

# PACIFIC WORLD

*Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*

Third Series Number 8  
Fall 2006

SPECIAL ISSUE:  
HONORING JAMES H. SANFORD  
GUEST EDITOR: CHARLES D. ORZEC



Pacific World is an annual journal in English devoted to the dissemination of historical, textual, critical, and interpretive articles on Buddhism generally and Shinshu Buddhism particularly to both academic and lay readerships. The journal is distributed free of charge. Articles for consideration by the Pacific World are welcomed and are to be submitted in English and addressed to the Editor, Pacific World, 2140 Durant Ave., Berkeley, CA 94704-1589, USA.

Acknowledgment: This annual publication is made possible by the donation of Buddha Dharma Kyokai (Society), Inc. of Berkeley, California.

Guidelines for Authors: Manuscripts (approximately twenty standard pages) should be typed double-spaced with 1-inch margins. Notes are to be endnotes with full bibliographic information in the note first mentioning a work, i.e., no separate bibliography. See *The Chicago Manual of Style* (15th edition), University of Chicago Press, \$16.3 ff. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of all quotations and for supplying complete references. Clear, clean typescript is required for electronic page scanning. Please include electronic version on disk in both formatted and plain text, if possible. Manuscripts should be submitted by February 1st.

Foreign words should be underlined and marked with proper diacriticals, except for the following: arhat, bodhisattva, buddha/Buddha, dharma/Dharma, Hinayana, kalpa, karma, Mahayana, nembutsu, nirvana, samsara, sangha, shinjin, sutra, yoga. Romanized Chinese follows Pinyin system (except in special cases); romanized Japanese, the modified Hepburn system. Japanese/Chinese names are given surname first, omitting honorifics. Ideographs preferably should be restricted to notes.

Editorial Committee reserves the right to standardize use of or omit diacriticals. Conventionalized English form of sutra title may be used if initially identified in original or full form in text or note. Editorial Committee reserves the right to edit all submissions. Upon request, page proofs may be reviewed by the author.

Include institutional affiliation and position, or present status/occupation and place. All manuscripts submitted for publication become the property of Pacific World. By agreeing to publication in the Pacific World, authors give the journal and the Institute of Buddhist Studies an unlimited license to publish and reprint the essay. This license includes, but is not limited to, any media format (hard copy, electronic, etc.), and international rights. Copyright remains the author's.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Richard K. Payne, Chair

David Matsumoto

Eisho Nasu

Natalie Quli, Assistant Editor

# PACIFIC WORLD

Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies

Third Series, Number 8

Fall 2006

SPECIAL ISSUE:

HONORING JAMES H. SANFORD

GUEST EDITOR: CHARLES D. ORZECCH

---

## CONTENTS

Guest Editor's Preface: Festschrift Honoring James Sanford CHARLES D. ORZECCH	1
Tantroid Phenomena in Early Indic Literature: An Essay in Honor of Jim Sanford BRUCE M. SULLIVAN	9
Skull Imagery and Skull Magic in the <i>Yoginī</i> Tantras DAVID B. GRAY	21
The Guru's Tongue: Metaphor, Imagery, and Vernacular Language in Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Traditions GLEN ALEXANDER HAYES	41
Sacred Space in the Temples of West Bengal: Folk, Bhakti, and Tantric Origins JUNE MCDANIEL	73
The Spell of the Great, Golden Peacock Queen: The Origin, Practices, and Lore of an Early Esoteric Buddhist Tradition in China HENRIK H. SØRENSEN	89
The Theoretical Foundations of Pure Land Buddhist Practice according to Tanluan ROGER CORLESS	125
Looking for Bhairava: Exploring the Circulation of Esoteric Texts Produced by the Song Institute for Canonical Translation CHARLES D. ORZECCH	139

Just Open Your Mouth and Say “A”: A-Syllable Practice for the Time of Death in Early Medieval Japan	167
JACQUELINE I. STONE	
The Shingon Subordinating Fire Offering for Amitābha, “Amida Kei Ai Goma”	191
RICHARD K. PAYNE	
Bhairavī Cakra: Goddess Mandalas/Rituals in Contemporary Tantra’s Nondualism	237
HELEN CROVETTO	
The Dao of the West: The Orientalist Critique and Western Interpretations of Daoism	269
JULIA M. HARDY	
BDK English Tripitaka Series: A Progress Report	291

## Guest Editor's Preface: Festschrift Honoring James Sanford

**Charles D. Orzech**

University of North Carolina, Greensboro

In a hidden lair, in these clouded woods  
I lay my head beside a moonlit stream.  
Pine boughs brush the great, flat stone  
sweet springs reach up, gentle, chill.

I sit, motionless, before such beauty,  
lost in the misted darkness of empty hills.  
I am content in this desolate spot  
pine shadow, stretching before a setting sun.

云林最幽栖，傍涧枕月谿。松拂盘陀石，甘泉涌凄凄。  
静坐偏佳丽，虚岩矐雾迷。怡然居憩地，日斜樹影低。<sup>1</sup>

—Attributed to Shide

Translation by James H. Sanford

THE CHOICE OF THE ABOVE POEM, attributed to the famous Tang eccentric and Chan poet Shide (拾得) and translated for this volume, seems to me an altogether appropriate opening for a celebration of Jim Sanford's work on his retirement from teaching. Though his house is in the woods in Orange County, North Carolina, and one might find some semblance in the pines to the "hidden lair" mentioned above, visitors will find Jim and his wife Pat surrounded by a variety of adopted animals, from peacocks and emus to koi, all the result of a life of compassionate action in animal welfare projects.

Jim Sanford grew up in Gunnison Colorado, did an undergraduate degree in linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, then in 1961 studied Mandarin at the U.S. Army's language school in Monterey, followed by a stint in Taiwan. Returning to the West Coast he studied Japanese literature and language at the University of Washington from 1963 to 1965, at which point he went to Tokyo for further training at the

Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies. On his return he ventured to the East Coast where he received a PhD from Harvard in 1972. From 1972 until his retirement he taught in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

I don't remember when I first met Jim, but it must have been sometime in 1982. I was just back from a year living in Hong Kong and doing research for my dissertation, research that compelled me to make the hour's drive to Chapel Hill to use the UNC and Duke libraries. Once having met it was clear that we shared many interests, including those of Chinese Buddhism, esoteric Buddhism, and Chinese literature and poetry. Coffee breaks from research led to the exploration of mutual interests in esoteric Buddhism and the establishment of the Society for Tantric Studies. In 1984 the study of the tantras was still associated either with sectarian interests or with non-academic pursuits. Jim's idea for the society was to create an international forum for the academic study of tantra that would help scholars reach beyond their area-specific training and enable them to share their research. Under his leadership the society has flourished and has held several national and international conferences. Jim was also instrumental in the establishment of a five-year American Academy of Religion Seminar on Tantra, and then a Consultation. Tantric Studies now has formal group status at the AAR, in large part through Jim's efforts and leadership.

How did a specialist in Zen become the key player in the promotion of the scholarly study of the tantras in North America? Perhaps Sanford had taken seriously Takakusu Junjirō's maxim that "in Japan the whole of Buddhism became the living and active faith of the mass of the people."<sup>2</sup> Whatever the value of Takakusu's argument, it is certainly true that specialists in Japanese Buddhism ignore the impact of India, Korea, and China at their peril, while it is considerably easier for a scholar of Indian Buddhism to ignore its incarnations outside of the subcontinent.

Jim Sanford's research has had three enduring foci: the Zen and Chan traditions of Japan and China; poetry, especially the Chan-inspired poetry of Hanshan, Shide, and their emulators; and esoteric Buddhism in its varied manifestations in China and Japan. While the East Asian impact of the Buddhist tantras have clearly been one of Sanford's primary interests, a closer look at his work reveals an uncommon eye for the incongruous and offbeat that have led him to probe things that transgressed sectarian taxonomies. As I got to know Jim better I

came to understand that his attraction to the offbeat was more than scholarly eccentricity. Indeed, as his works demonstrate, this interest in anomaly or *difference* constituted a theoretical stance, though Jim's interest in theory was not for the theory itself but for what theory can help us to see.

Jim's first publications were indeed, a bit offbeat. "Japan's 'Laughing Mushrooms,'" published in *Economic Botany* in 1972, explored an odd tale from the eleventh-century *Konjaku monogatari* (今昔物語集) about *waraitake* (笑い茸).<sup>3</sup> This was followed by his exploration of the mythology and historical roots of the iconic *Komusō* (虚無僧), the martial monks whose identity is cloaked by distinctive beehive headwear and who can turn their flutes into cudgels.<sup>4</sup> Sanford demonstrates in this meticulously researched article that in religion fact may be stranger than fiction. Despite widespread belief of the ancient Zen roots of this tradition, the *Komusō* is surprisingly modern (dating from around the beginning of the Tokugawa) and had little, initially, to do with Zen.<sup>5</sup>

A keen sense of the importance of incongruity (and humor) must have drawn Jim to the fifteenth-century Japanese Zen master Ikkyū Sōjun (一休宗純, 1394–1481). His now classic and well-written monograph, *Zen Man Ikkyū*, explored Ikkyū's flaunting of Zen orthodoxy as seen both in Ikkyū's own works and in his later transformation into the "type" of the mad Zen master of Tokugawa tales.<sup>6</sup> Yet Jim's interest was not a gratuitous one—here as in everything else he wrote Jim sought out the offbeat as a clue to the larger human condition, a condition too often obscured by pre-interpretive expectations and orthodoxies. Ikkyū's attitude toward orthodoxy, readily apparent in his poetic assaults on his contemporaries in the Rinzai lineage, is made more poignant and human in his late life love affair with the blind singer Mori. Ikkyū's lament, that it was unfortunate that the Buddha saved Ānanda from the clutches of a courtesan, underscores a maturity of understanding and a wry humor:<sup>7</sup>

I Heard the Crow and Was Enlightened

Anger, pride, I knew the passions.

Twenty years before, just like now.

A crow's laugh; I tasted the *arhat's* fruit.

Whose dappled face do I sing today?<sup>8</sup>

Written some twenty years after his initial enlightenment, Ikkyū now sees that achievement was partial—"the *arhat's* fruit." But this enlightenment, by implication much more profound, has been made possible by different passions than anger and pride.

In addition to the poetry translated in *Zen Man Ikkyū* Sanford translates the prose works "Skeletons" (一休骸骨), "The Buddha's Assault on Hell" (仏鬼軍), and "Amida Stripped Bare" (阿弥陀裸物語).<sup>9</sup> Here we can see indications of Ikkyū's—and of Sanford's—abiding interests, interests that transcend sectarian boundaries and through the uncommon and uncanny reveal something of the human. Sanford's discussion of these prose pieces sets them in the context of Ikkyū's life and fifteenth-century Zen. Although he initially regarded "Amida Stripped Bare" as "a fairly original Zen critique of Pure Land ideas," Sanford later came to view the work as "directly dependent on the ideas of Kakuban and Dōhan."<sup>10</sup>

Jim's interests in medieval Japanese religion and the role of Buddhism and poetry in it led to his co-editing (with William R. LaFleur and Masatoshi Nagatomi) of *Flowing Traces: Buddhism in the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan*.<sup>11</sup> The book, based on a set of conferences supported by Harvard University and the National Endowment for the Humanities, used *honji suijaku* (本地垂迹) or the idea that the *kami* are the "manifest traces" of the "original ground" (i.e., the buddhas) as its organizing theme. Speaking in the introduction to the volume, the editors argue that "flowing traces suggests . . . almost effortless movement between and across conventional boundaries . . . that is precisely what we see happening again and again in the arts studied here."<sup>12</sup>

Indeed as Jim's research progressed he realized that there was a substantial and unstudied undercurrent of esoteric ideas and practices in Japanese religion and that these practices often transgressed sectarian boundaries. While Japanese scholars had worked this field, much of that work was inspired by sectarian agendas and was thus marginalized. Under the auspices of the Society for Tantric Studies, the Association for Asian Studies, the American Academy of Religion, and the Seminar for Buddhist Studies (Denmark), Sanford presented a series of papers illuminating aspects of this esoteric undercurrent. These included, "The Abominable Tachikawa Skull Ritual,"<sup>13</sup> "Literary Aspects of Japan's Dual-Gaṇeśa Cult,"<sup>14</sup> "Breath of Life: The Esoteric Nenbutsu,"<sup>15</sup> and "Wind, Waters, Stūpas, Mandalas: Fetal Buddhahood in Shingon."<sup>16</sup>



These essays constitute a significant body of work that highlights religious phenomena marginalized by sectarian taxonomies.<sup>17</sup>

Poetry, both Asian and contemporary, has been an abiding interest of Jim Sanford. His first published translations (with Jerome P. Seaton), “Four Poems by Shih-te,” appeared in 1980 in *White Pine Journal*.<sup>18</sup> His study of Ikkyū included extensive translations of the master’s poems, and the epigraph at the front of that volume is a quote from Kenneth Patchen’s *The Journal of Albion Moonlight*: “The greatest masters foster no schools. / They imitate themselves until the matter is ended.”<sup>19</sup> The same year that saw the appearance of *Zen-Man Ikkyū* also saw the publication of *The View from Cold Mountain: Poems of Han-shan and Shih-te* (co-authored with Arthur Tobias and J. P. Seaton).<sup>20</sup> Poetry and comparative discussion of death come together in Jim’s study and translation, “The Nine Faces of Death: ‘Su Tung-po’s’ *Kuzōshi*.”<sup>21</sup> Throughout his career and right up to the present Jim has continued to translate and publish poetry. Recent works have appeared in *The Literary Review*, the White Pine Press, and Norton’s *World Poetry*, and he is currently engaged in the translation of Daoist alchemical poetry.<sup>22</sup>

As in Zen, so too in academia we are enmeshed in “the karma of words.”<sup>23</sup> The eleven essays presented in this volume are from former students, friends, and colleagues, all in one way or another influenced by Jim’s work. The arrangement is roughly chronological and according to geographic situation, with essays dealing with the earliest South Asian material first and American material last. A look at the titles shows the broad range of Jim’s impact. Not surprisingly, we find here essays on Japanese and Chinese materials, but also, notably essays on Indian material ranging from the Vedas to modern folk tantra and an essay on the American appropriation of Daoism.

The first essay by Bruce M. Sullivan explores the implications of Jim’s use of the term *tantroid* for the study of early, ostensibly non-tantric Indic literature. Taking inspiration from Sanford’s “The Abominable Tachikawa Skull Ritual,” David B. Gray traces the use and meaning of skulls in the *Yoginī* tantras. Glen Hayes’s essay on the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās has grown out of presentations and discussions at Society for Tantric Studies and American Academy of Religion Tantric Studies Seminar meetings. Hayes has adapted recent methodologies developed by conceptual metaphor and blend theorists to probe notoriously difficult and anomalous Sahajiyā traditions. Still in India, but now among contemporary Bengali folk practitioners, McDaniel looks at Kali

temples—and skulls. Henrik H. Sørensen details the Chinese translation and appropriation of the cult of Mahāmayūrī. Roger Corless, who spent many years as Jim’s colleague at Duke University, directs our attention to the earliest Chinese treatise on Pure Land practice, Tanluan’s “Annotations to the Treatise on Going to Birth [in the Pure Land].” Inspired by Jim’s attention to what has been marginalized, Charles D. Orzech’s essay challenges the standing assumptions that the later tantras did not circulate in Song China. Shifting to Japan, Jacqueline I. Stone’s essay on “A” syllable practice follows Sanford’s lead in nuancing the dominant picture of Japanese deathbed practices by examining minority practices connected with esoteric Buddhism. Blurring the boundaries set up by dominant discourses, Richard K. Payne details Shingon *homa* dedicated to Amida. Contemporary understandings and practices and the effect of cultural adaptation are the topic of the last two essays. Helen Crovetto analyzes the use of the Bhairavī Cakra by present-day Ānanda Mārgiis and in traditional sources. Julia M. Hardy, once one of Jim’s students, completes the volume with a discussion of misplaced critiques of American “Daoism.”

## NOTES

1. The poem is found in *Quan Tang wen* 全唐詩 (Shanghai: Xin hua shu dian, 1990), 801. The Song edition is missing the last four characters, which Ye Zhuhong 葉珠紅 supplies. See his *寒山詩集論叢* (Taipei: Showwe Technology Limited, 2006), 304.
2. Takakusu Junjirō, *The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy* (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp., 1975), back cover.
3. James H. Sanford, "Japan's 'Laughing Mushrooms,'" *Economic Botany* 26, no. 2 (1972): 174–181.
4. James H. Sanford, "Shakuhachi Zen: The Fuke-shū and Komusō," *Monumenta Nipponica* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1977): 411–440.
5. *Ibid.*, 412.
6. James H. Sanford, *Zen Man Ikkyū*, Harvard Studies in World Religions 2 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).
7. "Portrait of an Arhat at a Brothel" appears in Sanford, *Zen Man Ikkyū*, 156.
8. *Ibid.*, 166.
9. These also appeared separately in James H. Sanford, "Mandalas of the Heart: Two Prose Works by Ikkyū Sōjun," *Monumenta Nipponica* 35, no. 3 (1980): 273–298.
10. James H. Sanford, "Breath of Life: The Esoteric Nenbutsu," in *Esoteric Buddhism in Japan: Selected Papers from Two SBS Gatherings on Esoteric Buddhism*, ed. Ian Astley (Copenhagen and Aarhus: The Seminar for Buddhist Studies, 1994), 88. Sanford's discussion of the influence of Kakuban and Dōhan on Ikkyū is on pp. 87–89.
11. James H. Sanford, William R. LaFleur, and Masatoshi Nagatomi, eds., *Flowing Traces: Buddhism in the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
12. *Ibid.*, 4.
13. *Monumenta Nipponica* 46, no. 4 (Spring 1991): 1–20.
14. Robert L. Brown, ed., *Ganesh: Studies of an Asian God* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1991), 287–335.
15. Ian Astley-Kristensen, ed., *Esoteric Buddhism in Japan*, Society for Buddhist Studies Monograph Number 1 (Copenhagen and Aarhus: Society for Buddhist Studies, 1994), 65–98, reprinted in Richard K. Payne, ed., *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005).
16. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24, nos. 1–2 (Spring 1997): 1–38.

17. Along with the published essays there are several as yet unpublished that are directly related to this theme. Most important are "The Pure Land Visions of Kakuban and Dōhan," presented at the University of Copenhagen and University of Aarhus, Conference on the Esoteric Buddhist Tradition, Samso Island, Denmark, 1989; "The Many Faces of Matara," presented at the Object as Insight Symposium on Buddhist Art and Ritual, co-sponsored by Amherst College and the Katonah Museum of Art, 1996; and "Shinran's Secret Transmission to Nyoshin: Esoteric Buddhism in a Pure Land Context," presented at the Society of Tantric Studies Meeting, University of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff, AZ, 1997.

18. *White Pine Journal* 24–25 (1980): 9–10.

19. Kenneth Patchen, *The Journal of Albion Moonlight* (New York: New Directions, 1941; 5th ed. New York: Padell, 1946), 219. A most apt quote given Ikkyū's reputed destruction of his *inka*. The line following the quote is not without interest: "Oh! The noise the skeletons make trying on new bodies."

20. Buffalo, NY: *White Pine Press*, 1981.

21. *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 21, no. 2 (Autumn 1988): 54–77.

22. Further translations include two poems by Wang Chi (sixth century BCE) and three poems by Ikkyū (1394–1481) in *The Literary Review* 32, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 357–358; translations of thirty-six Chinese Chan poems (ten with J. P. Seaton) in J. P. Seaton and Dennis Moloney, eds., *A Drifting Boat: Chinese Zen Poetry* (Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1994); translations (with J. P. Seaton) of two poems by Shih-te and three sets of Shih-te harmony poems, in *The Literary Review* 38, no. 3 (1995): 376 and 335–337; three poems of Shih Shu in *The Literary Review* 41, no. 3 (1998); two poems of Shih Shu in Katharine Washburn, John S. Major, and Clifton Fadiman, eds., *World Poetry: An Anthology of Verse from Antiquity to Our Time* (New York: Book-of-the-Month Club, 1998), 849.

23. To borrow the title of a book on Buddhism and the literary arts in Japan by William R. LaFleur. See Sanford's review of it, "Paradigms and Poems: A Review of LaFleur's, *The Karma of Words*," *The Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1984): 124–133.

# Tantroid Phenomena in Early Indic Literature: An Essay in Honor of Jim Sanford

**Bruce M. Sullivan**

Northern Arizona University

IN MAKING USE OF THE TERM *tantroid* I feel that I owe a debt to those who have used it before me, and I want to highlight those instances of which I am aware for historical purposes. In an October 1992 newsletter from Glen Hayes to members of the Society for Tantric Studies there is a request that they consider whether tantroid phenomena can be explored outside Hindu and Buddhist traditions.<sup>1</sup> Coinage of the term may be attributable to Jim Sanford; he presented a paper at a Society for Tantric Studies conference in Flagstaff a few years later on tantroid phenomena in Daoism. The term *tantroid* is also used in a 1994 article by Fabio Rambelli in reference to some Pure Land movements in Japan.<sup>2</sup> My comments in this essay are not inspired by the use of the term *tantroid* as the title of one track on the CD by the techno band Eat Static.

I will take three variables as distinctively tantric, and therefore indicative of phenomena I want to label as *tantroid*—suggestive of tantric ideas and practices even if the sects and texts clearly claiming such a label were as yet not in existence.

- (1) *fierce goddesses*
  - Kālī in her skull-bearing form
  - the Seven Mothers (*māṭṛkā*)
- (2) *transgressive sacrality*
  - defying conventional behavioral norms for a religious purpose
  - drawing power from manipulation of impurity
- (3) *identification with one's deity*
  - possession by the deity
  - emulation of the iconic appearance of the deity

This paper, then, raises questions about the definition of “tantra” and what would merit consideration as “tantric.” To the extent that any

of the evidence adduced can be dated—always highly problematic in India—we may be able to draw some conclusions about the rise of tantric traditions.

Other efforts have been made to define the term *tantra* or *tantrism* with explicit reference to actual texts and movements using the term *tantra*. For example, Douglas Renfrew Brooks in his *The Secret of the Three Cities* approaches the problem of classifying tantric phenomena polythetically, listing ten characteristics typical of *tantra*.<sup>3</sup> David Gordon White in his *Tantra in Practice* provides a short “working definition of Tantra” that emphasizes the appropriation of divine energy.<sup>4</sup> The effort in this paper is different in seeking precursors to *tantra*, phenomena prior to the appearance of texts and movements using the label *tantra*.

#### KĀVYA POETRY AND DRAMA

As my first example I cite Kālidāsa, India’s greatest playwright and poet. His name tells us that he was a “servant of Kālī” but we have very little information about his actual life apart from the poetic works that bear his name.<sup>5</sup> It seems likely that he lived in the Gupta Empire when it was stable and prosperous, at the height of its power, about 400–450 CE (shortly after which the empire collapsed). Some legends attribute his poetic skill to a radical transformation in which an illiterate but devout peasant became a poet through the grace of Kālī.<sup>6</sup>

Each of his three dramas is dedicated to Śiva as indicated by the introductory benedictions, and Kālī does not figure in any. I would like, however, to refer to two of his less well-known works. In “Meghadūta” the narrator instructs his cloud-messenger to approach the city of Ujjaiyini as a pilgrim to the great temple of Śiva Mahākāla: “You should journey to the holy shrine of the guru of the triple world, Caṇḍeśvara (Lord of the Fierce Goddess), where Śiva’s troop (*gaṇa*) will greet you...” (verse 33). Even more interesting is his poem “Kumārasaṃbhava” in chapter 7 of which Śiva marries Pārvatī. The god approaches the ceremony accompanied by his *gaṇa* and the Seven Mothers (*mātṛkā*), who figure prominently in many tantric movements. The text continues: “Behind them gleamed Kālī, adorned with skulls (*kapāla*), like a mass of dark blue clouds bringing flocks of cranes, hurling lightning flashes far ahead.” This verbal iconography of the fierce goddess, and the pairing

of her with Śiva as her lord, suggest a developed theology that I would like to call *tantroid*.

Roughly contemporary with Kālidāsa was the playwright Śūdraka, author of the drama *Mr̥cchakaṭika* (The Little Clay Cart).<sup>7</sup> The hero is Cārudatta, a brahmin merchant who has become impoverished through his own generosity. In an effort to procure divine favor, he asks his friend, the brahmin Maitreya (who is the *vidūṣaka* character in this drama, the comic brahmin “sidekick” of the drama’s hero), to go offer a sacrifice on his behalf to the Mothers (*mātr̥ka*) at the crossroads. Maitreya protests that these offerings have done Cārudatta no good, and that perhaps Maitreya is performing the rituals incorrectly, and anyway there are dangerous people on the roads at night, so he’s not leaving his friend (act 1). Cārudatta seems to be concerned that the Mothers have it in for him.

This drama was apparently based on an incomplete drama entitled *Cārudatta* that is, by some, attributed to Bhāsa.<sup>8</sup> We have only four acts of this drama, and again our hero asks his friend Maitreya to go make offerings to the Mothers at the crossroads. Maitreya begs off with similar excuses, but is sent off with a maidservant Radanikā to protect him. Again we do not find out what might have transpired had the offerings actually been made, and Cārudatta gets into a lot of trouble. Bhāsa was named by Kālidāsa as a past master, one of his predecessors (Prologue, “Mālavikā and Agnimitra”).

Another form of *kāvya* merits our special attention because it can be even more reliably dated, namely, royal inscriptions. India has a large number of such inscriptions. Surely one of the most interesting is the stone inscription of a local ruler named Viśvavarman in eastern Rajasthan, dated 423–424 CE:

For the sake of religious merit, the king’s minister had them construct this terrifying home of the Mothers, filled with female demons (*ḍākinī*). . . . These Mothers impel the great booming of the rain clouds and rouse the ocean with the mighty wind that arises from the *tāntras*.<sup>9</sup>

This part of the inscription’s meaning hinges on the word *tāntras*; presuming that Fleet has read the inscription correctly, the first vowel in that word is long. Were we to take this as referring to written works, it would suggest a tantric canon in 423, much earlier than is usually thought, which would be most exciting. David Lorenzen, in what

I think is an overabundance of enthusiasm, takes it to mean texts.<sup>10</sup> To me, it makes a lot more sense to take it in the usual meaning for *tāntra*, namely, stringed instrument. Thus, we get the climatic effects mentioned in the inscription being caused by music (accompanied by booming clouds), not by “magic rites” (Fleet) nor by tantric texts (Lorenzen). There is little ambiguity about *ḍākinī*, though, and the fact that the fierce Mothers are attended by a batch of fierce female figures of power in the setting of a temple suggests to me a tantroid theology embodied in a tradition of tantroid practices in the early fifth century. That this receives royal support makes it all the more interesting! Fleet himself casually mentions the fact that this “inscription belongs partly to the Vaishṇava, and partly to the Śākta or Tāntrika form of religion,” but does not see fit to comment further.<sup>11</sup> To me, this inscription deserves more attention.

#### HINDU LITERATURE: THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

The origin of Kumāra receives extended treatment in the *Mahābhārata*, perhaps the source for Kālidāsa.<sup>12</sup> The account of the birth of Kumāra Skanda (MBh 3.207–221) includes a great deal of information about the Seven Mothers, their proclivity for eating children, and so on. There is reference to the divine Śakti emanating from Kumāra Skanda. Finally, the account ends with an attack on the party of the gods by a demon horde led by Mahiṣa Asura. In this account, only Kumāra Skanda can defeat the demon, and while the demon army was devoured by his father’s *gaṇa*, who gulped down their blood, Skanda killed Mahiṣa with his spear (MBh 3.221). In the *Mahābhārata* account, then, Skanda comes into being, is surrounded by the fierce goddesses, and performs the quintessential act attributed later to Devī, namely, killing the demon Mahiṣa Asura (see also MBh 8.5.55–58).

Another segment of the *Mahābhārata* seems to me particularly rich in tantroid imagery. In the *Sauptika Parvan* (MBh 10), the brahmin warrior Aśvatthāman seeks revenge, so he goes to attack the camp of his sleeping enemies and encounters there a fierce being who is the camp’s protector: “draped in a tiger-skin soaked in blood, with a snake as its sacred thread . . .” (MBh 10.6.4). Flames emanated from his body in all directions, and from those flames arose innumerable Hṛṣīkeśa figures (the fierce form of Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa). Aśvatthāman’s reaction is to attack this being (who is unidentified in the text but seems to be



Bhairava). The attack is unsuccessful, and then he places himself under the protection of Mahādeva, “the skull-garlanded Rudra . . . the trident-bearing mountain god” (MBh 10.6.32–34). Aśvatthāman worships Śiva, and is possessed by his deity:

Lord Śiva gave the warrior a perfect sword and entered his body. Then, being possessed by God, Aśvatthāman blazed with divine energy, and by that fiery, God-created power he was transformed into combat incarnate. (MBh 10.7.64–65)

The iconographic form of Śiva is described, and includes the phrases “wild inhabitant of the cremation ground” and “the one who brandishes the skull-topped pole” (10.7.5). His *gaṇa*, armed and dangerous, is described in detail (10.7.15–44), and toward the end of the description we find “those who consume blood, marrow, and other remains, and who feast on flesh and entrails” (10.7.36). More tantroid, though, are these followers of Śiva:

Forever fearless, those slaves to Hara’s frowns, behaving as they pleased, attainers of their ends, the lords of the Lord of the Triple World are perpetually immersed in sensual pleasures, yet untouched by passion. (10.7.39–40)

The account of the *gaṇa* ends with what I take to be an indication of their diversity: some are tantric while others are Vedic. “Some are fierce, constant consumers of the blood and marrow of the impious; and there are others always drinking *soma* to the ritual chant in 24 parts” (10.7.43).

To return to Aśvatthāman now, the text tells us that he looks like the very person of Śiva (10.7.66), destroying his victims like Paśupati (10.8.122), roaring like Bhairava (10.8.68). In the camp of his enemies there is confusion: is he human or *rākṣasa* (10.8.30, 34, 43, 116, 119)? He uses the Rudra weapon in his irresistible attack (10.8.31). Another passage (7.172.82) even attributes the birth of Aśvatthāman to Śiva. And at the height of the massacre, the Dark Goddess appeared:

Then there appeared before them a chanting, black-skinned woman, the night of all-destroying time (*kālarātri*), whose mouth and eyes were the color of blood, whose garlands and unguents were just as red, who wore a single blood-dyed garment, and held in her hand a noose. (MBh 10.8.64)

This nightmare vision of a sacrifice out of control, its violence terminated only by the exhaustion of the supply of oblations, is a representation of Aśvatthāman transgressing the bounds of warrior ethics and brahmanical behavior. And yet it is also sanctioned and presided over by Śiva; the text explicitly states that Aśvatthāman's actions were based on the paradigm of Śiva's assault on Dakṣa's sacrifice, which it recounts in two chapters (10.17–18).

This section of the *Mahābhārata* is integral to the text and its narrative, so there is little reason to consider it a late addition to the text. It is one of the climactic moments of the epic, and features a brahmin anti-hero who worships and is possessed by his fierce deity Śiva, whose appearance and paradigmatic behavior he then emulates. In his massacre of his fellow-warriors at midnight, he violates every norm of conventional warrior ethics. And the text includes the appearance of a fierce goddess as his assistant—or is he hers? This passage, then, contains in a powerful narrative context all three of my variables for tantroid phenomena, namely, (1) a fierce goddess, (2) transgressive sacrality, and (3) identification with one's deity. I just wish that we could confidently date the *Mahābhārata*.

## BUDDHIST SOURCES

### 1. *Buddhacarita*

*Buddhacarita* (~ 100 CE) by Aśvaghoṣa has a very interesting verse in the chapter in which Siddhārtha overcomes Māra.<sup>13</sup> Following upon efforts to frighten the meditator with an army of freakish ghouls, and just before the divine voice from the sky announces the hopelessness of Māra's campaign, we have the following verse (13.49):

But a woman, black as a cloud, with a skull in her hand and the intention of deluding the great seer's mind, roamed about there without restraint and did not remain still, like the intelligence of an indecisive man wandering uncertainly among the various sacred traditions.

Multiplicity of meanings being the stock in trade of poets, I suggest that for this text's audience the term *meghakālī* would have been taken as a proper name (Cloud-Kālī) as well as a phrase meaning "black as a cloud." She has a skull (*kapāla*) in her hand, and was endeavoring to delude

the future Buddha—notice, not scare him—to intoxicate (*mohanā*) him by means of her movement, which was “without restraint.” Was she dancing naked before him? Perhaps some additional light can be shed on the dark woman bothering the future Buddha by seeking her in the Pāli canon.

## 2. Pāli Canon

The Pāli canon began to be produced in the time of the Buddha, and was apparently written in its entirety for the first time in the first century BCE, though some texts may have been in writing even earlier.<sup>14</sup> The canonical literature reports that the great saint Mahā-Moggallāna also had a close encounter with Māra.<sup>15</sup> One day he felt particularly bloated and thought his belly felt so heavy that it was as if he was full of beans. Through mindful attention he determined that in fact Māra had entered his belly and bowels and the saint called on Māra to remove himself. In the ensuing discussion the saint makes the following startling revelation: “It happened once that I was a Māra named Dūsī (the Corrupter/Disrupter), and I had a sister named Kālī. You were her son, so you were my nephew” (MN 50.8).

In addition to my delight in knowing that being possessed by Māra feels like the onset of flatulence, I want to highlight the point that this story is a micro-*jātaka* tale about a former lifetime of a Buddhist saint, told to assert authority by the saint over the Māra of his day by invoking his former filial relationship. Moreover, it tells us that Māra had a sister named Kālī in that former lifetime. Probably it behooves us to think that Aśvaghōṣa knew his canonical literature, so that he knew of Māra and Kālī as troublesome siblings when he composed the *Buddhacarita*.

A feature of Buddhist practice that we see in the Pāli canon, one we usually do not think of as tantric but that I want to consider as possibly tantroid, is the cremation ground meditations. Early Buddhist canonical literature, such as *Majjhima-nikāya* 10, “The Foundations of Mindfulness” (*Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*), describes a meditative practice of visualizing a corpse in nine stages of decay (sections 10–30). To me, it seems likely that monks and nuns actually went to the cremation ground for such practice, at least sometimes. The purpose was to have an experiential realization of impermanence, and to be transformed thereby. Being in such close proximity to impurity would have been

transgressive from the perspective of society as a whole, and the religious purpose of such behavior is evident. Would we go too far by saying that the meditator was “drawing power from manipulation of impurity” by doing this? Even the act of eating together without regard for caste, as Buddhists did, might similarly be so regarded.

One more segment of the Pāli canon merits consideration as tantroid. *Āṅgulimāla*, the murderous thug who became a monk, provides an interesting example to consider. His name comes from his practice of taking one finger from each of the people he murdered on the highway and wearing them as a necklace. There are two sources on him, *Majjhima-nikāya* 86 and *Theragāthā*,<sup>16</sup> and they have some defects in the meter of a couple of key lines in *Āṅgulimāla*’s description of himself. The metrical problems compel us to think creatively about what the text is saying, and I accept the emendation of the text proposed by Gombrich.<sup>17</sup> As he rightly points out, the usual translations of the lines (MN 86.6) have *Āṅgulimāla* describing the Buddha (*mahesi* = *maharṣi* and *samaṇo* = *śramaṇa*) as having come to the forest for the thug’s sake, and that the thug has honored him after a long time. Such a translation, however, makes little sense, as we have no reason to think that the thug has been awaiting the Buddha. Moreover, such a translation does violence to the meaning of *cirassaṃ*, which means “for a long time,” not “after a long time.” Gombrich proposes, based partly on the two commentaries and a Burmese version, to emend the text as follows: changing *mahesi* to *maheso* (Maheśa, Śiva), and changing *cirassaṃ vata* to *ciraṃ vatā*—so that the thug was for a long time honoring Śiva in the forest due to a vow (i.e., as a way of life) when the Buddha came along. This revision has much to commend it, as it restores metrical as well as narrative coherence to an otherwise defective and puzzling text. The accounts we have about *Āṅgulimāla* have always been puzzling: he is described as a bandit but his actions consist of killing people without reference to robbing them—except of their fingers. And presumably the striking feature of wearing a garland of fingers must have made sense to the original audience of the Pāli canon as something that some people might do. Gombrich’s conclusion that “*Āṅgulimāla* is revealed as a proto-Śaiva/Śākta”<sup>18</sup> is provocative, but there is no denying the elegance of the solution made possible by his emendation of the defective text. And for my purposes, this passage with its focus on a “proto-Śaiva/Śākta” converting to the Buddha’s path is tantroid. After all, it is a story that features transgressive sacrality, some measure

perhaps of identification with the chosen deity, and maybe a finger (or a whole necklace of fingers) pointing toward Kālī.

### VEDIC LITERATURE

One does not usually think of searching in Vedic literature for tantra, but we are instead looking for tantroid phenomena, and one phenomenon merits consideration. A group that has been the object of scholarly interest and disagreement is the Vrātya. By various scholars the Vrātya have been regarded as Āryan or non-Āryan, members of the Vedic religious tradition or not, forerunners of the Śaivite ascetics or ecstatic mystics who were precursors of *yogins*. The main sources of our information on the Vrātya in Vedic literature are the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (2.222) and *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (17.1–4).<sup>19</sup> From these sources we learn that the Vrātya are understood to have reached the gods in heaven by means of the Vrātyastoma rite. To obtain the cattle for this sacrifice, the Vrātya raided their enemies or rivals and rustled the cattle. Another Vedic text, *Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra* (18.26),<sup>20</sup> mentions that sons of Kuru brahmins set out on a Vrātya expedition against the neighboring Pañcāla, and when asked their identity they replied that they were the Maruts (sons of Rudra who accompany Indra on his martial exploits as a warrior band). They rustled cattle to perform their distinctive ritual practice, a sixty-one-day animal sacrifice known as the Vrātyastoma that would provide them religious transcendence. At the center of it was the Mahāvrata rite, which entailed the drinking of alcohol, dancing, and music, especially singing, and an obscene and reviling dialogue between a man and woman whose ritual copulation was the rite's climax, so to speak. The woman is described as a *pumścalī*, a prostitute. In the tradition of the Vrātya as known in Vedic literature, then, we find brahmins stealing the cattle of others for their own religious benefit. That they were defying conventional behavioral norms seems evident from the later tradition's attitude toward the Vrātya: they were understood as non-Āryan by Manu (2.39), for example.<sup>21</sup> That the Vrātya would tell others that they were the Maruts suggests a desire for or assumption of identity with deities—perhaps we should say the use of an assumed divine identity to further their religious and acquisitive aims.

To take it a step farther, did they regard themselves as identifying with Rudra himself in the Mahāvrata rite and their other actions? Such

identification seems to be suggested by book fifteen of the *Atharva Veda*, where the Vrātya is praised as god-like.<sup>22</sup> This work introduces the figure Ekavrātya who seems to be the divine paradigm for the human Vrātya. The *Atharva Veda* also presents the Vrātya as a (proto-) yogin whose breathing exercises identify him with elements of the cosmos (earth, atmosphere, seasons, etc.), divinizing this practitioner. The text uses the term *tapas* (AV 15.1.3) and refers to the Vrātya's ascetic performance of standing for a year, resulting in the gods granting him a boon (AV 15.3). It is not clear to me precisely how the breathing exercises that make the Vrātya one with the cosmos relate to the Vrātyastoma ritual that bring the Vrātya to heaven or to oneness with the gods. Nevertheless, I think that the Vrātya were emulating the iconic appearance and paradigmatic deeds of the gods, and perhaps especially Rudra. To me it seems that we have here an interesting case of a Vedic phenomenon that is strikingly tantroid.

I hope that these examples of tantroid elements from Vedic literature, early Buddhist canonical literature, the *Mahābhārata*, and *kāvya* poetry, drama, and inscriptions, taken together, suggest the possibility that the complex of tantric ideas and practices may have a longer history in India than is usually described. And it is a pleasure to thank Jim Sanford for starting me down the path of thinking about tantroid phenomena.

## NOTES

1. Glen Hayes, "Future Indicative: Plans for Fall 1993, Call for Proposals," *STS News*, no. 8 (October 1992), [http://www.ibiblio.org/pub/academic/religious\\_studies/Buddhism/Tantric\\_Studies/Newsletter/news%23892](http://www.ibiblio.org/pub/academic/religious_studies/Buddhism/Tantric_Studies/Newsletter/news%23892).
2. Fabio Rambelli, "True Words, Silence, and the Adamantine Dance," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 21, no. 4 (1994): 373–405; 376 n. 9.
3. Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 52–72.
4. "Tantra is that Asian body of beliefs and practices which, working from the principle that the universe we experience is nothing other than the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and maintains that universe, seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the human microcosm, in creative and emancipatory ways." David Gordon White, ed., *Tantra in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9.
5. The complete works of Kālidāsa can be found in Dvivedī Revāprasāda, ed., *Kālidāsa-granthāvalī* (Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University, 1976).
6. See Barbara Stoler Miller, ed., *Theater of Memory: The Plays of Kālidāsa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 3–5.
7. Mahāprabhulaha Goswami and others, eds., *Mṛcchakaṭikam* (Benares: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1954).
8. The play can be found in K. P. A. Menon, ed. and trans., *Complete Plays of Bhāsa*, 3 vols. (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1996). Controversy over the authorship of all the plays in this collection has been extensive, and many scholars no longer attribute any of them to Bhāsa. The plays' texts do not contain the name of any author, an unusual feature for Sanskrit dramas.
9. The complete inscription and a translation can be found in John Faithful Fleet, ed. and trans., *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors*, 2nd ed. (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1963; original ed. Calcutta: Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1888), 72–78. The quoted segment is my translation from Fleet's Sanskrit text of the inscription, lines 35–37. I disagree with his translation of *tāntra* as "magic rites of their religion," as I discussed. I also do not agree with his translation of *ḍākinī* as "female ghoul"—I prefer "female demon."
10. David Lorenzen (pp. 29–30) translates and discusses this inscription, reluctantly leaving open the question whether the word *tantra* refers to tantric texts, but has missed the point that that inscription says "*tāntra*." See David Lorenzen, "Early Evidence for Tantric Religion," in *The Roots of Tantra*, ed. K. A. Harper and R. L. Brown (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 25–36.

11. Fleet, *Early Gupta Kings*, 74.
12. V. S. Sukthankar and others, eds., *The Mahābhārata, Critically Edited for the First Time*, 19 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–1959).
13. E. H. Johnston, ed. and trans., *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita, or Acts of the Buddha* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995; original ed. in 2 vols., Lahore: Motilal Banarsidass, 1936).
14. See, for example, K. R. Norman, *Pāli Literature*, vol. 7.2, *A History of Indian Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), 5–6. See also Richard Robinson, Willard Johnson, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Buddhist Religions: A Historical Introduction*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2005), 46.
15. V. Trenckner and R. Chalmers, eds., *Majjhima-nikāya*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1991–94; original ed. 1888–1925). The passage is in *Majjhima Nikāya* 50.
16. H. Oldenberg, ed., *Theragāthā* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1966; original ed. 1883).
17. Richard F. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began* (London: Athlone Press, 1996).
18. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began*, 151.
19. W. Caland, ed. and trans., *Das Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa in Auswahl: Text, Übersetzung, Indices* (Amsterdam: J. Müller, 1919), and W. Caland, ed. and trans., *Pañcaviṃśa-brāhmaṇa: The Brāhmaṇa of Twenty-five Chapters* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1982; original ed. 1931).
20. W. Caland, ed., *Baudhāyanaśrautasūtram: The Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra Belonging to the Taittirīya saṃhitā*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982; original ed. in 3 vols., Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1904–1924).
21. J. H. Dave, ed., *Manu Smṛti*, 6 vols. (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1972–1984).
22. W. D. Whitney, ed. and trans., *Atharva Veda Saṃhitā*, 2 vols. (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1987; original ed., Cambridge: Harvard University, 1905).



# Skull Imagery and Skull Magic in the *Yoginī* Tantras

David B. Gray

Santa Clara University

## I. RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

THE BUDDHIST TANTRAS constitute a unique class of Buddhist literature. While developing from earlier trends in Buddhist thought and practice, they also constituted a serious challenge to Buddhist identity, largely due to the fact that many of them contain passages that appear to transgress the tenets of Buddhist morality.<sup>1</sup> Tantric literature also departed, gradually, from the rhetorical norms of Mahayana Buddhism. While early tantras maintained the rhetorical style of the Mahayana sutras, later tantras, and most notably the *Yoginī* tantras, radically departed from this style.<sup>2</sup> This essay will explore one small facet of the vast array of unusual elements that can be found in this literature, namely, the image of the skull, as well as the use of skulls in tantric ritual. Like other elements, this deployment of skulls in the tantras was disquieting to some, evoking as it does the uncanny atmosphere of the charnel ground. Through this exploration, I will argue that skulls are multifaceted symbols in tantric literature, simultaneously evoking both death and awakening. As a result, they were powerful symbols, fruitfully deployed in tantric literature in a number of interesting ways.

The genre of tantric Buddhist literature in which skulls and associated charnel imagery is most powerful is the *Yoginī* tantras. These texts were composed in India beginning in the late seventh century or early eighth century (with the composition of the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga-ḍākiṇījālasamvara-tantra*)<sup>3</sup> and continued to be composed up until the final decline of Buddhism in India from the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup>

They are characterized by their focus on fierce deities, particularly the *yoginīs* and *ḍākiṇīs*, who appear to have originally been understood to be flesh-eating demonesses who haunted charnel grounds and wilderness

areas. As James Sanford wrote, “they were drafted into the Vajrayāna pantheon and transformed from horrifying old crones lurking in cemeteries into beautiful spiritual guides.”<sup>5</sup> Despite this transformation, they retained elements of their dreadful origins and are typically depicted as garbed with ornaments derived from the charnel ground.<sup>6</sup>

As texts that focus on such an awesome class of goddesses, they are naturally replete with imagery deriving from the fearsome setting of the charnel ground (*śmaśāna*). Their deities are adorned with charnel ground regalia, most notably skulls and skull bowls (*kapāla*). The charnel grounds are also the ideal locale for the performance of many of the rites described in these texts, such as the notorious Vetalā Sādhana, in which the adept seeks to invoke a spirit to animate a corpse in order to compel it to bestow magical powers.

These texts, while at least nominally Buddhist, do not seem to derive from the normative Buddhist setting, that is, the Buddhist monastic context. According to traditional histories, they derived instead from the liminal social setting of the *siddhas*, the great tantric saints such as Lūipa/Matsyendranāth,<sup>7</sup> who were seen as the originators of both the Buddhist and Śaiva tantric traditions.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, charnel grounds were long the haunt of Śaiva renunciants. The primal charnel ground deity is clearly Śiva, whose paradoxical penchant for both asceticism and sexuality firmly earned him a liminal status in Hindu mythology.<sup>9</sup> He is iconographically linked to the locale of the charnel ground via his penchant for ashes and bone ornaments, items that are found abundantly there, as well as the ghoulish company he was fond of keeping. His liminal status is recorded in several of the *purāṇas*, where we find passages such as the following, where his father-in-law Dakṣa, who disapproves of his dreadful appearance and ferocious companions, curses him:

You are excluded from the rituals and are surrounded by ghosts in the burning ground; yet you fail to honor me, while all of the gods give me great honor. Good men must scorn all heretics; therefore I curse you to be outside the sacrifice, outside caste; all the Rudras will be beyond the Vedas, avowing heretic doctrines, Kāpālikas and Kālamukhas.<sup>10</sup>

The form of Śiva that most clearly embodies the spirit of the charnel ground is Bhairava, the fierce and destructive form assumed by Śiva following his beheading of the deity Brahmā in a well-known episode of Hindu mythology. As a penance for this crime, Śiva qua Bhairava

wandered the world with the skull of Brahmā affixed to his hand, earning him the title *kapālin*.<sup>11</sup>

Somadeva, in his eleventh-century work, the *Vetālapañca-viṃśatikā*, describes the charnel ground as being a virtual incarnation of Bhairava, as follows:

It was obscured by a dense and terrible pall of darkness, and its aspect was rendered awful by the ghastly flames from the burning of the funeral pyres, and it produced horror by the bones, skeletons and skulls of men that appeared in it. In it were present formidable Bhūtas and Vetālas, joyfully engaged in their horrible activity, and it was alive with the loud yells of jackals so that it seemed like a mysterious and tremendous form of Bhairava.<sup>12</sup>

Śiva's penance as the skull-bearing ascetic Bhairava was assumed as the "great observance" (*mahāvratā*) of the Kāpālikas, an infamous Śaiva sectarian group notorious for their extreme modes of practice involving violence and sexuality, as David Lorenzen has shown.<sup>13</sup>

However, the Śaivas were clearly not the only ones in early medieval India spending time in charnel grounds. The very horror of the *śmaśāna* was believed to make it an ideal site for heroic renunciants, who sought to completely cut through all attachments to the world. Included among them were Buddhists.

The association of Buddhists with charnel grounds is evidently quite ancient. Archaeological excavations have shown that Buddhist monasteries were often built on or near charnel complexes, as Gregory Schopen has shown.<sup>14</sup> Buddhists, in taking the reliquary mound (*stūpa*) as one of their central cult centers, implicitly rejected brahmanic notions of the impurity deriving from death. The Buddhist association with sites connected with death was not without social implications, for in choosing such sites, they deliberately placed themselves in a liminal position within larger Indian society, a position that implied a rejection of brahmanic notions of purity and pollution.

Most importantly, the charnel ground was the site for a certain sort of meditation, the "mediation on impurity" (*aśubhabhāvanā*). Meditating in charnel grounds for the purpose of contemplating death and impermanence is an ancient Buddhist practice, which is justified by the legend that one of the four sights that inspired Siddhārtha Gautama to undertake the spiritual journey that would culminate with his achievement of awakening was the sight of a corpse.<sup>15</sup>

Both the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta*<sup>16</sup> and the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*<sup>17</sup> describe the nine charnel ground contemplations or “meditation on impurity,” which involve the contemplation of corpses in their various stages of disintegration. The practice of this meditation has persisted through time, as evidenced by the continuing interest in this subject in scholastic literature, where we find varying analyses of corpses into nine or ten types.<sup>18</sup> We also find treatments of this theme in Mahayana literature,<sup>19</sup> and also contemporary Web sites detailing the stages of the disintegration of corpses, produced for the sake of meditators who lack access to charnel grounds.<sup>20</sup> Such meditations were believed to serve as antidotes for attachment to the body or sensual pleasures.<sup>21</sup>

Elsewhere in the *Majjhima-nikāya* the Buddha recommends charnel grounds as meditation sites<sup>22</sup> and describes his austerities as a bodhisattva thus: “I would make my bed in a charnel ground with bones of the dead for a pillow.”<sup>23</sup> Dwelling in charnel grounds had become an acceptable vocation for Buddhist renunciants by at least the beginning of the Common Era, by which time they were designated as *śmāśānika* (Pāli *sosānika*). The *Vimuttimaggā*, a text composed by Upatissa in Pāli in the first or second century CE, describes the benefits of this practice as including an understanding of death and impermanence, overcoming of fear, and gaining the reverence of supernatural beings.<sup>24</sup>

## II. SKULL IMAGERY IN THE YOGINĪ TANTRAS

The tantric texts that call upon practitioners to perform rituals, such as mandala construction in charnel grounds, or to use the substances derived from charnel grounds in rituals, followed a venerable precedent. A number of the early tantras, later classified as *kriyā* tantras in the Indo-Tibetan classification scheme,<sup>25</sup> describe practices necessarily set in charnel grounds.<sup>26</sup> These likely derive from what I have termed “the cult of the charnel ground.”<sup>27</sup> Texts resulting from this social milieu are characterized by their focus on the charnel ground (*śmāśāna*) as the ideal site for practice and call for the practitioner to dress him- or herself in garb derived from this locale, most notably skulls and bone ornaments, and to live upon the foodstuffs available there. However, the charnel ground culture comes to its fruition in Buddhist literature in the *Yoginī* tantras. Perhaps not coincidentally, this is also the genre of Buddhist literature that received the greatest degree of influence from Śaiva traditions.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to textual dependence on Śaiva materials, the Buddhist Yoginī tantras also drew upon Śaiva iconography.<sup>29</sup> Among a number of iconographic elements borrowed from Śaiva sources is the decorative use of skulls. In India, the skull is clearly a symbol of death and the fear of death and is thus considered inauspicious and impure. In both Śaiva and Buddhist tantric contexts, it is deployed as a sign that the deity bearing this symbol has mastered death and has transcended the mundane world in which fear of death is nearly universal.

The deity Heruka, who is prominent in a number of texts in this genre, is a clear example of a Buddhist deity modeled upon a Śaiva precursor, particularly the fierce deities Bhairava or Rudra.<sup>30</sup> He is described as follows in the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga-ḍākiṇījālasamvara-tantra*:

Greatly Glorious Vajraheruka is very terrifying, blazing with ash; his visage blazes blue for beings, and his mandala of light blazes red. He is as fierce as the end time of great destruction. Greatly blazing, his voice blazes, like a charnel ground fire. He has a crown of skulls, fierce like the end time of great destruction. Possessing the methods such as anger, he is as terrifying as a charnel ground, with various faces, and eyebrows arched in anger. With his blazing gaze and dance, he completely reduces the three worlds to ash, along with Mahādeva, Viṣṇu (Upendra), the Sun, the Moon, Yama, and Brahmā.<sup>31</sup>

It is important to note that there is a long tradition in tantric Buddhism of associating death with awakening. For early Buddhists, final emancipation, *parinirvāṇa*, is not attained until death. In traditions of tantric yoga, it was widely believed that in death one gained a vision of the clear light, identified with the *dharmakāya* or gnosis of awakening, meaning that death provided an opportunity for awakening that is difficult to achieve in normal states of consciousness.<sup>32</sup> Hence such dreadful images evoking death are also seen as symbols of awakening.

As a result, in tantric Buddhist literature and art, imagery evoking death, and skull imagery in particular, is quite pervasive, precisely because it also evokes the awakening toward which the tradition aspires. Such imagery is particularly associated with the authority figures of the tradition, the deities, *siddhas*, and gurus or lamas, as these are seen as the awakened figures capable of bestowing the tradition's teachings. In the *Cakrasamvara-tantra*,<sup>33</sup> for example, the tradition's chief deity, Heruka, is described as follows:

Place in the center of the lotus the hero who is the terror of Mahābhairava, who is bright and brilliant, and who makes the tremendous noise of very loud laughter. Wearing a skull rosary, divine are his three eyes and four faces. Covered with an elephant hide, his excellent eyebrows are split by a *vajra*. His hand wields a *khatvanga* staff, [and he is] ornamented with a half a hundred garland.<sup>34</sup>

This is immediately followed with the following description of his consort, the goddess Vajravārāhī:

The goddess who stands before him is the truly awesome Vajravārāhī, facing the deity Śrī Heruka, with three eyes and of fierce form. Her skull bowl is filled [with entrails], blood trickles from her mouth. She threatens all of the quarters together with the gods, titans, and humans.<sup>35</sup>

The master (*ācārya*), like the deities, also must assume a charnel-ground-derived garb when performing major rituals. He is described as follows:

He has the proper knowledge and understands the tantra and Śrī Heruka's mantra. He is not angry, is pure and competent, and he understands yoga and is perfected in knowledge. His hair is marked with skulls, his limbs are smeared with ash. His body is decorated with ornaments, and [he] has a bone garland. His hair is formed into one plait, and he wears a bone garland.<sup>36</sup>

The *Hevajra-tantra* gives additional information concerning the master's garb, adding details concerning the construction of a skull-tiara that "marks" the master's hair, as well as ash and the sacred thread, as follows:

Now he, whose nature is *hūṃ*, should arrange his piled-up hair as a crest and for the performance of yoga he should wear the skull tiara, representing the five buddhas. Making pieces of skull five inches long, he should secure them to the crest. He should wear the two-stranded cord of hair, which symbolizes Wisdom and Means, the ashes and the sacred thread of hair.<sup>37</sup>

This imagery firmly places these texts within the context of charnel-ground culture.

Apparently the use of skulls in tantric Buddhist iconography and ritual sparked criticism. Although we do not know the source of this criticism, the author or authors of the *Cakrasamvara-tantra* presumed that it would be leveled against the text and thus included a preemptive response. It occurs as follows:

By whom is the skull of the relics of the reality body disparaged, arising as it does from the tripartite cause of conch, mother-of-pearl, and pearl? The hero who has a skull garland and who is adorned with a half moon is regarded as one who is born as the heroes' hero.<sup>38</sup>

While it is certainly possible that criticism might have come from within the Buddhist community, made by Buddhists uncomfortable with charnel ground imagery and practices, it seems far more likely that this text was directed toward Hindu critics, most likely brahmins, who would view these bone implements as polluting.<sup>39</sup> That this is the case is suggested by the late ninth-century commentator Bhavabhaṭṭa,<sup>40</sup> who explained that “just as conch and so forth is purifying for Vedic brahmins, likewise the skull is as well.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, the text compares the “impure” skull with the “pure” objects of similar appearance, such as the conch, used in Vedic ritual.

Interestingly, this passage also refers to a myth in a Vedic canonical text, the *Atharva Veda*, related in its effort to legitimate the use of skulls in tantric ritual. This is the myth that holds that pearl and mother of pearl derives from the bones of the slain *asura* Vṛta.<sup>42</sup> It is particularly interesting that the author of this tantra was familiar with the *Atharva Veda*, given the long association of the study of this text with Śaiva groups such as the Pāśupatas.<sup>43</sup>

While it seems likely that this text was composed in expectation of criticism from Hindu circles, the author or authors of this text (or, perhaps, a later Buddhist reviser) also attempted to legitimate the use of skulls in a Buddhist fashion. They did this with a reference to a key Buddhist philosophical concept, through the modification of the term skull (*kapālaṃ*) with the unusual qualifier “of the relics of the reality body” (*dharmakāyaśarīrāṇām*). At first glance this seems somewhat strange. Technically speaking, bone relics should be classified as belonging to a buddha's “form body” (*rūpakāya*), not the intangible “reality body,” *dharmakāya*.<sup>44</sup> A closely related term, *dharmasārīra*, typically refers to “textual relics,” often mantra or *dhāriṇī* inscriptions.<sup>45</sup>



The text here associates a skull with the *dharmakāya*, the “reality body” of a buddha, representing either the collection of a buddha’s teachings or the gnosis of a buddha (*buddhajñāna*), the realized wisdom whereby a buddha is awakened. This association is rooted in several trends in Mahayana Buddhism. One factor was the development of Buddhist hierarchical systems of classifying Buddhist teachings in terms of the three bodies of a buddha.<sup>46</sup> Another factor was the rise of the “relic cult,” centering upon *stūpas*, in Buddhist communities.<sup>47</sup> Since *stūpas* are basically reliquary mounds, believed to enshrine the physical relics of a buddha, the rising popularity of this cult would naturally elevate the significance of these relics.<sup>48</sup> The famous talking *stūpa* episode in the *Lotus Sūtra*, for example, highlights not only the belief that *stūpas* somehow embody the Buddha and preserve his presence,<sup>49</sup> but even that a *stūpa* itself could manifest the voice of a buddha (*buddhavaṇa*), thus embodying his or her “reality body” in the same manner as a textual relic.<sup>50</sup>

With the composition of the *Yoginī* tantras, it is not only *stūpas* that can talk and thus manifest the Buddha’s wisdom. Talking skulls, too, are found in the increasingly bizarre terrain of tantric literature. The *Buddhakaṇḍa Yoginītantrarāja*, a ninth-century text, begins with a *nidāna* opening passage that narrates the origin of the scripture. It relates the death of Śākyamuni Buddha immediately following his sexual union with the *yoginī* Citrasenā. Although physically dead, his presence lives on via his skull, which gives a discourse, and also disgorges this text itself, the “Buddha skull king of *yoginī* tantras.”<sup>51</sup>

This text, then, clearly indicates what is meant in the tantric context by a skull that is a “relic of the reality body,” a skull that can manifest a buddha’s gnosis. It is an image that unites the ideas of death and awakening. The skull, then, is a symbol that is particularly meaningful in the tantric context, in which death truly is seen as an occasion for the realization of the *dharmakāya*, and hence awakening.

### III. SKULL MAGIC

Passages such as the above clearly highlight the significance of skulls in tantric Buddhist literature and help us to understand their centrality in later tantric Buddhist iconography. They are also very important in tantric Buddhist ritual. Skulls, or more properly, skull bowls, are ubiquitous elements in the tantric Buddhist ritual practices associated with the *Yoginī* tantras. In the Newar and Tibetan Buddhist contexts, these



bowls are formed from the upper hemisphere of a human skull, the inside of which is often covered with a decorative layer of metal that makes it water-impermeable. These skull bowls are used in a wide variety of rituals such as *abhiṣeka* initiation rites, usually in conjunction with a *vajra*. When so deployed, the skull bowl replaces the lotus, symbolizing wisdom (*prajñā*), while the *vajra* symbolizes expedience (*upāya*).

However, in the remainder of this article I will focus on several ritual practices in which the skull plays a central role, the focus of the ritual, rather than a necessary but peripheral ritual implement. In these cases, the skull retains its dual association with awakening and death, and thus can serve as an agent for either one of these potentialities.

The example that sparked my interest in this topic is the infamous Tachikawa Skull Ritual studied by Jim Sanford. The surviving texts that describe this ritual portray it as a secret method for producing for oneself a talking skull, one that will tell one the secrets of the world.<sup>52</sup> While I have not found a ritual for the production of a talking skull in any of the Indian materials I have studied, in my study of the *Cakrasamvara-tantra* I have come across several ritual practices employing skulls that contain elements of the Tachikawa ritual, including the anointing of skulls with body fluids and the association of these rituals with *ḍākiṇīs* and jackals.

In tantric literature, the skull is often used in rituals employing sympathetic magic techniques. Chapter twelve of the *Cakrasamvara-tantra* describes a ritual for giving one's enemy a hemorrhage or a headache. This ritual involves the creation of a simulacrum of one's enemy's skull, which one enchants with mantra and then ritually acts upon. It occurs as follows:

With this mantra, the quintessence<sup>53</sup> of Śrī Heruka's essence, make a substitute skull devoid of flesh, and rub it with the tip of one's forefinger. His blood will be drawn out. By rubbing it with the left it will return again. If, enchanting with mantra, the skull is struck with one's fist, the head of him whose name one utters will ache. Calling the mantra to mind, fill the skull with milk and he will be relieved.<sup>54</sup>

As is typical of the tantras, the text gives a rather bare-boned description of the ritual, leaving out many elements essential for its practice. For example, one element that is left out is the fact that, when performing the ritual for causing hemorrhage, one visualizes oneself as the fierce deity Vajrarudra and then invokes the fierce goddess Khaṇḍarohā. The

visualization one then performs is described as follows by the ninth-century commentator Jayabhadra:

As for “with the tip of the forefinger,” etc., this refers to drawing out blood. The procedure for this is as follows: taking a human skull, the mantrin who has performed the prior service instantly utters the syllable *hūṃ* while in union with Vajrarudra. Khaṇḍarohā, with a sword in hand, issues from the deity’s right nostril. Visualize that she pierces in five places the head of him who is named and that the skull fills with streams of his blood.<sup>55</sup>

As is typically the case with these rituals, the text also provides the ritual antidote. In this case, anointing the skull with milk, a pacifying element in Indian magic, relieves the injury caused by the rite.<sup>56</sup>

The *Cakrasamvara-tantra* also describes another ritual that is the closest analogue I have found in Indian literature to the Tachikawa Skull Ritual. Like the latter ritual, it involves anointing a skull with sexual fluids and is associated with *ḍākiṇīs* and jackals. However, unlike that rite, it is a violent ritual, used for the elimination of one’s enemies. Chapter 46 of the *Cakrasamvara-tantra* opens with the following passage:

Next, there is the accomplishment of all ritual actions through the five *ha* syllables, by means of which there is rapid engagement in power through the cognized only. One should rub one’s hands on which are the five syllables, *haṃ hau ho hai haḥ*. Drawing blood from his mouth with a [word of] command, one’s foe dies instantly. Should one anoint the skull that is the receptacle of one’s own blood with the blood of one’s ring finger, as soon as it dries the victim perishes. Should one, angered and with reddened eyes, repeat [the syllables] excitedly, the king will quickly be killed, along with his army and his mount. Make an offering of the *ḍākiṇī* sacrifice (*bali*), with cat, mongoose, dog, crow, crane, and jackal; there is no doubt that in this tantra this quickly yields power.<sup>57</sup>

This passage appears to describe two rituals, the first being a ritual for killing an enemy by drawing a *yantra* in the shape of a five-petalled lotus on one’s palm, in the center of which is written both the victim’s name and a ritual command, and on the petals of which are written the five mantra syllables.

The skull ritual can apparently accomplish this same aim, but can also be performed so as to kill on a far grander scale, namely, for the

elimination of an enemy king along with his army. The ritual description is very bare-boned. It clearly involves a skull, but one which is “the receptacle of one’s own blood.” It is then anointed with the “blood of one’s ring finger.” This seems clear, but the commentator Bhavabhaṭṭa, who lived circa 900 CE, glosses the term “ring finger” (*anāmikā*) as a “childless woman” (*anapatyā*) whose “blood” is uterine blood or menstrual discharge.<sup>58</sup> This detail, along with the injunction that one should perform a sacrifice to the *ḍākiṇī* involving the meat of a number of animals, including jackal, invokes the charnel-ground culture that appears to be the ultimate origin or inspiration of not only the *Cakrasamvara-tantra*, but also the East Asian tradition that gave rise to the Tachikawa Skull Ritual.

Tantric literature focuses on human skulls, which is natural, given the fact that in early medieval India, these would be readily available in the charnel grounds that were positioned on the outskirts of cities and major towns. However, the tantras also contain rituals employing animal skulls. In these cases, they are used in order to invoke qualities associated with these animals.

For example, chapter 12 of the *Cakrasamvara-tantra* describes the following ritual for driving one’s enemy or enemies insane: “Binding the conjoined skull seals, repeat [the quintessence mantra] without breathing. He whose name the fierce one [utters] will instantly become mad. As many as one thousand people will be maddened. One can mentally release them.”<sup>59</sup> The late ninth-century commentator Kambala comments upon it as follows:

Place the magical diagram (*yantra*) augmented with the name of whom-ever [is the victim] within the conjoined skull seals, i.e., conjoined skull [hemispheres] of a rabid dog, together with the five intoxicants. Repeat [the mantra] seven times without breathing, then bind and seal them. Should one conceal it together with his name in a charnel ground, he will become mad.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly, the ritual calls for the use of rabid dog skulls in order to inflict a similar sort of madness upon the victim of the rite. The aura of madness that this ritual evokes is further heightened in the following description written by the fifteenth-century Tibetan commentator Tsong Khapa:

Draw a wheel augmented with the victim’s name. Prepare the seeds, roots, stalk, leaves, and branches of the *datura* plant,<sup>61</sup> and put it in the

closed mouth of a rabid dog's skull. Bind its fissures with mud [made of] charnel ground ash, and repeat the augmented quintessence mantra seven times without breathing. If you put it in a charnel ground, he whose name one [utters] will become mad. As many as one thousand people will be maddened. If one bathes [the skull] with milk reciting with a peaceful mind, they will be released.<sup>62</sup>

The addition of the potent and poisonous intoxicant *datura* was clearly intended to heighten the efficacy of the rite. Tsong Khapa's description also firmly places this ritual within the scope of charnel-ground culture.

In conclusion, it is clear that the skull is a powerful symbol in tantric literature and ritual. It is a symbol with twofold significance, just like the rituals in which skulls can be employed. Just as "achievement" (*siddhi*) is understood in tantric literature to be twofold, manifesting the ultimate achievement of buddhahood or the worldly achievement of mundane ends,<sup>63</sup> the skull can be a cipher for awakening itself, representing the Buddha's gnosis, and can be employed in ritual to invoke awakening, the achievement of enlightening knowledge. But they are also employed in rituals to achieve worldly ends, such as the torment or destruction of one's enemies. These worldly applications are largely violent, but this seems understandable, given the fact that the skull is commonly understood as a symbol of death. It thus plays a prominent role in the violent *abhicāra* Buddhist rituals that are intended to harm or destroy enemies.

## NOTES

1. Tantric literature, and particularly the *Yoginī* tantras, contains numerous descriptions of violent rituals which, if practiced literally, would involve a transgression of the first precept prohibiting killing. Many tantras also contain descriptions of sexual practices that would likewise entail a violation of the *prātimokṣa* vow of celibacy for the monastic *saṅgha*.

2. Early tantras, such as the *Mahāvairocanaḥisambodhi* and the *Tattvasaṃgraha*, largely preserve the style of the Mahayana sutras, and many of them maintain the title of “sutra,” at least in their early versions. The opening *nidāna* verse, typically beginning “Thus have I heard . . .” is a particularly useful marker of this transformation. Many early tantras follow the venerable Buddhist pattern of locating the scripture in the teaching activity of a buddha. Later, tantras such as the *Guhyasamāja* and *Hevajra* transform this through the eroticization of the opening *nidāna* verse. A number of tantras, such as the *Cakrasamvara*, drop the *nidāna* verse entirely, representing a total break with earlier Buddhist scriptural patterns. For further discussion of this topic see my “Disclosing the Empty Secret: Textuality and Embodiment in the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*,” *Numen* 52, no. 4 (2005): 417–444.

3. This dating is made on the basis of Amoghavajra’s detailed summary of this text in his *Index of the Vajrasekhara Sūtra Yoga in Eighteen Sections* (金剛頂經瑜伽十八會指歸, T. 869), a work he composed following his return to China from South Asia in 746 CE. For an annotated English translation of this important text see Rolf W. Giebel, “The Chin-kang-ting ching yü-ch’ieh shih-pa-hui chih-kuei: An Annotated Translation,” *Journal of Naritasan Institute for Buddhist Studies* 18 (1995): 107–201.

4. Although the great Northern Indian Buddhist centers such as Nālandā and Vikramāśīla were destroyed by the early thirteenth century, Buddhism, at least in its tantric form, seems to have been preserved for several centuries by itinerant *yogī* groups. Buddhism seems to have existed in some form in Northern India by the late sixteenth century, apparently as preserved by Buddhist Nāth *yogīs* such as Buddhaguptanātha, who traveled to Tibet in the late sixteenth century and served as a guru for the Tibetan polymath Tāranātha. See David Templeman, “Taranatha the Historian,” *Tibet Journal* 6, no. 2 (1981): 41–46.

5. James H. Sanford, “The Abominable Tachikawa Skull Ritual,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 46, no. 1 (1991): 15–16.

6. For more information concerning the *yoginīs* and *ḍākiṇīs* see my *The Cakrasamvara Tantra: A Study and Annotated Translation* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies/Columbia University Press, 2007), 77–103. See also David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī: “Tantric Sex” in South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

7. Regarding Lūpa/Matsyendranāth and the overlapping lists of Buddhist and Śaiva *siddhas*, see David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 78–110.
8. I argue this in my article “Eating the Heart of the Brahmin: Representations of Alterity and the Formation of Identity in Tantric Buddhist Discourse,” *History of Religions* 45, no. 1 (2005): 45–69.
9. This mythology has been admirably studied by Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty in her *Śiva: The Erotic Ascetic* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).
10. Translated in Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (1976; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 278, from the *Skanda-purāṇa* 1.1.1.20–40, and *Śiva-purāṇa* 2.2.26.14–27, 2.2.27.42–54.
11. For a summary of this story see David N. Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and the Kālāmukhas: Two Lost Śaivite Sects*, 2nd rev. ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991) and Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, 272–320.
12. This passage is from the frame story that begins the *Vetālapañcaviṃśatikā* in Somadeva’s retelling, which is in turn embedded within his much larger *Kathāsaritsāgara*. It describes the charnel ground entered at night by King Trivikramasena. Trans. in N. M. Penzer, ed., *The Ocean of Story, Being C. H. Tawney’s Translation of Somadeva’s Kathāsaritsāgara* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968), 6:167.
13. See Lorenzen, *Kāpālikas and the Kālāmukhas*, and see also Sunthar Visuvalingam, “The Transgressive Sexuality of the Dīkṣita: Sacrifice, Criminality and *Bhakti* in the Hindu Tradition,” in *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 427–462.
14. See Gregory Schopen, “Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism,” *History of Religions* 31, no. 1 (1991): 13, 14. See also Robert DeCaroli, *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 55–62.
15. The classic rendition of these events occurs in the *Buddhacarita*, canto 3, in E. H. Johnston, ed. and trans., *Aśvaghōṣa’s Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha* (1936; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984).
16. *Dīgha-nikāya* 22, trans. in Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1987), 338–339.
17. *Majjhima-nikāya* 10, trans. in Ñāṇamoli and others, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 148, 149.
18. A list of ten types of corpses occurs in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* sections 263 and 264; see C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics of the Fourth Century B.C.* (1923; repr., Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Co., 1975), 69–70.

The standard list of nine occurs in the Sanskrit *Mahāvīryūtpatti* as follows: (1) a discolored corpse (*vinīlaka*); (2) a festering corpse (*vidhūtika*); (3) a worm-eaten corpse (*vīpaḍumaka*); (4) a bloated corpse (*vyādhmātaka*); (5) a bloody corpse (*vilohitaka*); (6) a devoured corpse (*vikhāditaka*); (7) a dismembered, scattered corpse (*vikṣiptaka*); (8) a burned corpse (*vidagdha*); and (9) bones (*asthi*). See Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (1932; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), 94. This practice is described in more detail in chapter 6 of Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*; see Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, trans., *Visuddhimagga: The Path of Purification* (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), 173–190.

19. For example, Śāntarakṣita, in his *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, quotes the *Ratnameghasūtra* concerning the *śmāśānika*, or meditator who dwells in a charnel ground. See the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* 135.1, translated in Cecil Bendall and W. H. D. Rouse, *Śikṣā Samuccaya* (1922; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), 132.

20. See, for example, <http://www.wakeupsmart.com/Asubha.html>. Many thanks to Dr. Anil Sakya for bringing this Web site to my attention.

21. This practice also had misogynist implications, as Liz Wilson has argued. See her *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

22. See the *Mahāssapura-sutta*, *Majjhima-nikāya* 39, trans. in Ñāṇamoli and others, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 366.

23. *Mahāsihanāda-sutta*, *Majjhima-nikāya* 12, trans. in Ñāṇamoli and others, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 175.

24. This text was originally composed in Pāli and was translated into Tibetan; this translation was edited and translated into English by P. V. Bapat in his *Vimuktimārga Dhutaṅga-nirdeśa: A Tibetan Text Critically Edited and Translated into English* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1964). The passage concerning the advantages of charnel ground meditation occurs on pp. 54–55 of that text. See also Reginald Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 298–302.

25. For a classic discussion of these categories, see David Snellgrove, “Categories of Buddhist Tantras,” in *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, ed. G. Gnoli and L. Lanciotti, *Serie Orientale Roma* 56, no. 3, 1353–1384. For a more recent critical and historical analysis of the development of these classificatory schemes see Jacob Dalton, “A Crisis of Doxography: How Tibetans Organized Tantra During the 8<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> Centuries,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 115–181. Many thanks to Dr. Charles Orzech for bringing the latter work to my attention.

26. Chapter 7 of the *Subāhupariprccha-tantra*, a text composed during the seventh century, describes a *vetālasādhana*, a rite for reanimating a corpse in order



to achieve magical powers, as well as several other charnel ground oriented practices. See Ronald Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 203–204. Chapter 26 of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, a text dated to the eighth century, also describes a *vetālasādhana*. See Glenn Wallis, *Mediating the Power of the Buddhas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 176.

27. See Gray, “Eating the Heart of the Brahmin,” 53.

28. Alexis Sanderson has pointed out several instances of intertextual overlap between the Buddhist *Laghvasamvara-tantra*, also known as the *Cakrasamvara-tantra*, and several early Śaiva tantras that appear to have been associated with the Kāpālikas. See his essay “History through Textual Criticism in the Study of Śaivism, the Pañcarātra and the Buddhist Yoginītantras,” in *Les Sources et le temps*, ed. François Grimal (Pondicherry: École française d’Extrême Orient, 2001), 1–47.

29. This thus continued a trend that began centuries earlier, as Phyllis Granoff has argued. See her “Maheśvara/Mahākāla: A Unique Buddhist Image from Kaśmīr,” *Artibus Asiae* 41 (1979): 64–82.

30. Indeed, the advocates of the *Cakrasamvara* and related tantras developed myths that account for this iconographic similarity, claiming the Heruka is a manifestation in Śaiva guise of the Buddha Mahāvajradhara, who assumed this form to tame the deity Bhairava. A translation of Indrabhūti’s version of this myth can be found in my book *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 46–51. See also Ronald Davidson’s “Reflections on the Maheśvara Subjugation Myth: Indic Materials, Sa-skyapa Apologetics, and the Birth of Heruka,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14, no. 2 (1991): 197–235. For a more general study of Buddhist myths of the subjugation of Śaiva deities, see Iyanaga Nobumi, “Récits de la soumission de Maheśvara par Trailokyavijaya—d’après les sources chinoises et japonaises,” in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R.A. Stein*, ed. Michel Strickmann, *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* vol. 12 (Brussels: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises, 1985), 633–745.

31. My translation from the text at To. 366, D rgyud ‘bum vol. ka, fol. 157b.

32. Regarding this see Glenn H. Mullin, *Tsongkhapa’s Six Yogas of Naropa* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 78–81.

33. The *Cakrasamvara-tantra* (CT) likely dates to the late eighth century or early ninth century. Regarding its dating, see Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 11–14.

34. CT 2.14a–16b. For an annotated translation see Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 167–168.

35. CT 2.16c–18b. For an annotated translation see Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 168–169.



36. CT 2.4a–6b. For an annotated translation see Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 164–165.
37. *Hevajra-tantra* 1.6.15–16, translated in David Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 1:64–65. The *Hevajra-tantra* has been dated by Snellgrove to the early ninth century (ibid., 1:11–19).
38. CT 31.3c–5a. For an annotated translation see Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 297.
39. That this is the case is suggested by the contemporary Newari context, in which Hindus and Buddhists continue to live in close proximity. David Gellner has reported that brahmins will never enter Newari Buddhist compounds such as Kwā Bāhāḥ by the front door, because, as a brahmin stated, “when you go in the main door you have to go underneath a *caitya*, and *caityas* contain impure (*aśuddha*) things such as bones.” Gellner concludes that “what is holy relic (bones in a *caitya*) to the Buddhist is impure to the Brahman.” See his *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest: Newar Buddhism and Its Hierarchy of Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 97.
40. Regarding the dating of Bhavabhaṭṭa and other commentators on the CT, see Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 21–24.
41. My translation of the text *yathā śaṅkhādayo vaidikānāṃ pavitrās tathā kapālam api*, ed. in J. S. Pandey, *Śriherukābhīdhānam Cakrasamvaratantram with the Vivṛti Commentary of Bhavabhaṭṭa* (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 2002), 2:515.
42. See the *Atharva Veda* 4.10, translated in W. D. Whitney, *Atharva-Veda-Saṃhitā, Part I* (Indian repr. ed.; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1962), 161–162.
43. Regarding this association, see Peter Bisschop and Arlo Griffiths, “The Pāśupata Observance (Atharvavedapariśiṣṭa 40),” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 46, no. 4 (2003): 315–348.
44. For an excellent study of the Buddhist triple-body theory see John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).
45. See John S. Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 9–10, as well as Glenn Wallis, “The Buddha’s Remains: Mantra in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 24 (2001): 89–125. See also my essay “Disclosing the Empty Secret.”
46. This became an important tool for tantric Buddhist thinkers in the construction of taxonomies that privilege their own tradition’s texts, which were invariably classified as *dharmakāya* teachings. For an example of this see Ryūichi Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

47. Regarding this term see Gregory Schopen's essay "Monks and the Relic Cult in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*: An Old Misunderstanding in Regard to Monastic Buddhism," in his *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 99–113.

48. This is generally the case, but not exclusively so. Buddhists often enshrined textual *dharmasārīra* in *stūpas*, often in conjunction with physical relics. See Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 10.

49. Regarding this see Schopen's article "Burial *Ad Sanctos* and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism," in *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks*, 114–147.

50. For a translation of this episode see Leon Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 183–194.

51. For a translation of this opening passage and a discussion of the history and significance of this text see Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 247–251.

52. See Sanford, "The Abominable Tachikawa Skull Ritual," 1–20.

53. That is, the hero's seven-syllable *upahṛdaya* mantra, which is *oṃ hrīḥ ha ha hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ*.

54. CT 12.2.4. For an annotated translation see Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 210–211.

55. This is translation of my reading of the text in his *Cakrasamvarapañjikā*, from IASWR ms. #MBB-I-122, fol. 22b.3–5: *tarjanyagreṇetyādinā rudhirākaraṣaṇam āha / tatṛāyaṃ kramaḥ / naraśira[h]kapālam ādāya kṛtapurvasevāmantrī jhaṭiti vajrarudrayogāt hūṃkārocāraṇa / devasya dakṣiṇanāsāpuṭ[ā]ntarāt / khaṇḍarohā śāstrahastā niścārya tayāḥ yasya nāmnā pañcasthāne śirovedhaṃ kārāyitvā tadrudhiradhārabiḥ kapālaparipūrṇa bhāvayet/*.

56. Just as blood is typically associated with the fierce *abhicāra* rites, milk is associated with the pacifying *śāntika* rites. Moreover, these substances were seen as symbolically oppositional. Regarding this see David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 68–73.

57. CT 46.1–5. For an annotated translation see Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 358–359.

58. His comment here reads *anāmikā anapatyā tasyā rudhiraṃ rajaḥ*. Ed. in Pandey, *Śrīherukābhidhānam*, 569–570.

59. CT 12.2.7. For an annotated translation see Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 212.

60. My translation from Kambala's *Sādhanaśāstra-śrīcakrasamvara-nāma-pañjikā*, To.1401, D rgyud 'grel vol. ba, fol. 29b.

61. Tsong Khapa gives both the Tibetan translation, *smyo byed*, and also attempts to transliterate its Sanskrit name, *dhattūra*, which he represents as *dadura*. This refers to the plant *Datura alba*, which is both a powerful hallucinogen and poison.

62. My trans. from Tsong Khapa's *bde mchog bsdus pa'i rgyud kyi rgya cher bshad pa sbas pa'i don kun gsal ba*, bKra-shis Lhun-po edition (repr., Delhi: Ngawang Gelek Demo, 1980), vol. nya, fols. 103b–140a.

63. Regarding the two senses of the term *siddhi* in tantric Buddhism, see Charles D. Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 50–52.



# The Guru's Tongue: Metaphor, Imagery, and Vernacular Language in Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Traditions<sup>1</sup>

Glen Alexander Hayes

Bloomfield College

The praises for Kṛṣṇa are the uterine blood, while the seed syllable is the semen.

The guru's tongue (*guru-jihvā*) is the penis, while the ear of the disciple is the vagina.

So, your birth should result from these things.

You should really try to understand how you can be born through the grace of practitioners.

—Ākiñcana-dāsa, *Vivarta-vilāsa* (The Play of Transformation)<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION: VERNACULAR TANTRA AND BENGAL

THESE VIVID PASSAGES from a seventeenth-century Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā text provide us with a good example of the richness and complexity of vernacular (in this case, Bengali) tantric literature. We will analyze these passages later in this essay, but they help to introduce us to some of the issues regarding the scholarly study of tantra,<sup>3</sup> especially those concerning differences between South Asian tantras composed in Sanskrit and others composed in Bengali and other vernacular languages. Most prior scholarship, especially in the area of Hindu tantra, has emphasized the more abstract and elite Sanskrit-based texts; more recently, however, scholars of tantra have demonstrated that important tantric traditions have been expressed in vernacular languages such as Bengali, Hindi, and Malayalam.<sup>4</sup> In addition to honoring the career of Jim Sanford, this essay has two objectives: (1) to briefly review modern metaphor theories and consider their use in the study of vernacular tantra, and (2) to apply these insights to brief selections of seventeenth-century Bengali Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā texts. But first we must consider the general background of vernacular tantra in Bengal.

To begin with, the area of northeastern India including greater Bengal and Assam has historically been one of the most fertile arenas for the development and growth of Buddhist and Hindu tantrism. The renowned Buddhist centers of Tamralipti and Nālandā were located here, and Buddhist tantrics traveled throughout the region, including active exchanges between Bengal and Himalayan regions such as Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, and Tibet. As noted by S. C. Banerji in his survey *Tantra in Bengal*, from “the Tibetan Bstan-hgyur and Lama Tārānātha’s history of Tibet, we learn about quite a number of other Buddhist tantras by Bengali authors. Their Sanskrit originals are lost, and are preserved only in Tibetan versions and, in a very few cases, in Chinese.”<sup>5</sup> But tantrism was also being expressed in proto-vernacular languages like “old Bengali” or Apabhraṃśa, surviving in manuscript form as collections called *caryāpadas* and *dohas* (ca. 950–1150 CE) by their discoverer, Haraprasad Sastri.<sup>6</sup> These important texts suggest a vital vernacular tradition of Buddhist tantrism in Bengal, outside of the walls of universities and the elite, for the songs of the *caryāpadas* and *dohas* reveal aspects of domestic village life like dancing, cooking, music, and boating. In contrast to the refined philosophy and abstractions of many Sanskrit- and Tibetan-based tantras, these short Buddhist works focus more on the experiences of specific gurus and particular practices rather than developing a more general tantric system.

Although the origins of Hindu tantrism are as obscure as those of Buddhist tantra, we also find many examples of both elite and popular expressions.<sup>7</sup> While this is not the place to examine the many important tantric teachers and texts connected with Bengal, it should be noted that some of the most renowned works are the *Sarvollāsa* of Sarvānanda (ca. 1425 CE), the famous *Tantrasāra* of Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgiśa (ca. 1580 CE), and the *Śyāmārahasya* of Pūrṇānanda (ca. 1575 CE).<sup>8</sup> But these texts tended to be written by, and intended for, upper-caste Hindus; as with Buddhist tantrism, various tantric movements flourished among village and rural people, and among the lower castes and outcastes. It is especially among these groups that vernacular tantric traditions developed. As with Buddhist tantrism, in contrast to most Sanskrit-based tantric traditions, Bengali vernacular tantrics, such as the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās, the Bāuls, and the Kartābhajās, did not emphasize cosmic abstractions or complex philosophies.<sup>9</sup> Instead, these widespread movements and their gurus were concerned with the problems of everyday life, the human body, and desires. In their own ways, Sahajiyās,

Bāuls, and Kartābhajās confronted the issues of cosmology, physiology, sexuality, and soteriology and came up with their own distinctive vernacular responses. Perhaps it is not surprising that they embraced the concept of *saṁdeha* or liberation “with a body” far more than most Sanskrit-based texts, for whom the physical body was still regarded as less real than, for example, the subtle body (*sūkṣma-śarīra*, in Śaiva tantras).<sup>10</sup> Although all tantras regard some type of body as “real” and useful for liberation, Bengali vernacular tantras have placed great emphasis upon the physical body as the basis of *sādhana* (psychophysical ritual and meditative practices).

Perhaps as an extension of this *saṁdeha* worldview, Bengali vernacular tantrics tended to embrace a cosmological continuum of substance and consciousness, as opposed to the more dualistic model proposed by Sāṃkhya and Sanskrit-based systems, e.g., the contrast between *puruṣa* (consciousness) and *prakṛti* (matter). Although vernacular traditions employ classical South Asia homologies between the body and the cosmos, microcosm and macrocosm, these connections are not based so much upon the precise use of mantras as much as they are upon the use of specifically *bodily* rituals such as ritual sexual intercourse, ingestion of sexual and other substances, devotional singing, and visualization. This focus on embodiment and, in a way, the local and immediate world, led in turn to development of various religious metaphors dealing with “taste,” “touch,” and “sight” (to name just a few). As a result, we find Bengali vernacular tantric communities making use of esoteric discourses and rituals expressing these polyvalent metaphors to comprehend and achieve cosmic processes, beings, and liberation.

Descriptions of the subtle inner yogic bodies and regions use imageries and metaphors from Bengali culture and the Gangetic delta, so that, for example, the better-known *cakras* and *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* of Śaiva and Śākta systems are often replaced in Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā teachings by the more hydraulic and riverine images of enchanted ponds (*sarovara*) and winding rivers (*bāṅkānādī*). In the *Amṛtaratnāvalī* of Mukunda-dāsa (ca. 1600 CE) we find the following (vv. 96–98):<sup>11</sup>

Through the ninth door<sup>12</sup> is the Pond of Lust (*kāma-sarovara*).

Thus has been proclaimed the story which all the *śāstras* discuss.

There are the Pond of Lust (*kāma-sarovara*) [and] the Pond of Self-Consciousness (*māna-sarovara*);

The Pond of Divine Love (*prema-sarovara*) [and] the Pond of Indestructibility (*akṣaya-sarovara*).

The four ponds lie within the heart.

If you have a body (*deha*), you can reach the other shore.<sup>13</sup>

In other Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā, Bāul, and Kartābhajā texts we also find extensive use of references to Bengali sweets, flowers, animals, villages, marketplaces, and even local coinage. To be sure, many of these have pan-Indian cognates, but they exist in these texts as specifically Bengali variants, located in, and expressing, Bengali culture and contexts.

In grappling with the fundamental tantric issues of sexuality, ritual transformation, and cosmic powers, Bengali vernacular tantras reflect not just a need to balance the feminine with the masculine, but, perhaps reflecting the prevalence of Śaktism and other goddess traditions in the region, a frequent *emphasis* upon the cosmic feminine, the role of the female ritual partner (*gopīs*, *nāyikās*), and (especially with Sahajiyās) the necessity of the inner visualized female form (*śrīrūpa-mañjarī*) as prerequisites to final liberation. In addition to this important valorization of the feminine, we find among the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās the process of what Joseph O’Connell calls “anamnesia,” a ritual transformation whereby the practitioner seeks to “remember” (*smaraṇa*) his/her “true nature” (*svarūpa*) as a participant in the cosmic drama (*dhāma-līlā*) of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the academic study of Bengali vernacular tantric traditions (as well as those from other regions) has been hampered not only by Orientalist strategies, terminologies, sanitizing, and censorship (as Andre Padoux, Doug Brooks, Tony Stewart, and Hugh Urban have argued),<sup>15</sup> but also by the problems of attempting to study “local” and vernacular tantra without having the discourse constrained by the generic reductionist concept of Sanskrit-based “tantra” or “tantrism” (itself an Orientalist and scholarly construct). This essay will demonstrate the vernacular “Bengali” and local nature of Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā tantric traditions. Rather than understanding them from the perspective of Sanskrit-based, elite tantric traditions, we will encounter them on their own terms, hopefully appreciating their richness and complexity.<sup>16</sup>

In this short essay I would like to consider some of these problems of studying “local” and vernacular tantra by referring to selections from two seventeenth-century Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā texts that I have



translated.<sup>17</sup> Information gleaned from these wonderful, if challenging esoteric texts can illustrate not only important aspects of vernacular tantric literature, but also show how the use of modern conceptual metaphor theories (especially those developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, see below) can help us to better understand the imaginative worlds expressed by vernacular texts and traditions. One way to “liberate” local tantras from the constraints of the dominant Sanskrit-based model of “tantra” is to explore the vernacular language itself, to coax out the often-profound metaphors and entailments that “live” in the texts.

Edward C. Dimock presented some of the basic beliefs and practices of Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā traditions and discussed the problematics of determining their origins in his now-classic *The Place of the Hidden Moon*.<sup>18</sup> However, for the convenience of those readers not familiar with his work I will provide a quick overview of these fascinating traditions. The Sahajiyās may be considered—in the very broad sense—an interaction of tantric yoga with Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*, with the resultant a quite distinctive vernacular tantric tradition.<sup>19</sup> First, Sahajiyās adapt classical devotional interpretations of Kṛṣṇa, transforming him from a supreme being (as *bhagavān*, quite distinct from ordinary human beings) into the inner cosmic form (*svarūpa*) of every human male. Rādhā is transformed from the consort or *hlādinī-śakti* (“bliss emanation”) of Kṛṣṇa into the *svarūpa* of every woman. For Sahajiyās, in other words, the goal is not to worship Kṛṣṇa or imitate Rādhā and the *gopīs* in a dualistic *bhakti* sense, but rather to *become* Kṛṣṇa or Rādhā themselves, in a monistic tantric manner. Second, by expressing these alternative and antinomian notions of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā in Bengali language and verse, and embedding these narratives in specific Sahajiyā teaching lineages, they move Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā even further from the Sanskrit-based and classical formulations into the local cultural and cognitive realities of Bengali men and women.

As Dimock has shown, Kṛṣṇa and his erotic encounters with Rādhā would seem to be natural choices for adaptations by late medieval Sahajiyā tantrics as they sought to express the need to reverse the phenomenal flow of creation—engendered as the “play” of male and female powers—“upwards against the current” (*sroter ujāna*) back to the unitive state of Sahaja, the “Innate” or “Primordial” condition. Of course, the popular notion of the religious leader Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (ca. 1486–1533 CE) as the dual incarnation of both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, devel-

oped by Kṛṣṇa-dāsa Kavirāja (ca. 1615 CE) in his *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*,<sup>20</sup> was also taken up by some Sahajiyā gurus as a clear reflection of their own belief that all Sahajiyās must themselves realize the indwelling of both male and female powers within their own physical bodies.

#### CONTEMPORARY METAPHOR THEORIES AND THE STUDY OF VERNACULAR TANTRA

If we can set aside the controversy of possible Sahajiyā influence on orthodox Vaiṣṇavism,<sup>21</sup> we can turn our attention to how vernacular tantric traditions are expressed in some Sahajiyā texts, such as the *Amṛtaratnāvalī* of Mukunda-dāsa (ca. 1600 CE) and the *Vivarta-vilāsa* of Ākiñcana-dāsa (ca. 1650 CE).<sup>22</sup> Of interest is the fact that, in contrast to most other tantric traditions that have extensive written commentaries based on major or “root” texts, there appears to be no such tradition of written commentaries in Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā traditions. So the modern scholar is immediately challenged when dealing with the intricacies and details of the existing texts (many of which remain unstudied manuscripts in Bengali archives and libraries). We lack traditional guides to the texts, but we can turn to other methods. One fruitful way to do this is to explore the metaphors that lie at the heart of the texts. To begin with, the basic Vaiṣṇava notion of *avatāra* is itself a wonderful metaphoric process, for it enables an abstract, cosmic, divine being to be expressed in more earthly, concrete terms—one of the basic functions of either religious metaphor (such as “God is love”) or everyday metaphor (“Life is a journey”). Whether it is Viṣṇu taking form as a fish or a boar or a man-lion or Kṛṣṇa taking form as a baby, a friend, or a lover, it is this shape-shifting nature of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa that lends itself to additional tantric reinterpretation and metaphorical elaboration.

Until recently, metaphor has been studied by Western scholars primarily as a linguistic and poetic device. And, as scholars of South Asia know, metaphor is given extensive treatment in classical Indian aesthetics and dramaturgy in terms of *rūpaka*, *alaṃkāra*, and *dvani* (ideas that continue in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava and Sahajiyā aesthetics).<sup>23</sup> But over the past several decades a decidedly modern theory of “conceptual metaphor” has emerged, based on the efforts of a wide range of scholars, including linguists, philosophers, literary critics, folklorists, cognitive scientists, and anthropologists.<sup>24</sup> A methodology using concepts

from this emerging field shows great promise in our efforts towards understanding religious texts and discourse. Vernacular religious traditions may be contrasted to classical and elite traditions not only because they developed in (and responded to) different social, cultural, and historical contexts, but also because they make distinctive uses of metaphors in their attempt to construe and express sacred realities and beings. These are not metaphors just in the sense of literary and poetic devices; the modern understanding of conceptual metaphors connects metaphors to fundamental cognitive, physiological, and neurological processes—many of which we are only just beginning to understand.

As linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson observe in their wonderful groundbreaking collaboration *Metaphors We Live By*, “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.”<sup>25</sup> According to Johnson, metaphor is

conceived as a pervasive mode of understanding by which we project patterns from one domain of experience in order to structure another domain of a different kind. So conceived, metaphor is not merely a linguistic mode of expression; rather, it is one of the chief cognitive structures by which we are able to have coherent, ordered experiences that we can reason about and make sense of. Through metaphor, we make use of patterns that obtain in our physical experience to organize our more abstract understanding.<sup>26</sup>

Following the groundbreaking work of Lakoff and Johnson, Gary B. Palmer applied their insights to culture and cognition in his useful *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics*, wherein he argues that different languages and metaphors correspond to different cognitive models and worldviews.<sup>27</sup> For our purposes it is worthwhile to note Palmer's argument that human communities operate with “folk cognitive models,” models of reality that operate in the minds of speakers of a given language.<sup>28</sup> Thus, vernacular tantric traditions like the Sahajiyās are not just using different languages to express the same basic tantric worldviews; they are in fact expressing distinct cognitive and cosmological models. That is one of the reasons why the Sahajiyā cosmophysiology of lotus ponds and rivers is so different from the Śaiva models of *cakras* and *nāḍīs*; although structurally similar, the metaphors used are different, as are the entailments and the subtle meanings.

According to Palmer, one of the major goals of language, especially metaphors, is to convey images from one person to another. This is also a major goal of tantric *sādhana* and initiation, as gurus experience cosmic realities and bodily sensations, then share them with disciples using rituals, texts, and discourses. But, just as tantric imagery is always essentially secretive and esoteric (*gupta, rahasya, marma*), so are images never directly related by language; rather, to quote Palmer, they are “mental representations that begin as conceptual analogs of immediate, perceptual experience from the peripheral sensory organs.”<sup>29</sup> This is why we must pay close attention to the vernacularity of the traditions we study, for if the key to tantric visualization and *sādhana*s are the images of deities and the disciples’ connections with them, the shaping influence of vernacular language and culture must be understood. Although not referring to religious images per se, Palmer observes that images are<sup>30</sup>

Indirect conceptual analogs of the environment, broadly construed to include society, natural phenomena, our own bodies and their organic (and mental) processes, and the rest of what is often called “reality” or “the world out there.”

So, to summarize, we could argue that basically all imagery is structured by culture and what Palmer calls “personal history.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, in order to understand and appreciate vernacular or elite tantric imageries, we must understand the context of the culture and the language.

In an earlier essay<sup>32</sup> I suggested how modern conceptual metaphor theory can help us to understand tantric visualization and ritual processes; here I will apply this methodology to the issues of vernacular language and tantric traditions. In order to appreciate the basic theory, a bit of linguistic terminology must be used, that involving so-called “target” and “source” domains. For example, regarding the LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor (which exists in variants worldwide, and is found in Sahajiyā texts as well), Lakoff observes:

The metaphor involves understanding one domain of experience, love, in terms of another domain of experience, journeys. More technically, the metaphor can be understood as a mapping (in the mathematical sense) from a source domain (in this case, journeys) to a target domain (in this case, love). The mapping is tightly structured. There are ontological correspondences, according to which entities in the domain of love (e.g. the lovers, their common goals, their dif-

faculties, the love relationship) correspond systematically to entities in the domain of a journey (the travelers, the vehicle, destinations, etc.).<sup>33</sup>

Thus, for most metaphors, the basic taxonomy is: TARGET-domain IS SOURCE-domain, and much of the theory explores these “ontological correspondences,” as well as their various meanings. This same basic relationship can be applied to virtually any metaphor, for example: ARGUMENT IS WAR or IDEAS ARE FOOD. The multiple meanings found in the source domain (war, food) may have complex relationships with those in the target domain (argument, ideas), and a wide range of semantic and lexical implications or entailments are the result. Thus, we can have, respectively, expressions like “He attacked my position” and “Your thesis is hard to digest.” So, even in cases of nonreligious language, what we find are local and vernacular expressions being linked to underlying metaphorical constructions and to Palmer’s “folk cognitive models.”

The same applies to specifically religious metaphors, which tend even more to be polysemic. An example from the *Amṛtaratnāvalī* helps to illustrate this complexity (vv. 162–164):

That Pond is visualized as having a pleasing shape.  
I will tell you about it, please listen carefully!

That Pond is adorned with precious gems (*maṇika*).  
That eternal Abode (*dhāma*) is inlaid with the Jewels (*ratna*).

In the four directions there are four landing-stairs, connected to the  
path of the village leader.<sup>34</sup>

The landing-stairs are redolent with the [scents] of musk, vermillion,  
and sandalwood.

This passage, which describes the visualization of one of the inner ponds of the yogic body, also contains images of stairs, villages, leaders, and ritual cosmetics. But beyond this basic level of simple description, there is a deeper underlying level of metaphorical process at work. When we examine Sahajiyā religious metaphors (and there are many), such as THE BODY IS A POND SYSTEM or REALITY IS FLUID or SAHAJA IS A CONTAINER or SĀDHANA IS A JOURNEY, we find that important aspects of the source domain (the relatively “concrete” notions of a pond system, fluid, container, journey) tend to be applied to the target domains (the more abstract notions of body, reality, Sahaja, and *sādhana*)

in ways that attempt to maintain metaphorical consistency. Thus, the local or “folk” details of a river system (e.g., banks, landing stairs, waters, villages, ponds, current, boats) are connected to the body in a way that the Sahajiyās thus envision these details as part of the subtle inner body. In other words, the “cognitive topology,” the “nooks and crannies” as it were, of the source domains (the “concrete” image) tend to constrain and structure how the target domain (the “abstraction”) is perceived and experienced. This is why we must pay attention to the specifically local images and vernacular Bengali expressions that are used to indicate cosmic abstractions like Kṛṣṇa, Sahaja, or the subtle body; it also suggests why the Sahajiyā subtle physiology is typically envisioned not as fiery energy centers and ascending *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* (more typically features of Sanskritic texts), but rather as the movement of fluids along a river, past villages, and into a series of inner ponds. There is a metaphorical and cognitive consistency that leads to what Tony Stewart calls “coherent metaphoric worlds.”<sup>35</sup>

Metaphors are thus useful because they enable what Mark Johnson calls “the imaginative structuring of experience” in human life, which consists of “forms of imagination that grow out of bodily experience, as it contributes to our understanding and guides our reasoning.”<sup>36</sup> And it is here where we can gain an appreciation for the use of local, folk, and vernacular expressions, for it is this very function of metaphor that allows mystics such as the Sahajiyās to “imaginatively structure” their yogic, emotional, and sexual experiences. This is based upon what modern theorists call “image schemata,” essentially “a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience.”<sup>37</sup> Although we are still learning more about such cognitive schema as we learn more about neurophysiology and other areas, schema theory has been reviewed by Ronald W. Casson.<sup>38</sup> Casson states that schemas are “conceptual abstractions that mediate between stimuli received by the sense organs and behavioral responses” and that they “serve as the basis for all human information processing, e.g. perception and comprehension, categorization and planning, recognition and recall, and problem-solving and decision-making.”<sup>39</sup> While this is not the place to explore the neurophysiological aspects of schema, it is worth quoting Palmer on why they are essential to our study of language and culture:<sup>40</sup>

To understand a word as its speaker intended or to use it appropriately, it is necessary to know the schema or schemas to which it be-

longs in a particular context of use. Words evoke systems of meaning, and often, as in metaphor, they evoke two or more systems at once. Whole vocabularies pertaining to the landscape, the body, kinship, and other topics all have their own underlying schemas. Along such schemas, words and idiomatic phrases are distributed more or less systematically.

Some such schemata, such as the “verticality schema” (and the meaning or value of “up” versus “down”) or the “container schema” (which can “mark off” a mental space and turn an idea or experience into a “vessel”) are perhaps universally found with humans, but it is likely that there are important local and individual expressions—issues that we are still working out.

Metaphors thus work together with bodily experience and image schemata to create “coherent metaphoric worlds,” allowing us to interact with, and even to “enter,” those worlds. It is precisely this process of what Lakoff and Johnson call “mapping” that we can find in Sahajiyā notions of subtle physiology and ritual process, of identifying men with Kṛṣṇa and women with Rādhā. This “mapping” (itself a spatial metaphor) allows for not just analysis and manipulation of the embodied condition and the material world, but for gradual transformation of the bodies of the male and female practitioners and the attainment of Sahaja.

Although the preceding discussion of contemporary metaphor theory is necessarily brief, and the issues are often quite subtle and nuanced, I trust that it has shown how metaphors may be related to language, thought, imagination, and basic experience. In addition to being useful literary devices, metaphors are embedded in our ways of thinking about ourselves, others, and the world. Like the operating system of a computer that runs quietly “in the background” of what we see on the screen, metaphors and image schemata exist underneath our words and thoughts and actions. They are at the heart of vernacular language. As it turns out, they are very “real.” Lakoff observes that “metaphors impose a structure on real life, *through the creation of new correspondences in experience. And once created in one generation, they serve as an experiential basis for that metaphor in the next generation.*”<sup>41</sup> This is precisely what seems to have happened in medieval Sahajiyā communities, as influential gurus like Mukunda-dāsa and Ākiñcana-dāsa developed distinctive metaphoric worlds based upon their own yogic experiences, expressed them orally and in written texts, and then passed



them down to their own students. Through their development of such metaphoric worlds they were able to express and disseminate their experiences to others in greater Bengal.

Some further examples of these visionary worlds from the *Amṛtaratnāvalī* will help to illustrate this metaphorical richness (vv. 42–50):

This dharma is the purest, without division or simple lust (*kāma*).  
The abode (*dhāma*) beyond the heavenly Virajā River is transcendent.<sup>42</sup>

Along the far shores of the Virajā River is The Land (*deśakhāna*).  
Sahajapur is that Village (*grāma*) which is called “Eternal Bliss” (*sadānanda*).

To the west of that [river] is [a village called] Kalinga Kalikā;  
The female partner (*nāyikā*) of that place is called Campaka Kalikā.<sup>43</sup>

[In that place are] the Tree of Emptiness,<sup>44</sup> and lotuses of one hundred and one thousand petals.

The Land surrounds that tree and the waters of the Lotus Pond.

To the north [of the Virajā River] is the Village called Place of Bliss (*ānandapura*).

[In that place are] mystics (*rasikas*), the grove (*kuñja*) of *rasa*, and the abode of the God of Love (Manmatha, or Kāmadeva).

Forever blissful, forever overwhelmed, forever desirous,  
the Together-Born Inner Person (*sahaja-mānusa*) always makes [its] home there.

To the east of that [Virajā River] is the heavenly village of Sahajapura.  
That is the eternal abode of the Together-Born Person.

Forever blissful, forever overwhelmed, forever desirous,  
the Together-Born Person always makes [its] home there.<sup>45</sup>

To the south of that [river] is [the Village called] Place of Conscious Bliss (*cidānandapura*);  
a Land called Radiant Moon (*candrakānti*) is not far away.

When we consider such lovely inner worlds depicted in Sahajiyā texts, we need to bear in mind that these visionary worlds are connected to underlying metaphorical structures and experienced by Sahajiyās as very real—more “real” than the outer realm of zamindars, geckos, and monsoons. Sahajiyās did not just attempt to construe



their esoteric language so that it made sense in the ordinary world; rather, to paraphrase literary critic Samuel Levin,<sup>46</sup> they construed the world to make sense of the esoteric language. It is thus this profound “process of construal” that we must be sensitive to, by noting regional phrasings, local references, and above all metaphorical consistencies (or, in some cases, inconsistencies).

For esoteric mystical traditions like the Sahajiyās, ritual practices—ranging from the beginner’s practices of singing and dancing adapted from Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *vaidhi-bhakti* to the tantric sexual rituals practiced at the advanced stage of *siddha*—thus allow for a visualized inner cosmos and body that is construed in terms of the metaphors, be they “rivers,” “ponds,” “flowers,” or “villages.” There is, of course, a physical component, as parts of the human body and material world are homologized with the metaphors, such as the vagina with a lotus, the penis with a honeybee, the urethra with a river, and so forth. Verse 133 of the *Amṛtaratnāvalī*, for example, quoting another text by Mukunda-dāsa, *The Garland of Bees* (*Bhṛngaratnāvalī*), compares men to bumblebees, allowing possible entailments such as taking honey, flitting from flower to flower, and so forth: “Protected by the lotuses of the Pond which is a sea of Divine Love and nectar, men become bumblebees. How can the passionate ones, clinging to the feet of the blessed Body, enter the world inside the body?”<sup>47</sup> This esoteric “process of construal,” then, allows for not just metaphoric language based upon concepts, but also for religious realities and concepts “created” by the metaphoric language. The religious adept is thus “projected into,” engages, and responds to such metaphoric worlds as coherent reality, not at all fictive illusion.<sup>48</sup> For Sahajiyās, they really become bees, alight in floral realities.

Folklorist Barre Toelken, in his wonderful study of European and American folksongs and ballads, *Morning Dew and Roses*, argues that “We will not want to read meaning into a song, but rather attempt to read meaning out by carefully noting . . . the relationship of the metaphor to the assumptions in its culture and by charting its coherent relationships to the song in which it appears.”<sup>49</sup> When reading such material (or listening to it), the scholar should be sensitive to the “range of metaphorical possibilities” within the text and the culture, and will discover that this range can span “almost explicit metonymy to complex suggestive metaphor.”<sup>50</sup>

In the case of Sahajiyā texts, which are often riddle-like in their use of uninflected language and esoteric vocabulary (which, along with the lack of written commentaries, makes their study quite vexing for modern scholars!), there is an interesting range of imagery and metaphor, much of which is “hydraulic” in nature, based upon sexuality, fluids, rivers, ponds, and flowers. We find similar imageries and tropes in other Bengali vernacular tantric traditions, such as Bāul, Śākta, and Kartābhajā songs.<sup>51</sup> This consistency suggests that such choices are neither coincidental nor random. In explaining the polysemy of Euro-American “riddle songs,” Toelken observes:

The more fully we can perceive the vernacular system from which the song grows and in which such references make sense, the more we will realize that there is not a strict code of any sort, but rather a field of metaphorical possibility, a pool of culturally recognizable resources in the language and in everyday jokes and formulations.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, in a way, we return to Lakoff and Johnson’s basic point about metaphor, that the relationship between the target and source domains (between the denotative and connotative, “love” and “journey,” or “woman” and “lotus flower”) is not simple and predictable, and certainly not a simple or even predictable “code.” But now we will turn to an examination of selected passages from Sahajiyā texts to apply some of these insights regarding metaphor and vernacular language.

#### SACRED JEWELS AND FLUIDS: THE AMṚTARATNĀVALĪ OF MUKUNDA-DĀSA

We have already examined some verses from the *Amṛtaratnāvalī* or *Necklace of Immortality* of Mukunda-dāsa, which was composed around 1600 CE. In its over three hundred couplets we find a rich trove of metaphors and Bengali cultural references—as well as the tantric visualizations and ritual procedures that are its main focus. As with other Bengali vernacular tantras, it expresses a worldview emphasizing embodiment, the transformative and salvific powers of ritual sexual intercourse, and the importance of “substance” in the religious quest. The very title, *Necklace (ratnāvalī) of Immortality (amṛta)*, is itself a polysemic metaphor, for it suggests not only the uses of jewels and bodily ornamentation in tantric ritual, but the more fundamental notion that the practitioner must “fashion” and then figuratively

“wear” an encircling mandala made out of the “jewels” or *ratna* which, in the esoteric language of the text, are yogically-reversed sexual fluids. Called *vastu* or “stuff” by Mukunda-dāsa, these fluids are created and joined when the male practitioner, as Kṛṣṇa, joins with his female partner, who is visualized as Rādhā. The process is one in which the male is believed to draw the female sexual fluid (*rati*) from the woman’s vagina into his penis, where it joins with his semen (*rasa*) and is then caused to move upwards along the “crooked river” (*bāṅkānadi*), through four inner ponds (*sarovara*), and finally up to Sahaja itself.<sup>53</sup> (Some have playfully termed this the “reverse-fountain-pen technique,” but it is a variant of the tantric practice of “reverse suction,” such as the *vajrolī-mudrā* of Siddha traditions).<sup>54</sup> As abstract and mystical as these inner places may be, they are all accessible through the fluids of the human body, connected to the very “stuff” (*vastu*) of this world.

That Mukunda-dāsa and other medieval Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās would use a substantive term like *vastu* in their description of subtle physiology is significant, for it illustrates the use of several different kinds of ontological metaphors identified by Lakoff and Johnson: entity, substance, and container metaphors. Abstractions like the experience of a “divine body” (*deva-deha*) and associated states of consciousness are expressed and made more accessible through the use of such images. As Lakoff and Johnson note:

Our experience of physical objects and substances provides a further basis for understanding—one that goes beyond mere orientation. Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind. Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them—and, by this means, reason about them.<sup>55</sup>

Because of the use of such “substantive” metaphors to express mystical experiences, the metaphoric world of the *Necklace* has a particular character or quality that distinguishes it from the metaphoric worlds of some Sanskrit-based tantric or Kṛṣṇa traditions, which often use different kinds of metaphors. Whereas the metaphoric world of the *Necklace* is expressed primarily through metaphors of substances and fluids, other types of tantric worlds—for example, those expressed using the better-known systems of *cakras* and *kuṇḍalinī-śakti*—use metaphors

of energy, sound, power, and light.<sup>56</sup> Although this is not the place to explore the many fascinating issues arising from such differences (and similarities), it should be clear that, once a basic metaphorical world is established, certain entailments and outcomes are possible—while others are not. In other words, a cosmophysiology based primarily (though not exclusively) upon fluids and substances will probably have some dynamics or “feel” (to use a modern sensory metaphor) that vary from one based primarily upon energy, sound, and light.

Mukunda-dāsa is quite clear about the importance of substance and fluid, for early in the text (vv. 7–12), immediately after offering homage to notable Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava authorities like Caitanya, Nityānanda, and the Gosvāmins, he discusses the importance of *rasa*, understood on several levels—as a religio-aesthetic experience, as a sexual substance, and even as an alchemical term (as mercury).<sup>57</sup> However, since the basic meaning of *rasa* is “juice” or “essence” (as from a sugar cane), this allows Mukunda-dāsa to develop entailments based upon the core image of a “sweet fluid” that causes delightful sensations when “tasted.” Thus, *rasa* can be the rapturous aesthetic or devotional experience of “sweet” emotions, and it can also be the essence that derives, not just from a cane, but from the penis. Furthermore, those who experience *rasa* are called *rasikas* (“aesthetes,” “connoisseurs,” or “tasters”), and Mukunda-dāsa compares their experiences to floating upon a river (vv. 8–9):

Those devotees who are *rasikas* seek the subtle inner Body (*śrī-rūpa*).  
Their minds are constantly bobbing (*ḍubāya*) about in the *rasa*.

With minds submerged (*magna*) in *rasa*, they float along.  
*Rasa* can only be produced by keeping the company of *rasikas*.

Both meanings of *rasa*—as aesthetic experience and sexual substance—share similar entailments, for both “experience” and “semen” can “flow” like a river. This riverine entailment or extended meaning of the basic substance/fluid metaphor also helps to suggest why the subtle physiology of the *Necklace* consists of a system of a river and ponds, and not the more familiar *suṣumṇā-nāḍī* and *cakras* of other traditions: fluids naturally run through rivers and streams and into ponds. Recalling the earlier metaphors of love and *sādhana* as a journey, which defines a path and surfaces, if mystical experience is being expressed in terms of fluidic metaphors, then the later stages of the process of liberation may be expressed as passage along a river, being

contained by the two banks of the river, flowing into a pond, and leaving the waters through landing-stairs (*ghāt*) to enter neighboring celestial villages (*grāma*). Of course, much of this also reflects the natural topology and climate of deltaic Bengal, with its innumerable streams, rivers, and bodies of water. In other words, the experiences of substances, fluids, rivers, and bodies of water may have been adopted as metaphors and then projected in order to refer to, categorize, group, and quantify profound mystical and sexual experiences.

But Mukunda continues this use of substance metaphors as he introduces the importance of *vastu* as a “cosmic substance” made out of yogically-reversed sexual fluids, which are then used to generate the inner visualized form of the female ritual partner. Some relevant passages (vv. 10–12) are:

[Through the experience of] that *rasa*, you should internalize the principles of Substance (*vastu*).

Indeed, the Together-Born Substance (*sahaja-vastu*) and the principles of *rasa* are to be regarded like precious jewels (*ratna*).

Influenced by the jewel [of Together-Born Substance] the *rasa* [assumes] the shape of the Body (*rūpa*).

The Body was born [by] the rituals of *rasa*.

Then, in the company of *rasikas*, she who possesses the Body (*rūpavatī*) [must appear].

Your own inner identity [requires] sporting as he who experiences *rasa* (*rasavati*).

We can detect many aspects of Sahajiyā ritual and discourse reflected in these few passages, especially the practice of ritual sexual intercourse, the yogic reversal of sexual fluids, and the use of those fluids to create the inner “Body” (*rūpa*) of the female partner. Written in riddle-like vernacular Bengali, they help to illustrate the quite distinctive character of Sahajiyā worldviews and ethos.

#### THE GURU'S TONGUE: THE VIVARTA-VILĀSA OF ĀKIÑCANA-DĀSA

In addition to their specifically religious usages, metaphors may also be used to claim authority and legitimation. Such examples may be found in the *Vivarta-vilāsa* (The Erotic Sport of Transformation) of Ākiñcana-dāsa, an extensive treatise of several thousand couplets

composed about 1650 CE. Much of this work is devoted to arguing that the renowned Bengali devotional leader Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (1486–1533 CE) and other notable Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas were in fact secretly practicing Sahajiyā sexual rituals (a claim hotly contested then as now by orthodox Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas).<sup>58</sup> Ākiñcana-dāsa quotes extensively from the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* of Kṛṣṇa-dāsa Kavirāja and from other texts in order to argue for this “privileged” Sahajiyā reading of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava history.<sup>59</sup> Most of the work is composed in Bengali, although there are some quotations from Sanskrit works like the *Bhagavad-gītā* and philosophical and aesthetic works by Gauḍīya scholars. Ākiñcana-dāsa had several goals in composing the *Vivarta-vilāsa*, including outlining the basic Sahajiyā worldview and ritual practices; however, it is clear from his extensive discourse with the mainstream Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition that issues of authority and legitimation were at the core of the text as well. Thus, we can also find sophisticated uses of metaphors for these purposes; some, such as the first example below are like Mukunda-dāsa’s uses in the *Amṛtaratnāvalī*, essentially describing *sādhana* and *deha-tattva*. Others, like the vivid metaphor of the guru’s tongue (*guru-jihvā*), are more complex, weaving issues of authority into those of cosmology, physiology, and *sādhana*.

Like Mukunda-dāsa and other Sahajiyā gurus, Ākiñcana-dāsa embraces a basically substantive and hydraulic cosmophysiology, and the metaphors help him to do this. One such example of a substance or ontological metaphor reflects not only traditions of ritual sexual intercourse and alchemy, but also the Bengali love of making candy and other sweets:<sup>60</sup>

Without the help of experienced devotees, devotion to the divine  
juice (*rasa*) cannot be understood.  
The alchemical candy (*bhiyāna*) is ritually prepared using the in-  
strument of divine love.

\* \* \* \* \*

The alchemical candy was made by seizing the divine juice,  
and blending into that precious treasure the female and the male  
principles.

As many sugar-drops and candy pieces that can be made from the  
juice of the sugarcane,  
that much cosmic substance (*vastu*) and power (*śakti*) are to be gained  
in the great mystical condition (*mahābhāva*).

In *The Immortal Acts of Caitanya* (2.23.23) it is said:

From the sugarcane plant come seeds, stalks, juice, and molasses, but they share the same basic essence.

Sugar candy is really just the finest white sugar mixed with spices.

Just as the flavor of these products of the sugarcane gradually increases, so does religious appreciation increase due to passion and divine love.

The juice and cosmic substance are always present in a special place. If they remain, what happens? You must understand all of this.

Take the juice in that place and mix spices with it.

You must fashion the confection by transforming that juice.

Using the quaint and intriguing substantive metaphor of candy-making, this couplet clearly reflects the cultural context of Bengali village life. The underlying “folk cognitive model” is that of transforming worldly substances like sexual fluids (*rasa*) into powerful alchemical substances or pills which, like candy (*bhiyāna*) can be ingested to achieve the higher stages of Sahajiyā *sādhana* and immortality. As with many Sahajiyā practices, there are additional devotional elements of *bhakti* and “divine love” (*prema*) adapted from Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism—hence the citation from Kṛṣṇa-dāsa Kavirāja’s great work in an attempt to legitimize this tantric alchemical procedure and locate himself within the lineage of Caitanya and Kṛṣṇa-dāsa. Furthermore, all of this refers to the underlying hydraulic or fluidic metaphorical world found in most other Sahajiyā cosmologies. To the best of my knowledge, few if any other tantric traditions use this metaphor of candy-making, which seems specific to vernacular Bengali texts.

The metaphor of the guru’s tongue, although clearly connected to issues of cosmophysiology, initiation, and empowerment, also takes us to Sahajiyā attempts to claim authority and legitimation. As Hugh Urban has convincingly shown in his study of the nineteenth-century Kartābhajās, Bengali tantric movements have attempted to deal with their marginal status by employing a number of strategies of appropriation, transformation, and concealment.<sup>61</sup> In the case of the earlier Sahajiyās, we find not only attempts to claim the teachings and personalities of Gauḍīya traditions, but also the goal of achieving an entirely “new birth” that would distinguish the Sahajiyās from others. These issues appear in the following key passage from the text, which has a number of metaphors, such as those of fluids, substances, and especially the basic “container” metaphor in which THE BODY IS

A CONTAINER. This is connected to a polysemic convergence of images of “birth,” “initiation,” and “speaking/hearing,” all of which lead to the creation of the inner yogic body. It is worth quoting much of this passage to illustrate its richness.<sup>62</sup>

Those rituals which deserve the highest praise involve childless asceticism.

Please, I implore you, behold and understand the secret meanings!

There is a full pitcher (*kumbha*) upon his head.

When there is such a full pitcher, the practitioner becomes very powerful.

Then divine love appears in his body.

Thus everyone says: “That inner country is truly a fine place.”

Hear about the different kinds of birth from the manuals of the practitioners and from the mouths of practitioners.

It is not even worth considering other viewpoints concerning the nature of devotion.

The grace of the guru and the grace of practitioners come after the grace of mother and father.

This tells you that there are two separate and distinct births.

There is no birth at all without uterine blood, semen, vagina, and penis. How can that be? I will discuss its significance.

At first there was a birth due to the bonding between mother and father. But behold how just a little grace from the guru can cause a rebirth (*punarjanma*).

That also involves uterine blood, semen, vagina, and penis.

Clear your mind and listen, for I speak the essence of this.

The praises for Kṛṣṇa are the uterine blood, while the seed syllable is the semen.

The guru’s tongue is the penis, while the ear of the disciple is the vagina.

So, your birth should result from these things.

You should really try to understand how you can be born through the grace of practitioners.

The eye and ear are some of the five organs of knowledge (*jñāna-indriya*). In the beginning and intermediate stages of practice, you must make them compassionate.



Use the organ of knowledge that is the ear to hear about birth.

Use the eye to see the grace of the practitioners and the eternal order  
(*nitya dharma*).

You will then progress gradually through the three stages of practice:  
Beginner, Intermediate, and Perfected.

Hear with the ear and see with the eye how these are all really one  
process.

You must realize, brother, that everything has its uterine blood and  
semen.

Semen and uterine blood will develop when one assumes the condition  
(*bhāva*) of Rādhā (“Prosperity”).

The condition of being Rādhā I call the “law of loving another’s spouse”  
(*parakīyā dharma*).

All of the principles of greed and devotion can be found in that condition.

There is much to comment about regarding this wonderful passage, which extols the virtues of “childless asceticism,” an ironic (and seemingly oxymoronic) phrase since this is an asceticism using ritual sexual intercourse.<sup>63</sup> However, whereas ordinary sexual intercourse, through the bodies of the father and mother, leads to the birth of the ordinary physical body of flesh and blood, the Sahajiyās seek a form of “rebirth” (*punarjanma*) as the inner subtle body (*śrī-rūpa*). This passage makes use of various container metaphors: the pitcher upon the head, referring to the reservoir of semen according to Bengali folk culture, and, among Sahajiyās, to the uppermost pond (the *akṣaya-sarovara*), which is fashioned out of reversed sexual fluids.<sup>64</sup> But the most vivid couplets refer to the creation of this inner bodily container, which is made metaphorically from “uterine blood, semen, vagina, and penis.” Instead of having a fleshly body born of mother’s blood and father’s semen (again based on the Bengali folk model), the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava praises (*kīrtana*) for Kṛṣṇa (used by Sahajiyās in early stages of practice) are equivalent to the blood (*śoṇita*), while the “seed-syllable” or *bīja-mantra* used by the guru during initiation is compared to semen (*śukra*). Of note here is the transformation of sounds into substances and sexual fluids—yet another example of the core fluidic ontological metaphor. As far as the containers that hold these vital sound-fluids, the guru’s tongue is creatively compared to the penis; metaphorically both share a similar function: they both deliver the female/male sound/fluid to what will be the “womb” for the “birth” of the yogic body. The disciple’s ear is thus compared to the vagina/womb, as the receptacle

for the conjoined principles. So, the guru's tongue and the disciple's ear serve as polysemic metaphors for initiation, epistemology, birth, and salvific passage. But beyond this the guru's tongue also expresses the Sahajiyā claim to authority and legitimation, and the disciple's ear (and, by extension, head) provides the "vessel" within which both the "new body" and the "new power" are to grow.

Still, as the penultimate couplet notes: "You must realize, brother, that everything has its uterine blood and semen," meaning that the Sahajiyā worldview is grounded in substance, in stuff, in fluids—just as the surrounding world of medieval Bengal was based upon substances and sexuality. In contrast to the classical Sāṃkhya philosophy, which valorizes the consciousness of *puruṣa* over the matter of *prakṛti*, Ākiñcana-dāsa and Mukunda-dāsa argued that even mystical experiences (*bhāva*, *mahābhāva*, *rasa*) are grounded in substance and stuff. Such is the "folk cognitive model" that we find in the vernacular tantric traditions of the Sahajiyās, a model made all the more vivid and "real" through the skillful use of religious metaphors.

### CONCLUSION

So what have we learned about vernacular religious metaphors in seventeenth-century Sahajiyā texts? To begin with, we must approach our understanding of such texts through the larger context of medieval Bengali culture and language. Sahajiyā tantric texts express a worldview quite distinct from other Bengali Sanskrit tantric texts due at least in part to the vernacular language of Bengali. Behind the Sahajiyā cosmophysiology we can find "folk cognitive models" that are in turn connected to Bengali language and culture. Thus, using this methodology of modern metaphor theory and cognitive linguistics we can better understand the development and expressions of medieval tantric discourse. Although the goal of Sahajiyās is to become the indwelling cosmic being known as the *Sahaja-mānusa* (the "innate" or "together-born" man), this soteriology is fully grounded "in the flesh" of the practitioners, promoted through their control of erotic energies and substances, and legitimated through the secretive power of the guru's tongue. Just as we are only beginning to appreciate the richness and diversity of vernacular tantric traditions like the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās of medieval Bengal, we are also just beginning to understand the important role that metaphor and cognition play in the development of language and in the formation of culture and religion. Much

---

of what I have written here must be considered at best as a “work in progress,” but I trust that it will inspire others to study vernacular texts and make further investigations into the fascinating world of metaphor. The “guru’s tongue,” so to speak, may have much to say to scholars of tantric traditions.

## NOTES

1. This particular essay grows out of a much earlier draft presented at a workshop in September 1997 at the University of Pennsylvania that dealt with the problem of addressing the ambiguities inherent in delineating a living Bengali vernacular tantra in concrete geographic, social (economic, political, religious, academic), and psychological spaces. Organized by Tony K. Stewart (North Carolina State University), this workshop, entitled “Constrained by Choice? The Places of Bengali Vernacular Tantra,” also included the following participants: Rachel Fell McDermott (Barnard College), Hugh Urban (Ohio State University), Jeffrey J. Kripal (Rice University), Carol Salomon (University of Washington), Rebecca Manring (Indiana University) and Jason Fuller, Pika Ghosh, and Dina Siddiqui (University of Pennsylvania). Subsequent drafts were also presented at a meeting of the Society for Tantric Studies at Flagstaff, Arizona in October 2002, and at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Toronto, Ontario in November 2002. Portions of this essay also appear in *Alternative Krishnas: Regional and Vernacular Variations on a Hindu Deity*, ed. Guy Beck (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 19–32, and in *Yoga: Essays on the Indian Tradition*, ed. Ian Whicher and David Carpenter (London: Routledge, 2003), 162–184. My thanks to Charles Orzech for his useful suggestions on this current version, and to Jim Sanford for all of the many years of friendship, collegiality, scholarship, and fun.

2. *Ākiñcana-dāsa, Vivarta-vilāsa*, ed. Kṛṣṇa Bhattacharya (Calcutta: Taracand Dasa and Sons, n.d. [approx. 1988]), 114–115. This text was composed around 1650 CE. All translations of this and other Bengali texts by the author, with thanks to the late Edward C. Dimock Jr. and to Tony K. Stewart of North Carolina State University for their tremendous help in working with such difficult texts. I would also like to thank Dr. Ramakanta Chakravarti of the University of Burdwan and the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad for his help during my studies in Calcutta in 1987–1988. Final responsibility, of course, remains with the author.

3. It has been well established, by scholars such as Andre Padoux, Douglas Brooks, and others, that the very categories of “tantra” and “tantrism” are Western Orientalist constructions. However, as Hugh Urban notes in his recent study of the Kartābhajās, *The Economics of Ecstasy: Tantra, Secrecy, and Power in Colonial Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), “Tantrism is perhaps much better understood as a product of the scholarly imagination, which we find it useful to employ as a tool or heuristic device” (p. 179). In this essay I will also use the terms as heuristic devices, but look forward to continuing discussions with colleagues about the problematics associated with the terms.

4. See, for example, Hugh B. Urban, *Songs of Ecstasy: Tantric and Devotional Songs from Colonial Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), which includes a superb introduction to the Kartābhajās and fine translations of many of their enigmatic vernacular songs. Also see his *Economics of Ecstasy*, noted above; Rachel McDermott, *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams: Kālī and Umā in the Devotional Poetry of Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kālī and Umā from Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) and *Kiss of the Yoginī: "Tantric Sex" in Its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Sarah Caldwell, *Oh Terrifying Mother: Sexuality, Violence, and Worship of the Goddess Kali* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and my own various works, cited in note 17 below. A useful recent study of various aspects of tantra in both Asia and the West is Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

5. See S. C. Banerji, *Tantra in Bengal—A Study in Its Origin, Development and Influence* (Calcutta: Naya Prokash, 1978), 70.

6. See, for example, Atindra Mojumdar, *The Caryāpadas*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: Naya Prokash, 1973).

7. By using the terms “elite” and “popular” or “vernacular,” I am not suggesting that these are two completely polar areas of culture; obviously, people who spoke Bengali and Sanskrit lived in the same region. However, as this essay will argue, the uses of elite or vernacular languages can often influence how one perceives and experiences the world. Still, in the broadest sense we should consider “elite” and “vernacular” as possibilities along a continuum of language, culture, and society.

8. For more on these and other texts see S. C. Banerji, *Tantra in Bengal*, 74–122.

9. For the Kartābhajās, see Urban, *Economics of Ecstasy*. For the Bāuls, see Carol Solomon, “Bāul Songs,” in *Tantra in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 187–208, and Jeanne Openshaw, *Seeking Bāuls of Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

10. For an excellent treatment of the issues regarding *saṃdeha* versus *videha* (“without a body”), see Andrew O. Fort and Patricia Y. Mumme, eds., *Living Liberation in Hindu Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).

11. My translations of the *Necklace of Immortality* are based upon a manuscript edition of the *Amṛtaraṇḍavālī* found in the collection of the Department of Bengali at the University of Calcutta, mss. #6451. Two other versions have been consulted and are often referred to when there are important variations or agreements: “M1” refers to mss. #595 in the University of Calcutta collection,

while “P” refers to the printed version found in Paritos Dasa, *Caitanyottara prathama cāriṭi saḥajiyā puṭhi* (Calcutta: Bharati Book Stall, 1972), 131–159. The author expresses his gratitude to the American Institute of Indian Studies for their support during 1979–1980 and 1987–1988. This work could not have been carried out without the assistance of the Registrar of the University of Calcutta, Archivist Tushar Mahapatra, and Department Heads Asit Kumar Bandhopadyaya and P. Dasa. During 1987–1988, Dr. Ramakanta Chakravarti of the University of Burdwan and the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad shared with me his great knowledge of Bengali religions and manuscripts. Deepest thanks are also extended to the late Professor Edward C. Dimock of the University of Chicago, who guided me in the translation of this difficult text and suggested many useful readings of obscure passages. Professor Tony K. Stewart of North Carolina State (Raleigh) also suggested many useful changes and interpretations. The final responsibility for the translation, however, rests with the author.

12. The ninth door or orifice of the human body is widely known in yogic literature. It is often the last opening before the tenth door—which serves as the first opening to the yogic body. For a discussion of the Buddhist tantric views, see Alex Wayman, “The Nine Orifices of the Body,” in *The Buddhist Tantras: Light on Indo-Tibetan Esotericism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1974), 139–150. The Śrīvidyā school of Hindu Śaktism envisions a total of nine *cakras*; see Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śakta Tantrism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 56–58, 157–163.

13. On the importance of the symbol of the heart in the Kaula tantric system of Abhinavagupta, see Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Siva: Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir*, ed. Harvey P. Alper (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), *passim*. Line 98b is missing from M2 and is supplied from M1 and P.

14. See Joseph O’Connell, “Were Caitanya’s Vaiṣṇavas Really Sahajiyās? The Case of Rāmānanda Rāya,” in *Shaping Bengali Worlds, Public and Private*, ed. Tony K. Stewart (East Lansing, MI: Asian Studies Center, 1989), 11–22; and also his “Rāmānanda Rāya: A Sahajiyā or a Rāgānugā Bhakta?” *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 36–58.

15. See, for example, Urban, *Economics of Ecstasy*, and Brooks, *Secret of the Three Cities*.

16. These complicated issues have been addressed in a number of venues over the past few decades, including the University of Pennsylvania workshop in 1997, by the participants in the Tantric Studies Seminar of the American Academy of Religion (AAR; which ran from 1996–1999), the Tantric Studies Consultation of the AAR (2004–2006), and by colleagues in the Society for Tantric Studies, which has met several times, most recently in 2002 and 2005.

17. See notes 2 and 11 above for information on the Bengali versions of the two texts. Standard scholarly works on the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās in English are Shashibhusan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 3rd ed. (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969), especially pp. 113–156; Manindramohan Bose, *The Post-Caitanya Sahajīā [sic] Cult of Bengal* (Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1986; original ed. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1930); and Edward C. Dimock, Jr., *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava-sahajiyā Cult of Bengal* (1966; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). My own works include: “Shapes for the Soul: A Study of Body Symbolism in the Vaiṣṇava-sahajiyā Tradition of Medieval Bengal” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1985); “On the Concept of Vastu in the Vaiṣṇava-sahajiyā Tradition of Medieval Bengal,” in *Religions and Comparative Thought: Essays in Honour of the Late Dr. Ian Kesarcodi-Watson*, ed. Purusottama Bilimoria and Peter Fenner, Sri Garib Dass Oriental Series, no. 62 (Delhi: Śrī Satguru Publications/Indian Books Centre, 1988), 141–149; “Boating Upon the Crooked River: Cosmophysiological Soteriologies in the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Tradition of Medieval Bengal,” in *Shaping Bengali Worlds, Public and Private*, ed. Tony K. Stewart, South Asia Series Occasional Paper, no. 37 (East Lansing: Asian Studies Center/Michigan State University, 1989), 29–35; “The Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Traditions of Medieval Bengal,” in *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Princeton Readings in Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 333–351; “Cosmic Substance in the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Traditions of Medieval Bengal,” *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1996–1997): 183–196; and “The Necklace of Immortality: A Seventeenth-Century Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Text on Ritual Sexual Intercourse and the Transformations of the Body,” in *Tantra in Practice* (see note 9), 308–325; “The Necklace of Immortality: Metaphoric Worlds and Body Symbolism in Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Tantric Traditions” in *Yoga: Essays on the Indian Tradition* (see note 1), 162–184; and “Contemporary Metaphor Theory and Alternative Views of Krishna and Rādhā in Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Tantric Traditions,” in *Alternative Krishnas* (see note 1), 19–32. Scholarly works in Bengali include Manindra Mohan Basu (Bose), *Sahajiyā sāhitya* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1932); Paritos Dasa, *Caitanyottara prathama cāriṭi sahajiyā punthi*, and *Sahajiyā o Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava dharma* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. M. Private Ltd., 1978); and Gopināth Kavirāja, *Tantrik sādhanā o siddhānta*, 2 vols. (Burdhwan: Bardhāman Visvavidyalaya, 1969–1975), which covers the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās in various places. Excellent introductions to Hindu Tantrism, as well as useful studies of specific traditions, may be found in Brooks, *Secret of the Three Cities* and Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Siva*. On the Kartābhajās, see Urban, *Economics of Ecstasy* as well as the accompanying volume of translations, *Songs of Ecstasy: Tantric and Devotional Songs from Colonial Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

18. Dimock, *Place of the Hidden Moon*.



19. As Hugh Urban demonstrates in *The Economics of Ecstasy*, the Kartābhajās may be regarded as a later branch of the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās, also combining tantra and *bhakti*—but in distinctive ways that reflect the colonial context.
20. See the superb new edition, including an introduction and commentary: Edward C. Dimock, Jr. and Tony K. Stewart, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja: A Translation and Commentary*, Harvard Oriental Series 56 (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000). The fruit of many years of labor by the late Edward C. Dimock, Jr. and his student Tony K. Stewart, this volume will become the new standard work in the field.
21. See the works by Joseph O'Connell noted above and also my own "Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Appropriations of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism," *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 8, no. 1 (Fall 1999): 77–90 for debates concerning Sahajiyā influences on the Gauḍīyas. There is no debate about Gauḍīya influences upon the Sahajiyās.
22. Selections from these texts are translated in my contributions to two recent anthologies: "The Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Traditions of Medieval Bengal" and "The Necklace of Immortality: A Seventeenth-Century Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Text on Ritual Sexual Intercourse and the Transformations of the Body."
23. For a brief survey of Western views through the mid-twentieth century, see Terence Hawkes, *Metaphor* (London: Methuen and Co., 1972). On the basic traditions of Sanskrit aesthetics, see A. K. Ramanujan and Edwin Gerow, "Indian Poetics," in *The Literatures of India: An Introduction*, ed. Edward C. Dimock, Jr. and others (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 115–143.
24. Perhaps the most comprehensive collection of essays, examining metaphor from a range of disciplines, may be found in Andrew Ortony, ed., *Metaphor and Thought*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Another valuable collection is Sheldon Sacks, ed., *On Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). The URL for The Center for the Cognitive Science of Metaphor Online is <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rohrer/metaphor.htm>. This has many links to other related sites.
25. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3. See also the later work by Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). I am indebted to both of these works for helping me to appreciate the pivotal role of metaphor in the medieval Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā traditions. More recently, I have been inspired by a groundbreaking work on cognitive science: Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). I applied some of this more recent methodology to my paper delivered at the 2006 meeting of the American Academy of Religion Tantric Studies Consultation, "Blended Worlds and Emergent Beings: Metaphors, Cog-



nitive Science, and the Study of Tantra.” More of these insights will appear in a forthcoming publication.

26. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, xiv–xv.

27. Gary B. Palmer, *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996). Palmer also includes a nice discussion of the evolution of cultural linguistics from the days of Boas on.

28. *Ibid.*, 36.

29. *Ibid.*, 47.

30. *Ibid.*, 47.

31. *Ibid.*, 49.

32. “The Necklace of Immortality: Metaphoric Worlds and Body Symbolism in Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Tantric Traditions.”

33. *Ibid.*, 207.

34. Only ms. #6451 finishes the line this way; ms. #595 and the printed edition conclude with “built with golden vessels” (*bāndhā svarṇapute*). #6451 reads: *bāndhā sarddā pāthe*. However, #595 and the printed version make more sense. This couplet also seems to describe the Rādhākuṇḍa in the *Kuṅḍavarṇana* of Narottama Dāsa, and suggests some of the preparations for *mañjarī-sādhana*. The cosmetics are used by the *mañjarīs* as they adorn themselves for the service of the divine couple in love play.

35. Personal correspondence. My thanks again to Tony Stewart for his guidance and inspiration over these many years.

36. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 215.

37. *Ibid.*, xiv.

38. Ronald W. Casson, “Schemata in Cognitive Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 12 (1983): 429–462.

39. *Ibid.*, 430; cited in Palmer, *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics*, 63.

40. Palmer, *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics*, 66.

41. George Lakoff, “The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor,” in *Metaphor and Thought* (see note 24), 241.

42. Verses 41b through 46 are found only in ms. #595 and #6451, not the printed text.

43. *Kaliṅga Kalikā* translates as “Orissan Flower Bud,” while *Campaka Kalikā* is “Magnolia Bud.” These obscure references to the flower buds may represent female ritual partners seated in a circle.

44. *Śūnya-vṛkṣa* is translated as “tree of emptiness.” The usage of the term *śūnya*, “void,” “empty,” may reflect Buddhist tantric ideas. It can also mean “void,” or “non-ejaculated” when applied to the term *śukra*, “semen”; thus, this tree may be a metaphor for the phallus while in use during the ritual.

45. The first line of this couplet is found only in ms. #6451 and P, thus duplicating couplet 47. Such repetition suggests the possible use of this couplet as a mantra.

46. See Samuel Levin, “Language, Concepts, and Worlds: Three Domains of Metaphor,” in *Metaphor and Thought* (see note 24), 121.

47. This passage refers to earlier references to bees, suggesting that the inner experiences of the sweet nectar of divine love transform humans into bees. Beyond the metaphorical connection to coitus, this possibly means the ability to fly about and such, reminiscent of the classical yogic powers known collectively as *siddhis*.

48. This is very much what goes on in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava practice of *rāgānuṅgā-bhakti-sādhana*, adapted by Sahajiyās for beginners. In this, one envies, and gradually identifies with, a character in the mythical love-play of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. See David L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānuṅgā Bhakti Sādhana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

49. Barre Toelken, *Morning Dew and Roses: Nuance, Metaphor, and Meaning in Folk-songs* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 34.

50. *Ibid.*, 35–36.

51. See, for example, Urban’s works (cited above) on the Kartābhajās and, on the Bāuls, Openshaw, *Seeking Bāuls of Bengal*.

52. Toelken, *Morning Dew and Roses*, 39.

53. The four ponds are, in ascending order, the *kāma-sarovara* (“Pond of Lust”), the *māna-sarovara* (“Pond of Egotism”), the *prema-sarovara* (“Pond of Divine Love”), and the *aṁśaya-sarovara* (“Pond of Indestructibility”). For more on these ponds, see my “The Necklace of Immortality: A Seventeenth-Century Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Text,” 313–314.

54. See White, *The Alchemical Body*.

55. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 25.

56. This is not to say that Mukunda does not make some use of these other metaphors, especially sound and color/light, or that other traditions eschew metaphors of fluid and substance. However, Mukunda clearly emphasizes the primacy of the substance/fluid metaphors over these others.

57. See Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 869, cols. 2–3. On the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava and

Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā interpretations, see Dimock, *Place of the Hidden Moon*, 20–24. An extensive treatment of alchemy may be found in White, *The Alchemical Body*.

58. See note 21 above for works addressing this controversy.

59. See Urban, *Economics of Ecstasy*, for ways in which the Kartābhajās also claimed that noted Gauḍīyas were practicing secret tantric rituals.

60. This passage appeared in my “The Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Traditions of Medieval Bengal,” 348. Used by permission. I have used the seventh printed edition of the *Vivarta-vilāsa*, ed. Kṛṣṇa Bhattacharya (n.d.; see note 2). It was purchased in Calcutta in 1988. The excerpt comes from pp. 92–93.

61. See Urban, *Economics of Ecstasy*, especially chaps. 3–5.

62. This passage appeared in my “The Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Traditions of Medieval Bengal,” 349–351 and from Bhattacharya, *Vivarta-vilāsa*, 113–114.

63. Compare this to the Kartābhajā phrase that men must become eunuchs and women must become castrated men. See Urban, *Economics of Ecstasy*, e.g. 98–100.

64. For a good overview of the basic Bengali model of procreation, which is transformed by the Sahajiyās, see Ronald B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) and Ronald B. Inden and Ralph W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).



## Sacred Space in the Temples of West Bengal: Folk, *Bhakti*, and Tantric Origins

June McDaniel

College of Charleston

GODDESS TEMPLES DEVELOP in India in many ways. In Hindu folk religion, we have deities who incarnate within material objects, either spontaneously (*svayambhu*) or by choice. However, sometimes they end up imprisoned in these objects, and their liberation and worship by human beings becomes the origin of a temple. Thus, it is the birth and material incarnation of the goddess that lead to the sacred space. In tantric Shaktism, we have sacred space based on death and desire. The goddess's sacred space may be associated with death in the past (as in the story of Sati's death), or in the present (the goddess dwells in the burning ground or *smasana*). She may also be called down through the desire of the *tantrika*. In devotional goddess worship or Shakta *bhakti*, the goddess comes down in response to human love, to dwell in temples as long as she is fed, or temporarily in the *puja murtis* made for yearly festivals. In this paper, I shall examine these origins of sacred space: birth, death and desire, and love. I shall observe examples from fieldwork in West Bengal, in the areas of Calcutta, Bolpur, and Bakreshwar.

In folk Shaktism, the goddess has been in matter "from the beginning," as informants phrase it, or suddenly awoke there for reasons unknown. She finds herself trapped, and may spend centuries calling out to human beings for help. Most people cannot hear the voices of deities, so she must stay until someone can come to rescue her, usually as a response to a dream command (*svapnadesa*). The dream will recur until the person goes out to find the goddess. If he or she ignores the original dream, then the recurring dream will start to torment the person and cause all sorts of disasters. It is only after the rock is recognized as a goddess and given offerings that the dreams will stop.

When the person, usually accompanied by other villagers, goes out to find the goddess, they take the stone or statue back to the village

and set up a shrine to her. When she has performed miracles, especially healing particular diseases or answering vows or *manats*, then she is accepted as a living goddess, and her temple starts to attract pilgrims.

At the most basic level, the goddess shrine may be a rock, statue, or pot along a roadside or beneath a tree. When the power of the deity is recognized, then a small shrine hut (*than*) is built. There is just enough room inside for the rock or statue, some offerings, and perhaps a person or two. As the deity becomes more popular, a permanent (*pakka*) building with plaster or cement walls may be built, and the local *sevait* will offer food and worship on a schedule.<sup>1</sup> These folk Shakta temples do not normally have brahmin priests—they have local people willing to feed a starving goddess, who has for centuries only had wind to eat. Sometimes the goddess is hurt, as when laundrymen have been banging out the dirty clothes on the rock in which she dwells, or people have been breaking oysters open on her rock, thus hurting her back. She often begins with a small group of devotees, but with miracles, her shrine may grow into a full-fledged temple or even temple complex, and eventually official brahmin priests may work there. The place of debasement becomes a place of honor, and the goddess is liberated from hunger and loneliness, while the devotees get blessings in return.<sup>2</sup>

While the usual view of folk religion is that human beings depend on deities for happiness (for such things as food, fertility, good weather) here we see the goddess dependent on human beings for liberation. In this case, her freedom does not come from being taken from her material home. Instead, she demands worship and food, which strengthen her and allow the conversion of her space from secular to sacred.

A special case is the Adivasi or tribal goddesses, where the tribal group is forced to migrate due to industrialization or land development, and they must leave their traditional land behind. In this case, the goddess is a representation of the sacred land, and in forced exile she becomes a refugee goddess, carried into a foreign land by her refugee people. Many Hindu Bangladeshi informants in Calcutta told similar stories, of when they carried their deities on their backs during the war, unwilling to leave a family member behind. The goddess brings the sacred space of the homeland with her into the land of exile.

In the Shakta tantric tradition, the goddess comes with death. The origin may be mythic (as in the story of Sati) or current (where the goddess dwells in the burning ground or *smasana*, in the ground, or in the skull *asanas* upon which the *tantrikas* sit). While Kali is a goddess

of death, she also leads the soul to the next life or to heaven to rest in her lap, so she is a goddess much concerned with the future as well (some Shakta *tantrikas* understand her to be the goddess of the future apocalypse). She may also come down due to desire by her devotees, mediated by ritual action. She may be visualized in various places in the body of either gender through the yogic practice of *nyasa*, or she may come to dwell in the female *tantrika* through possession (*avesa*) during meditation.

In West Bengal, the major focus of Shakta tantra is death, and many informants interviewed either have performed the corpse ritual (*sava-sadhana*, in which a corpse becomes the place of the goddess's incarnation) or plan to do it in the future. There are also piles of skulls and seats made of skulls that attract the goddess's *sakti* or power, and people come to them to gain the goddess's blessings (or *siddhi labh kara*, to gain perfection in special types of meditation).<sup>3</sup>

There is also a third type of goddess worship—Shakta *bhakti*, or devotion to the goddess. There is introspective *bhakti*, where the goddess dwells within the individual human heart, and community *bhakti*, where groups of people participate in her worship in a shared space. Shakta *bhakti* is probably the major urban approach to the goddess, and may be found in Kali's annual festival of Kali Puja and also in her temples. Kali Puja night is a time for magic shows and theater, for fireworks and celebrations, but also for animal sacrifice to the goddess and contemplation of her importance in this world and in the universe. For most devotees, she is not merely Shiva's wife, but rather the origin of the universe, and her night reminds devotees of the fragility of their lives and their dependence upon a goddess who is alternately ruthless and compassionate. Many informants emphasized how careful one must be in worshipping Kali, for an error in worship could bring down her wrath.

During the festival in Calcutta, Kali's images are varied in the different street-corner shrines that are set up to celebrate Kali Puja. Some shrines are the size of small walk-in camping tents, made of rattan or bamboo, with Kalis like voluptuous dolls or withered old women, with white ornaments made of *solapith* and bright crepe-paper streamers. Large shrines may have beautiful Kalis standing on pale Shivas dressed in silk or gold lame or imitation tiger skins. In 1983, when Kali and Shiva were used to represent different cultural values, I vividly remember one set of statues, with a tribal-style Kali with dark skin wearing

animal skins and a fierce expression. She was stepping on a blond crew-cut Shiva dressed in a three-piece grey Western business suit, holding a briefcase. Next to him was a jackal, who stood beneath the severed head that Kali was holding, drinking its dripping blood. However, there were some Kalis at the 1993 Kali Puja with dark skin, large noses, and kinky hair, politically-correct Kalis looking like the Adivasis or tribals of West Bengal rather than Aryan invaders or Western imperialists.<sup>4</sup> In many situations, the image of the goddess is a reflection of the image of the self, or the personal ideal. Some Kalis were bright blue, voluptuous, and smiling happily, looking mature for a sixteen-year-old, while Kali with white skin showed her spiritual or *sattvic* nature. In the larger and more well-funded community *pandals* were giant statues, fifteen feet high or more, with piles of offerings all around. Sacred space was mobile, as was the goddess herself—her space was where she was worshipped and loved.

There are also more stable temples, where Kali is believed to dwell with mankind in response to their love, and to the priest's ritual devotion. These are often sanctified with the Hindu equivalent of relics buried beneath the temple in the form of jewels or gold or other valuable objects.

These understandings of sacred space—folk, tantric, and *bhakti*—often appear together. I shall give two examples from fieldwork, one on a small scale and one on a larger one. Each reflects all three types of Shakta sacred space. I shall also note two types of understanding of the goddess shown at her temples: as a joint Mahavidya goddess, and as an individual goddess who may alternate between wrathful and peaceful forms.

I met the female Shakta *tantrika* Gauri Ma in the town of Bakreshwar in West Bengal. It is a temple town dedicated to the god Shiva, with 108 Shiva *lingas* in stone shrines heavily overgrown with large tree roots. It is also a *sakti-pitha*, a place where there is a body part of the goddess. This town is the traditional locale of the goddess Sati's forehead.

At the old burning ground in Bakreshwar is an ashram of male and female renunciants of the Sankaracarya lineage. It is called the Bholagiri Abhayanaanda Ashram, named for the *tantrika* Shri Shri Pagal Maharaj (King of Madmen) Abhayanaanda Giri. Gauri Ma was head of the temple, a strongly-built woman in her fifties, with a *rudraksa mala* necklace and a shaved head. She had an intense gaze, and did a *sadhana*



practice with me that incorporated *kundalini* yoga and *pranayama* as a precursor to telling me stories about her ashram (she also told some stories that I was not permitted to publish). She told me the story of the temple's origin as we sat next to a *lakhmunda asana*, a great pile of human skulls (there are said to be one hundred thousand there). The skulls are buried at the base of a great *asvattha* tree, which appeared to be cemented over, and the area was covered with *alpana*, paintings done in white rice paste. Some of the exposed skulls are painted red and look out at any visitors who come to worship and meditate. She told of Aghor Baba's call by the goddess Kali in her *mahavidya* or great wisdom form as Tara:

This meditation seat (*asana*) was built by the tantric practitioner Aghor Baba, who was born in Orissa in the nineteenth century, and went to Tibet to study and meditate. He achieved several forms of empowerment (*siddhi*) there, and then he went to Tarapith. When he went there, the *tantrika* Vamaksepa was living there. In a dream, Tara told Vamaksepa to remove him, that Aghor Baba should not stay at Tarapith and did not belong there.

Now, people in the *aghor* stage of tantric practice [in which they do not distinguish between pure and impure] often disturb people around them. Shiva Mahakala spoke of the tantras through five mouths, and he is called Mahakala when he sits in the burning ground and decides the fate of souls. When a person dies, or enters the state of death while living, he is called Aghor Mahakala. The person in this state eats unused things and the flesh of dead people, and he drinks but does not become drunk. Even when the corpse is burning and the skull bursts, he will drink that liquid. He does many things which make people uncomfortable.

Tara instructed Vamaksepa to remove him, and Aghor Baba left unhappily and involuntarily. He then went to a temple at Howrah (near Calcutta), and sat down to meditate. He had a vision in which he was told to go to the town of Gorakhpur.

At Gorakhpur, he met a renunciant named Gorakhnath Mahayogi. Aghor Baba told him what had happened and of his anger at the goddess Tara. Gorakhnath went into meditation and called Tara Ma to find out why Aghor Baba had been expelled from Tarapith. Tara Ma answered his summons and came in the form of a tribal woman. She was quite angry, as it was a long way from Tarapith to Gorakhpur, and a long way to travel, even for a goddess. She said that she had him

removed because he could not attain any greater power at Tarapith—he had to go elsewhere to develop spiritually. She suggested that he go to Bakreshwar, which was a center of Shiva worship (an *aghor-pitha*), and a place more appropriate for his meditation. In the distant past, Shiva grew angry at Gauri, and he threatened her by chopping himself into five pieces. One of those five pieces came to rest at the Bakreshwar burning ground (*smasana*).<sup>5</sup> Here Aghor Baba could gain the power and abilities that he desired.

Aghor Baba came to Bakreshwar to do tantric practice. However, the burning ground was already occupied—a *kapalika* (practitioner who carried skulls) had come to the place years ago, and was living under a tree with his three female ritual partners (*sadhikas*). The *kapalika* told Aghor Baba to leave, which he did not wish to do, as he had been commanded by Tara Ma to go there. They fought there, and Aghor Baba killed the *kapalika* and his three partners. However, he did not allow their souls to gain liberation, for he intended to gain knowledge of the place from the four souls. Their burned bodies gave the first four skulls of his collection. He continued to collect skulls from the bodies burned at the burning ground and from the bodies of people killed by tigers and wild animals. He would enliven the skulls, and draw the souls down to the bones, and by tantric means ask the souls about meditation and use their power for his practice. However, he still could not attain his final goal.

At the last stage of his practice, a Shakta tantric holy woman (*bhairavi*) named Maheshvari Devi from East Bengal came to Bakreshwar. She helped him a great deal and finally brought him to liberation. With her help he attained siddhi, and he spent his remaining years in Bakreshwar. His pile of skulls is still here, at the base of the great *asvattha* tree.<sup>6</sup>

Aghor Baba's *samadhi* site at the ashram (where his body rests, for renunciants are buried rather than burned) is a five-foot ziggurat of bright red, and it is understood to be a place of power. Bakreshwar is often called a power place, sacred to both Shaktas and Shaivas. The main temple at the ashram is a temple to Kali, with the outside painted yellow and the inner room painted blue. There is a statue (*murti*) of a sweet, mischievous goddess, wearing a red and white silk sari and a garland of red hibiscus flowers, who stands before a red aura painted on the wall. She is called in hymns Satyanandamayi Kali and is surrounded by numerous pictures of deities and saints, including a tantric Ganesha with four arms. The priest in saffron waves a black fan and performs the offering of lights (*arati*) with young female assistants.

*Sannyasis* chant a hymn to Shiva by Sankaracarya before her statue. She is not jealous of this worship, but rather is pleased at the praise of her husband. There are complex white designs (*alpana*) before the entrance to the Kali temple, often with a dog sleeping in the middle of the designs (as Gauri Ma says, “These are not ordinary dogs”). Kali is friendly and helpful, and blesses the practitioners of various Hindu traditions who come to meditate at the burning ground. Gauri Ma discussed the nature of tantra generally:

Life stories tell about a person’s worldly history, but tantric practice (*sadhana*) reveals a person’s internal history. When a person has initiation, he or she is given the power to see inside. True initiation is given through the eyes and into the heart, but false initiation goes only through the ears (with the mantra)—it is a business. When you do *tantra-sadhana*, your right side becomes like fire and your left side like water, and your spine looks like a row of Christmas lights, shining in different colors. Inside of your mind you can see an inner television screen, and you can watch your inner life (*prana*) on it. Indeed, the term *tantra* is derived from the words body (*tanu*) and your (*tor*): it is the practice that you do with your own body.

Tantra is a kind of worship that requires the body. Some people worship Shiva to gain Shakti, and some worship Shakti to gain the blessings of the Mother. Shakti is wonderful in meditation, she does everything; Shiva barely helps, that’s why people call him a corpse.

People say that *tantrikas* do evil things, but real tantric practitioners do not. They do meditation on the five forbidden things (*pancamakara*), which have many secret meanings. For instance, *mada* is not wine, but rather special breathing (*pranayama*), and it makes you full of power. *Mamsa* (meat) means silence, the control of speech, while *matsya* (fish) represents the uncoiling *kundalini* energy, which looks like a fish when it is active (*jagrata*). *Maithuna* is the raising of *kundalini* up and down the spine, which unites the right and left sides of the person, the male and female halves. It is not intercourse, for no female partner (*bhairavi*) is used. *Mudra* means spontaneous trance, when the universal spirit (*paramatma*) and the individual self (*jivatma*) are related. The various finger to hand relationships, which most people think of when they hear about *mudras*, actually represent these deeper relationships. For instance, the thumb represents the universal spirit and the first finger represents the individual self, and the *mudra* where they touch represents their union. The third finger is Shakti, the fourth finger is Shiva, and the fifth finger is

Dakini or Yogini. The *mudras* occur spontaneously when people are in trance.<sup>7</sup>

Gauri Ma's story of the ashram's origin combines many aspects of folk Shaktism (including the power of the goddess in material objects and communication with spirits), Shakta tantra (supernatural power over death and gaining power from the dead), and both Shaiva and Shakta devotion (obedience and love towards Shiva and Shakti).

This site is also based on the story of Sati. There are many variants of the story of Sati, who in Bengal was most frequently understood by informants as an incarnation of Kali and who had committed suicide and was dismembered by the gods as her husband Shiva danced a mad dance of grief and destruction. Each place that one of her body parts fell become a place sacred to her.

Most goddess temples include all of these aspects, and perhaps the most famous set of goddess temples is known as the *sakti-pithas* or *sati-pithas*. There are many temples and shrines dedicated to Kali that arise from the story of the *sakti-pithas*. These are centers of power that extend over India and represent the goddess's identity in a variety of locales. These sacred sites of the goddess are based on a myth—the destruction of the sacrifice of Daksha Prajapati by the god Shiva, also called Rudra. The story is found in many sources, the earliest probably being the *Mahabharata* (XII, 282–283), though it is also found in several major *puranas* (including the *Matsya*, *Padma*, *Kurma*, and *Brahmanda puranas*). The most well-known variant is in Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhava* (I.21), in which Sati was the wife of the god Shiva and the daughter of Daksha. When Daksha organized a great sacrifice to which neither Shiva nor Sati was invited, Sati decided to attend anyway, and was insulted there by Daksha. Sati's death came about because of this insult, for Kalidasa says that she threw herself into the fire and perished. When Shiva found out about this, he angrily came with his attendants and destroyed the sacrifice. Three of the Shakta *puranas*—the *Kalika*, *Mahabhagavata*, and *Devibhagavata puranas*—also have versions of this story.

In the *Kalika Purana* version, Daksha did not invite his daughter Sati and her husband Shiva to his sacrifice. When Sati learned of this, she generated yogic power that burned her body with yogic fire. Shiva took her corpse on his shoulders and began to dance madly. To shake Shiva out of his frenzy, the gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Sanaiscara (Sani, god of misfortune) entered the corpse and cut it into six pieces, which fell to earth and formed the six *sakti-pithas*. The area where Shiva had

danced, “the eastern part of the earth,” came to be called “the sacrificial land.”<sup>8</sup>

In the *Mahabhagavata Purana*, Daksha decided to have a sacrifice but would not invite Shiva. Narada suggested that they attend the sacrifice anyway, and Sati agreed, but Shiva refused. At this Sati became furious, took on a wrathful expression, and generated ten forms of herself, the ten *mahavidya* goddesses. Sati predicted that these forms would be worshipped in the future by Shaktas in tantric rituals. Shiva was very frightened by her terrible forms and praised her, telling her he would obey her. Sati later split into two forms, one of which committed suicide (which was a shadow or *chaya* form), while the other existed secretly. Sati was thus able to survive her own suicide. Shiva was angry at Sati’s apparent death and generated out the form of the warlike Virabhadra, who went to destroy Daksha’s sacrifice.

Brahma and Vishnu told Shiva that the real Sati was alive and invisible and that it was the Chaya Sati who had apparently died in the fire. All three gods praised Sati, who then appeared before them in the form of Kali. She told Shiva to create the *pithas* by carrying Chaya Sati’s body on his shoulders and letting her limbs fall in different places. Then Shiva chose to live in the fifty-one *pithas* in the form of rocks (*lingas*).<sup>9</sup>

In the *Devibhagavata Purana* story, Daksha ignored a gift from his daughter Sati, thus insulting her, and she became angry and burned herself to ashes in a yogic fire generated by her rage. Shiva roamed the world with Sati’s corpse on his shoulders, and Vishnu severed her limbs with his arrows. These limbs fell to earth in 108 pieces, creating the 108 *sakti-pithas*.<sup>10</sup>

As we can see, there are a variety of origin stories for these sacred sites and their temples. There are also several different lists of *pithas* in various puranic and tantric texts, and the numbers range from 4 to 108. Many tantric sites claim to have some piece of Sati as justification for their existence, and there are long arguments by priests and disciples as to why their site is not listed in any of the traditional lists of *sati-pithas*. Most recently, the temple site of Tarapith has made this claim, and many Shaktas accept it as a *sati-pitha*, or at least a *siddha-pitha* (a place where people have gained perfection or *siddhi*).

However, such justification as a *sati-pitha* is not necessary—sites can begin just on the basis of dream commands from the goddess. The most famous dream command story in Calcutta is probably that of Ananda Thakur, whose picture hangs throughout the marketplaces and

shrines. Thakur was an ecstatic who lived in Calcutta around the turn of the twentieth century. He had dreams and visions of the goddess Kali and would often fall into trances. He was commanded by her in a dream to rescue her statue, which had long lay hidden in the muddy waters at Eden Gardens. He found the statue between the two trees she had specified and had it brought back for worship. It was a statue of the goddess Kali in her tantric form as Adya Shakti Kali, or Kali of primordial power, naked and with matted hair and a sword. This form of Kali is often described as the origin of the ten tantric *mahavidya* forms of the goddess.

While the Adya Shakti Kali was initially satisfied with household worship of her statue, after a few days she decided that she was dissatisfied with worship at only one place—she wanted much broader worship, and she also wanted devotional rather than ritual worship. So she ordered Thakur to immerse her in the Ganges and have people worship her photograph instead. This was new technology at the time, and an early case of what came to be known as “photo-*bhakti*”—taking the *darsan* of a goddess from a photograph. But she could indeed get wider worship, for pictures could be spread throughout villages and marketplaces and home altars, as well as just temples. While the goddess required devotion, she also threatened people who would not worship her properly, punishing families with illness and misfortune for their neglect of her picture. She continued to come to Thakur in dreams and visions, giving him mantras to chant and hymns to write down. The mantras would also induce states of trance.

However, many years later, Annada Thakur had another dream command. This one was from the late *sadhu* Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a famous Shakta saint of West Bengal. He told Thakur to build a temple to Adya Shakti in Kalisthan (or the Land of Kali, as he called Bengal because of its Shakta devotionism). He gave detailed instructions on how it was to be composed and run. The new temple was to include Vaishnava iconography, as well as a statue of Ramakrishna, and another statue of Adya Shakti standing upon the chest of Shiva. This started out as a small temple, which grew into the temple complex known today as Adyapitha (or Adyapeath), the third member of the tourism “Holy Trinity” (as their advertising phrases it) along the Ganges, of Belur Math, Dakshineshwar, and Adyapitha. It is considered a modern addition to the shifting number of *sakti-pithas* in West Bengal, and it is included in the stops of the tourist buses that come out of Cal-

cutta to visit the *pithas*. It has adopted imagery from other traditions; for instance, their Mother Teresa hall can feed two thousand people each day, and the poor eat for free. The walls list thousands of donors, and there are offices, orphanages, a library, kitchens, meeting halls, and housing for the elderly and for renunciant monks and nuns. It has been very successful at fundraising and attracting political support.<sup>11</sup>

In the case of Annada Thakur and Adyapitha, we see the various forms of sacred space merged together. Initially, there was sacred space by dream command and a neglected and demanding goddess. Then she came as a tantric Mahavidya goddess, giving mantras and trance states with visions. However, she also requires devotion and develops a form of *bhakti* that had no name at the time, shifting sacred space from building and statue to photograph. For Thakur, Adya Shakti Kali was the most important form of the goddess Kali, as primordial power. However, we may also see Kali in joint or alternating forms. To gain insight into how the goddess is understood, we can look at one example where the images of the goddess are united in a Mahavidya mandala and another where we have an individual image that alternates between peaceful and wrathful aspects.

At Matrimandir Asrama, in Kalimpong in the mountainous region of northern West Bengal, there is an astrology temple dedicated to the goddess's Mahavidya or Great Wisdom forms. This temple was founded by the Shakta tantric renunciant Jnanananda and has images of the tantric Mahavidya goddesses, which are here associated with astrology. The goddesses are believed to control the planets, and they have set planetary associations. The temple priest explained the correspondences between the Mahavidya goddesses and the planets and stars followed by this temple:

Tara – Sun  
 Kamala – Moon  
 Bagala – Mangala (Mars)  
 Tripura – Budha (Mercury)  
 Matangi – Brihaspati (Jupiter)  
 Bhuvaneshvari – Sukra (Venus)  
 Dakshinakali – Sani (Saturn)  
 Chinnamasta – Rahu  
 Dhumavati – Ketu  
 Durga – Shakti (as universal power)



At the front of the temple, the smiling black Kali statue in the center area was full of heavy silver jewelry: she wore necklaces, bracelets, an ornate silver crown with red jewels, and a belt of large, shiny silver hands. She carried a silver sword with a large eye on it, and there was a silver lamp over her head. Behind her was a sky-blue halo made of wood with the images of the Mahavidya goddesses painted on it around the edge. The Mahavidyas are understood to be Kali's ten major forms or emanations.

According to the priest, Shiva is the joint husband of all of these Mahavidya wives. The goddess takes on different shapes for different functions. If a person has problems with Budha, there is no energy for work; with Mangala, he loses his business and has political problems; with Sukra, he has too much desire. Bagala helps with legal problems, both civil and criminal.

When people come to the temple with problems, the priest looks at their palms to find out which planet is the cause of the trouble. He also finds this out by the date of birth, with which he consults the almanac (*panjika*) and does calculations. Once he has decided upon the planet that is causing problems, the person can then worship and give offerings to the goddess who controls that planet and thus take care of the problem. The priest finds out which planet is causing the trouble by means of palmistry or horoscope, and then that goddess is consulted. Astrology has come to be a specialization of *tantrikas*, and here astrological insight is associated with the tantric knowledge gained through worship of the Mahavidyas. While many wandering *tantrikas* make their living doing astrological predictions and selling astrological gems informally, here we have a temple dedicated to the practice.

When I asked about his own experience of the goddess, the priest said:

I am myself a devotee of the goddess, and my form of the goddess was chosen by my guru. Kali appears in my dreams, looking like her statue, and she gives me suggestions and instructs me. One may do Vedic *puja* (ritual worship) or tantric *puja*—here we do tantric *puja*. During tantric *puja* I am the son of the Mother, and I cling to her. We do not sacrifice many goats to her, for the goat is only the symbol of lust (*kama*), which must be sacrificed to have spiritual love (*prema*).

Kali is like a fire under a kettle, but you cannot put her out. People are like matches—if you go too close to her, you too will catch fire. But she is also a person, and she has a personality. This is shown by



the fact that she gives boons and she listens to devotees when they call. But she is invisible, and people have to sense her presence without seeing her.

Kali is a good goddess. Ma cannot be dangerous to her children, for she loves them, and she only punishes wrong actions, according to karma. She can change karma, but only to the good. She only destroys attachments (*ripus*), not her devotees.<sup>12</sup>

Tantric worship uses different mantras than Vedic worship and seeks a more personal relationship with the goddess. According to the priest, the major goal of Kali worship is the destruction of worldly attachments, which is a boon given by the goddess. She destroys the bonds that bind the devotees and brings liberation to those who seek it. As most people seek only favors, she gives gifts and suggestions to devotees through dreams and visions. She gives mostly moral instructions in dreams. Of the temple's founder he states:

Usually, the role of guru is handed down from father to son, but sages and *sannyasis* learn from other gurus. The founder of this temple, Jnanananda, was a wandering *sadhu* who spent much time in Bengal and Assam. He did tantric ritual meditation at burning grounds, with *pancamunda asanas* and many skulls. We do not do tantric ritual meditation (*sadhana*) here, only tantric *puja*. But we remember Jnanananda, and hope that one day we may be like him.

In this case, the goal of the goddess's multiple forms is a sort of specialization of labor. Kali's *rupas* have control over the powers of the various planets, and each form benefits the devotee in a different aspect of life. However, the Mahavidya goddesses may not be inclined to influence the planetary energies without prayers and assurances by the devotees.

This tantric temple in the mountains was founded by a *sadhu* who had done meditation in the area and called down the goddess in her Mahavidya forms. There are many stories of *sadhus* who have seen the goddess in all of these forms (the most famous is probably Sarvananda, whose vision occurred on a new-moon night while he practiced the *sava-sadhana* or corpse ritual). However, specifically tantric temples are a minority among the temples of West Bengal. Most temples combine tantric imagery with folk and *bhakti* traditions.

In the village Badabelun in Burdwan, Kali is worshipped in a small temple in her form as Bada Kalima (Elder Mother Kali or Big Mother

Kali; the term implies power as well as age and size). While the age and size show folk influence, the revealed style of worship was tantric. When the patriarch of the Bhattacharya family, Bhriguram Vidyavagisa, was on his deathbed, he called his sons together. He told them how Kali had appeared to him and told him to move from Ketugram to Badabelun early in his life, as well as how she had recently appeared to him in his dreams, telling him to prepare to die. She wanted her worship to continue, and he needed to inform his sons how to worship her. He told them of how to perform her worship in a long poem (emphasizing tantric rites rather than the Vedic *homa* fire or the puranic *arati* or worship with lights):

On the new moon of Kartik, sit [in meditation] through the night  
 Worship the Mother with devotion, after building her image.  
 It should be fourteen cubits tall  
 Worship the image according to tantric rites.  
 Put earth on her body on the full moon of Asvin  
 Make her tongue from a winnowing tray.  
 Offer her three bags of rice, and sweets  
 Then be seated and keep a steady mind.  
 Offer her a banana, and the blood of goat and buffalo in a skull  
 But do not perform *homa*-fire or *arati* to the Mother.  
 Light torches at the time of worship  
 And offer red hibiscus flowers at the Mother's feet.  
 Then give her sweets, rice and lentils, and meat offerings.  
 Continue to worship her until dawn.  
 Do not immerse her pitcher (in which she was installed)  
 But keep in inside the house, and daily offer it loving worship  
 On the third day after Kali Puja.<sup>13</sup>

He also told his sons about his experiences. After he had moved to Badabelun due to the goddess's dream command, he collected a set of five skulls and buried them at the local cremation ground and sat there in tantric-style meditation. He built a statue of Kali himself, and he would worship her at the burning ground, with vultures and jackals roaming about. He would call her "great bliss" (*mahananda*), and spend long hours before the statue. One day he went off for a bath, and when he returned he found that the image on the altar was not the one he had built. He had made a peaceful goddess, but when he returned he saw a terrifying figure. She had become very old and was standing on a corpse with a terrible face, full of blood and horrifying to see.

He was frightened to see the image and was about to run away. However, the goddess spoke to him reassuringly, saying, "My name is Elder Mother. This image will be worshipped for ages. Anyone who worships me with devotion will never have to worry about the next world." She told him to marry, for someone had to serve her after he died, and she suggested a bride for him. She told him that on the next new moon the daughter of a brahmin would die of a snake bite, and her relatives would bring her to the burning ground. He should take a handful of ash from the funeral pyre and put it into her mouth, and it would bring her back to life. He should then marry this reborn woman and start a family.

He agreed to do this, and on the next new moon he saw the funeral party. The girl's father wept like a madman, and he went over to Bhriguram and begged him to bring his daughter back to life. Bhriguram followed the goddess's advice and put the ash into the girl's mouth. She sat up and said, "Goddess," and stretched as if she had just awakened from sleep. Bhriguram then told her father of the goddess's command, and he agreed with the proposal for marriage. This was the beginning of Bhriguram's family and the reason for the necessity of maintaining the goddess's worship.<sup>14</sup> Tantric worship emphasizes the goddess's power over life, death, and liberation—in this story she is clearly a conqueror of death. Her continued worship at her temple reminds people of her ability to take life and to give it. In this case, we did not have a joint image of the goddess like the Mahavidyas, but rather a single image that could transform itself from peaceful to wrathful.

In the examples of Bakreshwar and Adyapitha, we have some major understandings of Shakta sacred space. The folk goddess is incarnated in matter, and her liberation is the ritual sanctifying of the matter that imprisons her. She gains not freedom but power and respect. The tantric goddess controls birth and death, sanctifying the places of death of her own past incarnations and the burning grounds of her followers. Death gains new value. Tantric ritual brings the passions of both goddess and devotee under control and uses them for creation and destruction. *Bhakti* has a mobile goddess who dwells in *pūja murtis*, in temples, and in the hearts of her devotees in response to their love. Temples may also be large or small, dedicated to multiple forms of the goddess or to one form. There are folk, *bhakti*, and tantric interpretations: all of these are ways that sacred space is understood in Bengali Shaktism.

## NOTES

1. See Tushar Niyogi, *Aspects of Folk Cults in South Bengal* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1987), 6.
2. See June McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), chap. 1.
3. See June McDaniel, *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 120–123.
4. India has problems with affirmative action and prejudice, as does the West. In the case of the Kali with non-Aryan features, the statue shows respect for the Adivasi or tribal people who wish representation and concern for their cultures.
5. According to Gauri Ma, the five major *aghor-pithas* are at Ujjain, Bakreshwar, Varanasi, Gorakhpur, and Kathmandu. The story may be a variant on the story of Sati and the origin of the *sakta-pithas*.
6. Gauri Ma, interview with the author in Bakreshwar, 1994.
7. Ibid.
8. *Kalika Purana*, chaps. 17 and 18, cited in Usha Dev, *The Concept of Sakti in the Puranas* (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1987), 146.
9. *Mahabhagavata Purana*, chaps. 7–11, cited in Dev, *Concept of Sakti*, 147–150.
10. *Devibhagavata Purana*, VII, chap. 30, cited in Dev, *Concept of Sakti*, 151.
11. Fieldwork and interviews with practitioners, Adyapitha (Adyapeath), 1994.
12. Kalimpong (a Shakta priest), interview with the author, 1994.
13. Pranavesa Cakravarti, *Ei Banglai* (Calcutta: Dev Sahitya Kutir, 1992), 56–57.
14. Ibid., 56–58.

# The Spell of the Great, Golden Peacock Queen: The Origin, Practices, and Lore of an Early Esoteric Buddhist Tradition in China

Henrik H. Sørensen

Seminar for Buddhist Studies, Copenhagen

## INTRODUCTION

THIS ESSAY IS DEVOTED to a discussion of the origin, practices, and esoteric Buddhist lore as taught in the early versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra* transmitted in China. For that purpose I shall remain focused on the three earliest versions of the text that have come down to us, that is, *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (大正新修大藏經, *Taishō Tripiṭaka*; hereafter *T.*) 986, 987, and 988, while addressing the later and extended Liang dynasty version (*T.* 984) whenever necessary. Reference will be made in passing to the two Tang translations by Yijing (義淨, 635–713) and Amoghavajra (705–774), respectively, which in many ways represent an entirely new and different transmission of esoteric Buddhism than that represented by the earlier recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*.

The main reason why I have singled out this scripture for discussion here is due to the unique status it has enjoyed among practicing Buddhists in East Asia down through the ages. Secondly, it is one of the earliest scriptures in China reflecting the phenomena that we shall refer to as proto-esoteric Buddhism in the following.<sup>1</sup> The importance of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra* as an early scripture of esoteric Buddhism in India has been noted by several scholars before, while its role in the context of Chinese religion has notably been signaled by Kenneth Eastman and Michel Strickmann. The latter, in the posthumously published study *Chinese Magical Medicine*,<sup>2</sup> refers to the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra* (Book of the Peacock Spell) on a number of occasions.<sup>3</sup> While Strickmann obviously did not make a detailed study of the scripture's textual history—in particular the early versions—he nevertheless felt confident in pronouncing it “first in date and

influence” as regards Buddhist spell literature in China.<sup>4</sup> While both of these assertions are mistaken, he was absolutely correct when insisting that “the *Book of the Peacock Spell* served both as an inspiration and as a direct model for many medieval Chinese books of spells, and was also a principal source for the powerful *nomina barbara* that were essential to an effective manual of demon-quelling.”<sup>5</sup>

According to the Japanese researcher Watanabe Kaikyoku, the origin of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra* is the *Āṭanāṭiya-sutta*, a Hinayana work written in Pāli.<sup>6</sup> He had earlier proved that the Sanskrit version of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra* as transmitted in the Bower Manuscript<sup>7</sup> corresponded in part with the Liang translation by Saṅghabhara, i.e., T. 984 mentioned above.<sup>8</sup> What is most important to note here is that the core of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, that is, the concept of a benign and divine peacock and its associated spell for the removal of poisons, is a rather early occurrence in the Indian Buddhist tradition evidently pre-dating the rise of Mahayana. Scholarly interest the scripture in Europe can be found in the work of the French researcher Sylvain Lévi, who used the Liang version of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* for establishing the origin of its demonology in the Indian context.<sup>9</sup> In the early 1970s the Japanese scholar Takubo Shuyo made a revised edition of the long version of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*,<sup>10</sup> and although it does not significantly contribute to a new understanding of the development of the scripture, neither in the context of Indian Mahayana, nor in the rise of esoteric Buddhism in China, it is useful for comparative purposes. Kenneth Eastman, a promising student of Lewis Lancaster who did research on the cult of *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* during the 1980s, has shown that a whole series of scriptures belonging to the Hinayana tradition, including the *Cullavagga*, the *Samyutta-nikāya*, the *Samyutta-āgama*, and the *Upasena-sūtra*,<sup>11</sup> as well as at least two important *vinaya* texts, the *Dharmaguptaka vinaya*<sup>12</sup> and *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*,<sup>13</sup> feature accounts of monks who get bitten by snakes and who (in some of the cases) receive protection from peacocks.<sup>14</sup> Obviously the need for protection against snake bites was a major issue for Buddhist monks living in the forests of India. Hence, this situation should undoubtedly be understood as the actual origin for the rise of the *Mahāmāyūrī* cult.

Despite the concern and scope of these earlier studies on the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, little serious attention has been given to the three early recensions of the scripture as transmitted in the Chinese

Buddhist tradition only. This is rather peculiar, since they must be considered both close to the Indian Mahayana Buddhist tradition of that time and as early representatives of esoteric Buddhist scriptures in the Chinese cultural context. Without a detailed study of them, much of the lore found in the later versions of the *Mahāmāyūrī-sūtra* makes little sense.

# 1. ON THE TEXTUAL HISTORY OF THE MAHĀMĀYŪRĪVIDYĀRĀJŪ-SŪTRA

Below follows a chronological survey of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājū*. It is important to note that it is only the Chinese Buddhist canonical tradition that has preserved the three early recensions that are the focus of the present study. Only with the extended Liang dynasty translation do we have a more or less matching text in a classical Indian language. The extant recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājū* are as follows:

- *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājū-sūtra* (大金色孔雀王咒經) by an unknown translator. It is listed in the *Qin lu* (秦錄, 350–431 CE). T. 986.19, pp. 477–478. *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājū-sūtra* (大金色孔雀王咒經) by an unknown translator. It is also listed in the *Qin lu*. T. 987.19, pp. 479–481. *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājū-sūtra* (孔雀王咒經), said to have been translated by Kumārajīva between 402–412 CE. T. 988.19, pp. 481c–484c.
- *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājū-sūtra* (孔雀王咒經) in two scrolls. Translation by Saṅghabhara done sometime between 502–520 CE during the early Liang dynasty. T. 984.19, pp. 446b–459a.
- *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājū-sūtra* (孔雀咒王經). Translation by Yijing done during the early eighth century. T. 985.19, pp. 459–477.
- *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājū-sūtra* (大孔雀明王經). Three-volume translation by Amoghavajra done sometime during the second half of the eighth century. T. 982.19, pp. 415–439.

The earliest historical record to mention the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājū* is the *Chu sanzang jiji* (出三藏記集, Collated Records Lifted from the Tripiṭaka; hereafter *CSJJ*) compiled during the early sixth century.<sup>15</sup> This scriptural catalog contains references to two early versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājū-sūtra* that are referred to as the *Da Kongque wang*

*shenzhou* (大孔雀王神咒, Divine Spells of the Great Peacock King) in one scroll, and the *Kongque wang za shenzhou* (孔雀王雜神咒, Miscellaneous Divine Spells of the Peacock King) also in one scroll, respectively.<sup>16</sup> Both are said to have been “produced” by the leading monk (Ch. *gaozuo*, 高座) Śrimitra (尸梨蜜, fl. first half of the fourth century),<sup>17</sup> a prince of Kyzil (龜茲國) in the Western Capital (Chang’an) sometime during the reign of Emperor Yuan (r. 317–322) of the Eastern Jin (東晉).<sup>18</sup> This information confirms the early presence of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* in some form on Chinese soil during the fourth century and also provides us with an approximate date of its actual composition, which probably would have taken place in India sometime during the late third century if not earlier. Note, however, that the *CSJJ* refers to texts of spells, not sutras, an observation deserving of more attention as will be seen in the following excerpt:

[a.] The *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-dhāraṇī* (大孔雀王神咒), one roll.

[b.] The *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-dhāraṇī* (孔雀王雜神咒), one roll.

The above two groups [of texts] consist of two scrolls. During the time of the first emperor of the [Eastern Jin], the high-ranking monk, Śrimitra from the western countries, made them [available in China].<sup>19</sup>

As regards his mastery of *dhāraṇīs*, the *CSJJ* has the following to say:

Formerly Śrimitra lived in frugal solitude, on a double seat he chanted in a barbarian tongue three times [a day?]. The Sanskrit sounds rose above the clouds; his intoned spells [consisting] of several thousand words sung in a loud voice, were harmonious and clear. [All the while] the expression on his face remained unchanging.<sup>20</sup>

The image of the Indian monk here is typical of the class of thaumaturges populating the Chinese compilations of life stories of famous monks from this period. And whether or not the *CSJJ* is transmitting a hagiographical stereotype of Śrimitra—an account that was after all written down more than one hundred fifty years after he is said to have lived—it does give us a picture of a practicing *mantrin*, i.e., a Buddhist monk specializing in *dhāraṇīs* and the associated effectuation of miracles. Similar accounts fill part of the *Kaoseng zhuan* (高僧傳, Accounts of Famous Monks), where they are in many cases classified as performers of miracles.<sup>21</sup> The standard account among these is the



celebrated case of Fotudeng (佛圖登, fl. first half of fourth century), the Kashmirian court magician of the barbarian ruler Shi Le (石勒, r. 319–333) of the Northern Zhao kingdom.<sup>22</sup> In the case of Śrīmitra and his purported practice of spells in order to achieve magical results, we are certainly helped by the early recensions that—as we shall presently see—essentially constitute the textual evidence we need to support the traditional claim for his thaumaturgical practices. All in all this provides us with information to the effect that there were Buddhist monks in the Nanbeizhao period—foreigners as well as Chinese—who specialized in process magic by using spells and rituals on some level of elaboration, and that they were seen and understood by their contemporaries as representing a separate class of monks famous for their practice of magic. We need not go so far as to classify these monks as proto-*tantrikas* or esoteric Buddhists in an institutionalized sense, but surely they were early practitioners of what we can only term “esoteric Buddhism” whether they called themselves so or not.<sup>23</sup>

The fate of the two versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* attributed to Śrīmitra is not known, nor is their relationship clear with the two early recensions of the scripture (*T.* 986 and *T.* 987), if indeed such a relationship ever existed. The early information on Śrīmitra and a supposed connection with two different translations of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* is interesting, however. It indicates that there were two versions of the scripture in circulation in China during the fourth century, and from this we may infer that they in all likelihood represented two distinct textual traditions. Incidentally, the early existence in China of two different text traditions relating to the cult of Mahāmāyūrī tallies—as we shall see below—with information supplied by the three extant recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*.

## 2. THE MAHĀMĀYŪRĪVIDYĀRĀJÑĪ OF *T.* 986

Let us now turn our attention to the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* recension as represented by *T.* 986. The text opens with a brief narrative sketch, but without the usual “thus have I once heard” or the characteristic presentations of locale and assembly known from most standard sutras. Instead the scripture opens with the Buddha addressing his disciple Ānanda:

In the past there was a golden-colored peacock king living on the southern [slopes] of the Himalayas, king of mountains, [when] I dwelt

there. Those who wish to practice this Great Peacock King of Spells should say it in the morning as self-protection while making a [ritual] boundary, then they will attain peace. In the evening they should say it as self-protection, and they will be at ease in mind and body during the night.<sup>24</sup>

This brief passage is essentially all the narrative we find in the text, and with the exception of a few dialogue passages between the Buddha and his disciple Ānanda, all the rest consists of spells and ritual instructions for their use. The Chinese translation of the *jātakas*, i.e., the *Sheng jing* (生經, Scripture on the [Previous] Lives [of the Buddha]),<sup>25</sup> dating from 285 CE, contains the story of Buddha as a peacock king.<sup>26</sup> However, beyond peacock imagery this story has basically no narrative relevance to the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*.

As already stated, T. 986 is a composition made up of various spells and invocations. Following the opening brief narrative, a spell for self-protection is given. Following the Peacock Spell the scripture sets forth four additional spells or *dhāraṇīs* uttered by the Bodhisattva Maitreya, the gods Brahma and Indra, and the Four Heavenly Kings, respectively.<sup>27</sup> Following the utterance of the Indra Spell, the text specifies the nature of the evil against which the spell is to be used:

Order that all evil [demons/spirits] will be brought to complete submission, their hands and feet bound [so that all] parts are restrained and they are unable to move. This should include the Gods of Thirty-three.<sup>28</sup>

This is an interesting passage because it shows that all evil is considered as belonging under the jurisdiction of Indra in his role as king of the gods dwelling on Mt. Meru. The Gods of Thirty-three, whom the text specifies are directly under the authority of Indra, appear as potentially harmful if not controlled. By this the text indicates the ambivalence with which gods and demi-gods were being envisaged by Buddhists of that time. Moreover, each spell section contains a prayer for long life.

The spells contained in T. 986 are overwhelmingly of the phonetic type rather than the epistemological type. In fact, they are partly phonetic and partly lists of names. They also incorporate Chinese text, rather unmotivated, such as invocation of the Buddha in the middle of a string of nonsensical syllables. Both the words *namo* and *svahā*

occur. This indicates that whoever translated this recension of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* was already moving away from a pure transcription of the Sanskrit wording of the spells in the text.<sup>29</sup>

One of the core sections of T. 986 features a long list of supernatural practitioners of spells who are referred to as *shenxian* or “spirit immortals” (神仙, Skt. *ṛṣi*). The text reads that they “Always practice ascetic practices on mountains and in forests, such as the *siddhi* for the ending of suffering, *siddhi* of recollection, and the *siddhi* of the mantric arts.”<sup>30</sup> The text goes on to explain that possessing and holding the names of these *mahārṣis* listed in the text enables the practitioner to attain supernatural powers, i.e., *siddhis* (Ch. *chengjiu*, 成就), such as the power to manifest responsive transformations (Ch. *ganbian*, 感變), attain the five supernatural powers (Skt. *pañcābhijñā*), and travel through the air at will.<sup>31</sup>

This may be one of the earliest references in Chinese to the type of yogic mastery of supramundane powers connected with the use of spells (in this case the invocation of the names of *mantrins*) that we encounter with greater and greater frequency in the later esoteric Buddhist literature. Incidentally, the section discussing the *mahārṣis* is virtually identical in all the six versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* presently at our disposal. The implication of this is that this section was considered central to those following the practices described in the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*.

The ritual function of T. 986 is evident throughout. For instance, the instructions to the effect that the practitioner must [first] “cordon off the altar (Ch. *jièjie*, 結界) while intoning it [the Peacock Spell] seven times” indicates beyond any doubt that we are dealing with a ritual situation.<sup>32</sup> Despite this, no description of the altar or how to construct it are given in the text. This may indicate that such ritual instructions were found elsewhere, perhaps in the form of a commentary or perhaps orally transmitted. In contrast both T. 987 and T. 988 provide instructions on how to construct the altar to be used in the ritual for invoking Mahāmāyūrī and the other relevant divinities.

In this regard the conspicuous absence from the text of demons or a list of their names may serve as an indicator that additional textual material was used in the rite or rites for which T. 986 was evidently used. Hence, the sudden and rather unexpected occurrence of the title of the *Mouniluotanjing* (摩尼羅亶經, *Maṇiratna-sūtra*)<sup>33</sup> in the invocation at the very end of the scripture may serve as a clue to explain this odd

absence. T. 986 reads: “*Mouniluotan jing*, Mahāmaudgalyāyana Bhikṣu,<sup>34</sup> may the *Mahāmāyūrī King of Spells* remove the enemies of sickness, suffering, and danger.”<sup>35</sup>

As to why the *Mouniluotan jing* crops up here we can of course only guess. However, since this sutra consists of an extensive list of demons and the afflictions they are thought to cause (including of course a divine antidote to their depredations), it would seem logical that an advocator of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, which also deals with demonology and exorcism, would seek to emulate this scripture. The *Mouniluotan jing* is not a *dhāraṇī* sutra in the usual sense since it contains no *dhāraṇīs* or spells as such. However, it is clear from its contents that the entire text was considered a spell. In other words, a recitation of it functioned in much the same way as a normal spell or *dhāraṇī*. For this reason it may be considered a proto-esoteric Buddhist work. Moreover, it appears older in both style and contents when compared to the slightly later *dhāraṇī* sutras among which we count the early recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*. Here we should also remember that there is no list of demons in T. 986, while the *Mouniluotan jing* has it in abundance. Likewise, there are spells in the former, but none in the latter. Hence the two scriptures are in fact a perfect match from the point of view of exorcistic ritual. In light of these observations, I am of the opinion that the incorporation or adaptation of the *Mouniluotan jing* in T. 986 may indicate that the two scriptures in so far as they supplement each other were used in tandem for exorcistic rites rather early in the history of Chinese Buddhism.

The appearance of the *Mouniluotan jing* at the very end of T. 986 means that this recension of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* does not date from the early fourth century, although it is in all likelihood based on one of the versions of the scripture attributed to Śrīmitra. And why? Because the former sutra is stated in the scriptural catalogs as having been translated much later than the latter, in fact sometime between 381–395 CE.<sup>36</sup> This leaves a gap of fifty-plus years down to the early Eastern Jin when the earliest recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* first appeared on Chinese soil. Most probably T. 986 represents a later version of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* that appeared or was modified in China sometime during the late fourth to early fifth century. Although the *Mouniluotan jing* appears in T. 986 with title only, it is obvious that whoever composed or redacted the latter already had access to the former. In any case the appearance of the title of the *Mouniluotan jing*

must be understood as a later addition to the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* of T. 986. This also means that we must concede that there were more versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* around than indicated by the Chinese canonical catalogs. Whatever the case, T. 986 is an archaic text that does not take into account the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* recension represented by T. 987 to which we shall presently turn.

Despite the various problems in placing T. 986 as the earliest recension of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* in China, as already noted, the scripture displays several traits that point to a relatively early date, the late fourth century at the latest. First of all, it does not feature any list of demons, a point that immediately sets it apart from the later recensions of the scripture. And as already stated, this may be why it invokes the *Maṇiratna-sūtra* at the end. Secondly, the textual parts it shares with the two other early versions, T. 987 and T. 988, indicates that it does not post-date the fourth century. Thirdly, T. 986 contains a number of archaic methods of transcribing Sanskrit, something that is apparent in both the terminology used and in the phonetics used in the spells and *dhāraṇīs*. Fourthly, the story of Svati is missing (more on this below), including any indication that whoever composed the text had any direct knowledge of it. Fifthly, if we discount the phonetics as seen in the spells and invocations, T. 986 contains no direct Sinitic elements. However, all the later recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, including T. 987, do. It is not unlikely that T. 986 was originally envisaged as a sort of abbreviated ritual devoted to Mahāmāyūrī, perhaps a sort of ritual guide. In any case its format and structure would seem to presuppose a more fully developed sutra or scriptural narrative no longer extant.

### 3. THE MAHĀMĀYŪRĪVIDYĀRĀJÑĪ OF T. 987

This recension of the scripture under discussion opens with an invocation to the Three Jewels followed by the names of the Seven Buddhas of the Past. This is followed by a lengthy passage that does not appear to have been part of the original sutra. It consists of an address to all the good and evil spirits believed to inhabit the world. It is in effect a listing of the various kinds of demons believed to inhabit or able to invade the human sphere. This address, the tone of which is threatening, warns of the power of the Peacock Spell to subjugate and control. However, as is typical for similar such rituals in esoteric Buddhism, the injunction is tempered with a mixture of threat and

appeasement. While the text on the one hand warns the demons to behave and to cease their depredations in the human sphere, on the other hand it also offers them the Triple Refuge as well as abundant offerings of food, flowers, and incense. On the practical level this is also what happened when local Buddhists both prayed and made offerings to the demons in order to avoid having any problems with them. As such *T. 987* fits well with other similar scriptures belonging to the category of spell texts since the most important feature in Buddhist demonology is to identify—that is, to name—the afflicting demon or ghost. Hence a list of demons' names was a highly useful tool for the exorcising monk.

Then follows the sutra part of the text that contains the well-known opening words: "Once I have heard (Ch. *ershi woben*, 爾時我聞)."<sup>37</sup> This narrative of what may be considered the original sutra, or rather part of the same, is relatively short, but is nevertheless the most full-bodied text among all the three early so-called *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtras*.

While the story of the Golden Peacock King as found in *T. 986*, barely given in outline form, could have been lifted from a *jātaka*, and most likely was, the central narrative of the two other early recensions features a rather different narrative plot. This plot, which serves as the occasion for propagating the spell, or rather series of spells, around which the scriptures revolve, concerns the story of the young monk Svati. It goes as follows:

While the Buddha is staying at Śrāvastī, there is a young monk by the name of Svati in the congregation. One day Svati goes in search for firewood to be used in heating the water for the sangha. While trying to break off a branch of a fruit tree a large, black snake emerges from a hole in the bottom of the tree and bites him. Svati falls to the ground in a poisoned swoon and is about to die. Ānanda, who happens to be in the vicinity and sees the incident, runs to ask the Buddha for help. Buddha thereupon gives Ānanda a lengthy instruction in the recitation of the Spell of the Great Peacock King, which will effectuate the cure of the poisoned Svati. The text then proceeds to relate the story of Buddha, who in one of his former lives was a king of peacocks by the name *Suvarṇābhāsa*.<sup>38</sup> That last piece of information of course links our scripture with the story of the Peacock King as told in the *jātakas*. Then follows a description of the wonders and protective qualities of the Peacock Spell, and so on.

Here I would like to return to the list of demons invoked at the beginning of the scripture. Among the list of demons' names we find the names of fourteen *rākṣasīs*. Their names are given in a mixture of foreign and Chinese sounds and meanings. The names of these demonesses partly reveal the nature of their functions, which are described as follows:

1. Heian (黑闇, Darkness)
2. Zuoheian (作黑闇, Making Eclipses)
3. Kumbhāṇḍa (鳩槃荼)<sup>39</sup>
4. Baiqu (白具, Naked Body)<sup>40</sup>
5. Huayan (華眼, Flower Eye)
6. Quzi (取子, Snatching Children)<sup>41</sup>
7. Qufa (取髮, Snatching [by the] Hair)<sup>42</sup>
8. Zuohuang (作黃, Making Yellow)<sup>43</sup>
9. Chuixia (垂下, Hanging Down)<sup>44</sup>
10. Jichuixia (極垂下, Hanging Down from the Ridgepole)
11. Cishi (伺使, Reporting Messenger)<sup>45</sup>
12. Yāma's Messenger (閻羅使)<sup>46</sup>
13. Yāma Rakṣa (閻羅羅刹)<sup>47</sup>
14. Kangui (瞰鬼, Spying Demon)<sup>48</sup>

Despite the overall malevolent nature of these demonesses, the practitioner is nevertheless directed to offer his or her prayer for protection to them together with offerings of flowers, incense, and food as mentioned above. The way the demonesses appear here is akin to the fifteen baby-snatching demonesses of the *Fo shuo hu zhu tongzi tuoluoni jing* (佛說護諸童子陀羅尼經, Buddha Speaks the Scripture on the Dhāraṇī that Protects All Children; hereafter *HZTTJ*),<sup>49</sup> a scripture that arrived in China slightly later than the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*. While the main list of demons occurring in the passage of *T. 987* are generic in nature, i.e., identified according to typology or type of affliction rather than by actual name, the manner in which the female demons are highlighted—and named in the text—indicates that this category of “snatchers” of life and vitality were particularly feared. Here it is also interesting to note that the Kumārajīva text, *T. 988*, also features the list of the fourteen demonesses, some of whom also occur in the *HZTTJ*. Apart from the sketchy narrative the main part of *T. 987* is devoted to spells and instructions for their use. In other words, we are essentially



dealing with a ritual text incorporating a minimum of narrative as contextual legitimization just as we saw with *T. 986*. Moreover—and perhaps most significantly—the final third of the scripture consists of text passages lifted from a variety of other Buddhist sources that were originally unrelated to the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*. They include:

- *Jieshuo jing xia jie zhouyu* (解說經下結咒語, Spell-words for Securing the Altar). This matches the part found in the appendix to *T. 986*<sup>50</sup> and indicates a preparatory stage in the development of rituals directed to Mahāmāyūrī.<sup>51</sup>
- *Foshuo zhou ze jing* (佛說咒賊經, Buddha Speaks the Scripture on Putting Spells on Robbers).<sup>52</sup> This short and rather peculiar scripture, better known as *Pichu zehai zhou jing* (辟除賊害咒經, Scripture on the Spell for Removing Suffering [Caused by] Robbers),<sup>53</sup> is said to be among the works translated by An Shigao (安世高, fl. late second to early third centuries).<sup>54</sup> It has remained popular in East Asian Buddhism until recently.
- *Fahua shenzhou jing* (法華神咒經, Divine Spell of the Lotus Sūtra). This *dhāraṇī* is a variant of that spoken by the Bodhisattva Bhaiṣajyarāja in Kumārajīva's translation of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarika-sūtra*.<sup>55</sup>
- *Pishamen tianwang suoshuo zhou* (毘沙門天王所說咒, Spell Spoken by the Heavenly King Vaiṣravaṇa). Like the previous *dhāraṇī* this also comes from the *Saddharmapuṇḍarika*.<sup>56</sup>
- *Chiguo tianwang suoshuo zhou* (持國天王所說咒, Spell Spoken by the Heavenly Kings Protecting the Kingdom). Also lifted from the *Saddharmapuṇḍarika*.<sup>57</sup>
- *Luocha nu suoshuo zhou* (羅刹女所說咒, Spell Spoken by Rākṣasī Women). These ten demonesses occur in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarika* from which this spell has also been lifted.<sup>58</sup> Hārītī, Mother of Demon Children, is sometimes considered as part of this group although not counted among the ten *rākṣasīs*.
- *Da Niepan jing zhou* (大涅槃經咒, Spell of the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra).<sup>59</sup>

This section of spells and ritual instructions reveals that by the late fourth to early fifth centuries Chinese Buddhists were becoming increasingly aware of spells and *dhāraṇīs* as specialized and powerful



tools in the fight against the demonic influences perceived in their everyday lives. It is also clear that traditional sutras, such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, were being “mined” for their *dhāraṇīs* that were then utilized in different contexts and for different purposes than originally intended. In my view this provides us with rather concrete and contextualized evidence that the formation of esoteric Buddhism as a distinct—although not separate—tradition in Chinese Buddhism was gradually taking shape by the time T. 987 was being compiled. By “distinct” I mean that it was becoming recognized as a tradition or formation of Buddhist practice in its own right. This nascent Buddhist esotericism was eventually to give rise to full-blown esoteric Buddhism some two centuries later in China.

#### 4. “KUMĀRAJĪVA’S TEXT” (T. 988)

As the last of the three early recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* to be discussed here, Kumārajīva’s text is a curious one indeed, and I am of the opinion that it is essentially not a real translation of a Sanskrit original into Chinese. Rather, it is a redacted text consisting of an “original” Indian core, or rather parts, onto which has been grafted various other textual bits and pieces, some of which are Chinese in origin. There are—we shall presently see—several weighty arguments to support this view. First of all, the text is not a real sutra per se, and in this sense T. 988 follows the loose structure that we also see in two earlier recensions. This is obvious both from its form as well as from its contents (including the peculiar absence of the Svati narrative although he is mentioned by name). Secondly, it is not a purely Indian (or Central Asian) scripture either. This is evident from the opening prayers addressed to the Dragon Kings and other deities that structurally follow the traditional Chinese cosmological system of groups of five. Included among these we also find invocations to a group of purely Chinese deities, namely the Five Directional Spirit Generals (Ch. Juntou, 軍頭).<sup>60</sup> The importance of dragon-kings or *nāgarājas* throughout the text would seem to underscore a dual feature of Kumārajīva’s text, namely that the early cult of *Mahāmāyūrī* in China was both geared towards the protection against poisonous snakes as well as control over rain. The latter feature of course hinged on magical control over the dragons believed to bring or withhold rain, something that was a major thaumaturgical concern for both Buddhists and Daoist

adepts of the arcane laws throughout the medieval period. In contrast, mentioning of dragons/*nāgas* is completely absent in *T. 986*.

Hence, whoever compiled or redacted *T. 988* would appear to have had a special interest or need in incorporating elements of Chinese cosmology into the text. This was undoubtedly done in order to cater to a local audience. We also encounter many assimilated Hindu deities in addition to the host of dragon-kings and demons also included in *T. 987*. Thirdly, *vajrapālas* for the five directions occur under the title of “Secret Trace Vajra[-holding] Men (Ch. Jingang mijishi, 金剛密跡士).”<sup>61</sup> This is one of the earliest appearances of this “new” category of esoteric Buddhist protectors in a Chinese context. When these points have been made, it needs also be said that Kumārajīva’s *Mahāmāyūrī* text does have many elements in it that obviously have been lifted from or are otherwise based on a supposed “real” version or versions of the sutra in question.

I should also like to add that Kumārajīva’s *Mahāmāyūrī* text was in all likelihood not compiled nor “translated” by him. A major reason for believing thus is that it was not included under his name in the *CSJ*. This view has also been brought forth by Lü Jianfu (呂建福), who believes that the *Mahāmāyūrī* text attributed to Kumārajīva was actually compiled sometime during the Liang dynasty.<sup>62</sup> While agreeing with him that *T. 988* was not from Kumārajīva’s hand, I nevertheless consider a Liang dating much too late. In the following I shall endeavor to elucidate this further.

Whether or not Kumārajīva had anything to do with *T. 988*, it nevertheless bears all the traces of an early esoteric Buddhist scripture with all the archaic traits associated with such texts, undoubtedly because it has many things in common with the two earlier recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* discussed above as well as many other scriptures belonging to the early Buddhist spell literature in China.

Among the peculiar features of *T. 988* is the great importance attributed to the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā*, which the text refers to in connection with a series of four divine spells uttered by dragon or *nāga* kings.<sup>63</sup> This may reflect an early stage in the belief that condensed the *Perfection of Wisdom* into a *dhāraṇī* proper and eventually into one seed syllable (Skt. *bīja*).<sup>64</sup> It is unclear, however, whether “*mahāprajñāpāramitā*” as it appears in the scripture refers to a text-corpus or whether it is simply the glorification of the perfection of wisdom as one of the six *pāramitās*. This uncertainty is compounded by

the fact that the text of the spell is not actually given in the text itself but is only referred to. It is not unlikely that the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* is understood as a spell.

In addition to the *Divine Spell of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā* (摩訶般若波羅蜜神咒), something that could be seen as a pointer in the direction of Kumārajīva in light of his preoccupation with scriptures and doctrines belonging to this tradition, the scripture refers to other spells, the texts of which are also not given. Among others it presupposes knowledge of the *Guanshiyin pusa tuoluoni shenzhou* (觀世音菩薩陀羅尼神咒, Divine Spell of the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva Dhāraṇī),<sup>65</sup> which may be identical with the *Guanshiyin pusa tuoluoni* (觀世音菩薩陀羅尼, Dhāraṇī of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva) found in the *Tuoluoni zaji*.<sup>66</sup>

The invocation of four directional buddhas in *T. 988* provides us with an interesting perspective on Chinese Buddhist cosmology at the time the scripture was being composed. This unusual group of buddhas includes Fixed Light of the southern direction, Hall of Seven Precious Things of the northern direction, Amitāyus of the western direction, and Bhaisajyārāja of the eastern direction. Their retinue is completed by the Eight Great Bodhisattvas and the Four Heavenly Kings, followed by various lesser gods of Hindu origin such as Indra, Brahma, Nārāyaṇa, Maheśvara, etc., and a host of demons. Interestingly, the spirits of the elements earth, water, fire, and wind are Indian in origin rather than Chinese, which underscores the hybrid nature of *T. 988*. Also invoked are lesser divinities, such as the personified planets including the sun, moon, and the five planets. Here it is interesting to find the spirits of the Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions invoked together with Hārītī, the Mother of Demon Children.<sup>67</sup>

Also to be invoked are “immortals, demons, great sorcerers, and spell-holding kings, etc.” (Ch. *xianren gui da huan chizhou wang*, 仙人鬼大幻持咒王等).<sup>68</sup> These “spell-holding kings” can hardly mean anything other than *vidyārāja*, “kings of knowledge.” Their occurrence here points to a semi-divine origin of this class of beings. Moreover, the *vidyārāja* (Ch. *mingwang*, 明王) as a distinct and personified class of esoteric Buddhist protectors most probably did not come about until well into the sixth century.

First, after the long invocation, unique to *T. 988*, we find again the opening prayer to the Triple Jewels, the Seven Buddhas of the Past, and the host of human and non-human spirits that opened *T. 987*.<sup>69</sup> The

passage has slight variations, but it is so similar that we may safely talk about it as the same textual passage. It was mentioned above that *T. 988* incorporates major parts of *T. 987*, including some of its invocations and most of the important spells. The fact that the spells found in the latter work are more complete or at least longer and structurally make more sense indicate a later date for *T. 988*. Comparison between the two texts indicates that whoever compiled the *Kumārajīva* text did not actually use *T. 987*, but did use a similar text. This becomes clear when the phonetic characters used for the spells in the two texts are compared. As was the case with *T. 987*, the *Kumārajīva* text also features the list of the fourteen female demons, some of whom can also be found in the *Huzhu tongzi tuo luoni jing*.

Whereas we found several embedded spells in *T. 987* lifted from other Buddhist scriptures, *Kumārajīva*'s text includes only one, namely the *Fo shuo kuangye guishen Atuopoju zhou jing* (佛說曠野鬼神阿吒婆拘咒經, Scripture on the Spells of Āṭavaka, the Demon of the Wilderness).<sup>70</sup> This is a most interesting piece of information, as it constitutes a direct link between the cults of *Mahāmāyūrī* and that devoted to the demon-king Āṭavaka.<sup>71</sup> This discovery is moreover important for placing *T. 988* later than the earliest known scriptures featuring Āṭavaka as their hero, including the text of his spell. In contrast the earlier version of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* as represented by *T. 987* does not include the Āṭavaka Spell. This information gives us good reason to believe that the cult of Āṭavaka developed in China between the time that the two versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* became popular. What is of the greatest significance, however, is that the Āṭavaka Spell as contained in *Kumārajīva*'s text is more or less identical with the version we find in the *Azhapoju guishen dajiang shang fo tuoluoni jing* (阿吒婆拘鬼神大將上佛陀羅尼神咒經, Scripture on the High Buddha Dhāraṇī of the Great Demon-General Āṭavaka) embedded in the *Tuoluoni zaji*.<sup>72</sup> Given the relatively early date of much of the material contained in this *dhāraṇī* compendium, it would appear that the version of the *Āṭavaka Scripture* utilized by the compiler of the *Kumārajīva* text was available in China no later than the mid-fifth century.

*Kumārajīva*'s text uses *zhou* (咒), i.e., *spell*, for both proper *dhāraṇīs* as well as for invocations of a more Sinitic character; however, *tuoluoni* (陀羅尼) for *dhāraṇī* also occurs.<sup>73</sup> Actually, it does not distinguish between mantras, spells, *dhāraṇīs*, or spell-like invocations in Chinese, all of which occur without any seeming order or internal structure.

This feature is common to many of the translated and redacted *dhāraṇī* sutras ascribed to the fourth to fifth century. As such they may reflect the early stages in the adaptation of Sanskrit liturgy to the Chinese cultural context, or perhaps the adaptation of Chinese ritual concerns to the orthodoxy of the Indian script.

## 5. ON THE LATER DEVELOPMENTS OF THE MAHĀMĀYŪRĪVIDYĀRĀJÑĪ

Finally I shall say a few things about the last of the extant *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* recensions from the Nanbeizhao period, namely the comprehensive two-volume version, the translation of which has been attributed to the Indian monk Saṅghabhara.<sup>74</sup> This translation is said to have been done sometime between 502–520 CE during the early Liang.<sup>75</sup> This version of the sutra is first mentioned in the *Gujin yi jing tuji* (古今譯經圖紀, A Sketchy Record of Translators of Sutras from the Past and Present), dating from 664–665 CE, and is later found in the more comprehensive Tang catalog, the *Zhenyuan xinding shijiao mulu* (貞元新定釋教目錄, Newly Established Catalog of the Buddhist Teaching of the Zhenyuan Era).<sup>76</sup> On this background we may safely consider Saṅghabhara's text as having appeared and eventually circulated in China during the first half of the sixth century.

When compared with the three earlier recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* discussed above, Saṅghabhara's version is in many ways a radically different text. In fact, while the earlier versions appear strangely incomplete and unorthodox in both contents and structure, the Liang recension in comparison is considerably better organized and coherent. Nevertheless, it is still far from being textually heterogeneous in the same way more traditional sutras are. In the following I shall provide a brief overview of the contents of the scripture and in this process point out the various anomalies and peculiarities it contains.

Despite being a more comprehensive text, T. 984 is—like the three earlier recensions—a ritual text with basic narrative elements to link the diverse parts of the text together. In this sense it is closer in style and format to the earlier versions than to proper sutras. However, the narrative(s) of T. 984 include all the diverse parts of the earlier versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, i.e., both the Svati story as well as the story of the Peacock King.

In terms of ritual practices and invocations all the *dhāraṇīs* and mantras found in the earlier texts have been included in Saṅghabhara's

text, which has also added a number of more formal ritual passages in the form of prayers and invocations. First of all we find a general prayer directed to all the *devas*, spirits, and demons listed in the text: “I pray that you may grant me a long life of one hundred years and that I may see one hundred springs (Ch. *yuan shou baishui, jian yu bai chun*, 願壽百歲見於百春).”<sup>77</sup> This prayer is also not found in the earlier versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*. The prayers also have an almost pleading tone, using the term “have compassion with me (Ch. *ciwo*, 慈我)” when addressing the various divinities and spirits.<sup>78</sup> The text also lists the names of twenty-eight *yakṣa*-generals together with their respective mantras.<sup>79</sup> Similar lists, but without the mantras, can be found in *T.* 987 and *T.* 988. This is a good example of the kind of textual amplification we see in *T.* 984.

We also find a lengthy section on dragon/*nāga* kings that is not found in the three earlier recensions. This section would appear to have become central to the later versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*.<sup>80</sup> This may be taken as an indication that in the process of its development, the scripture gradually shifted its attention from protection against poisonous snakes to the command of dragons/*nāgas*. This must of course be seen from the perspective of control over rainfall, as indeed large parts of the sutra are concerned with praying for rain. Generally speaking this new or rather extended focus includes control of all non-human beings inhabiting the watery element. In order for the invocations to be effective, both buddhas and *arhats* are invoked.<sup>81</sup>

The expansion of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* as seen here is not only caused by an expansion of the scripture’s ritual parts, but can also be seen in its more orthodox format as a proper sutra. As examples of this we can refer to the fact that the virtue and power of the Peacock Spell is widely discussed and extolled and that all the various demons and non-human beings it is effective against are named. Interestingly, it also refers to Śākyamuni’s enlightenment under the Bo tree at Bodhgāya.<sup>82</sup>

The cult of the Four Heavenly Kings in conjunction with the utterance of the Peacock Spell are prominently extolled in the scripture, both as encouragement to worship and as part of the ritual procedures set forth in the text.<sup>83</sup> As we have seen with *T.* 986, arguably the earliest extant recension of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, the importance of these four world rulers in the context of our scripture has remained constant down through the ages. Furthermore, the Peacock Spell’s power in protecting kingdoms is a standard feature in many of the later esoteric

Buddhist sutras. The names of hundreds of kingdoms—mostly mythical ones—are given.<sup>84</sup> This lengthy section is nowhere found in any of the earlier recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*.

When compared with the earlier three recensions, Saṅghabhara's extended text is noteworthy for providing much richer data on the host of demons that the sutra's *dhāraṇī* is supposed to counteract. It is especially interesting to find that the list of female demons such as *yakṣasīs* and *rākṣasīs* found in the earlier material has now been expanded to include several lists of female demons, in fact more than one hundred different names. Moreover, this inflation of demons' names that we find in the Saṅghabhara version of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*—something that actually amounts to a creation of a demonic geography—is repeated with minor differences in Amoghavajra's lengthy eighth-century translation.<sup>85</sup> Hence, from the perspective of demonology Saṅghabhara's version essentially constitutes the culmination of this development.

The Saṅghabhara recension does not provide any information on or instructions as regards the iconography of Mahāmāyūrī comparable to that found in Yijing's or Amoghavajra's versions of the scripture. This may be taken as a strong indication that the conflation of text, ritual, and iconography in the later two versions took place after the compilation of T. 984, probably sometime during the first half of the seventh century.<sup>86</sup> However, the ritual appendix of Saṅghabhara's text gives us some hints as to how the ritual sphere, i.e., the altar, was to be constructed and some additional information on the performance of the rite itself. The appendix under the title *Jie zhou jie fa* (結咒界法, Method for Binding the Ritual Sphere with Spells) reads:

Śrīmitra formerly established that one should make a three-layered round sphere [altar] with lime and dry soil scattered on the ground. [Then] one should proceed from the north-eastern corner to the south-eastern, etc. At the corner of the eastern direction one should place the Gandharva King. "General Dhṛtarāṣṭra, you of the spirits, Great General of the Army, protect the eastern wall!" [Then] proceed from the south-eastern corner to south-western, etc. In the southern side one should place the Kumbhāṇḍa King.<sup>87</sup> "General Virūḍhaka, you of the spirits, Great General of the Army, protect the southern wall!" [Then] proceed from the south-western corner to north-western, etc. In the western side place the Great Nāga King. "General Virūpākṣa, you of the spirits, Great General of the Army, protect the western wall!" [Then] proceed from the north-western corner to north-



eastern, etc. In the northern side place the Yakṣa King. “General Vaiśravaṇa, you of the spirits, Great General of the Army, protect the northern wall!” Having finished putting a spell on the ritual space and bound all oppressive demons, [one should say:] “I now command you in the ritual space to listen to and follow my will.” [Then] go [to a distance of] five paces, cut [dig?] five holes, [and place] five-colored banners on five poles [in them]. Twenty-one arrows, twenty-one lamps, and five mirrors [should be used for the altar].<sup>88</sup> Place incense [such as] *kunduru* incense, and sprinkle the ground with fragrant, hot water. [Comment:] The unorthodox ones [i.e., the Hindus] put spells on cow dung, which they spread on the ground [as a basis for their altars].<sup>89</sup> [Then throw] mustard seeds into the burning fire.<sup>90</sup> Fire will then blaze forth from the bodies of the evil spirits. Paint an image of the spirit, hold it down with a stone, and flog it with a branch. Blood will then flow from the evil spirits’ mouths.<sup>91</sup>

Here it is interesting to see that the altar/mandala used in the rite is circular and in three layers. Moreover, the manner in which the Four Heavenly Kings appear as guardians of the four cardinal directions indicate that the altar/mandala is a miniature or at least function as a symbolic representation of Mt. Meru, the cosmic mountain of Hindu and Buddhist mythology. The use of ritual implements in groups of five may be seen as an early instance of the kind that later became the division we know as the Five Buddha Families. Here it should also be noted that the above directions only indicate the basic rite for consecrating and purifying the ritual space. The ritual worship of Mahāmāyūrī herself is discussed elsewhere in the text.

In contrast to the earlier recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, in Yijing’s three-chapter version from 705 CE the opening section in which the ritual proceedings are set forth appears as a sort of introduction divorced from the sutra itself.<sup>92</sup> This would seem to indicate that Yijing was well aware that the opening section was not originally part of the scripture. Incidentally, there are other indicators that such was indeed the case. There is a note below the title that reads, “[with] the practical methods in front [of the text] (Ch. *qian fangbian fa*, 前方便法).”

The fact that almost two centuries divide Saṅghabhara’s translation from that of Yijing provides us with a perspective on the historical development of the cult of Mahāmāyūrī, and in a wider sense with important information on the manner in which esoteric Buddhist rituals developed during this rather lengthy period. In addition to the extended ritual discourse of the text, one of the most significant



changes is that which pertains to iconography. Whereas the exact nature, including the gender and looks of Mahāmāyūrī, are unclear in the earlier material, the Yijing text answers these questions in full. However, in the setting up of the altar and the ritual space, we find that Śākyamuni Buddha and not Mahāmāyūrī is still the main icon. Moreover, the text gives a full description on how to paint the deity and mentions her four arms and the attributes they hold, including the peacock feathers. Here it is interesting to note that the peacock itself, i.e., the mount of the divinity as it occurs in the Amoghavajra text, is not mentioned.<sup>93</sup>

The expansion and redaction of the ritual material in Yijing's version, including a number of *dhāraṇīs*, mantras, prayers, and verses not found in the Saṅghabhara text, show a conscious development towards systematization and ritual coherence not seen previously. This is emphatically revealed in the strong sense of internal structure of the text and the ritual procedures it sets forth.

#### 6. THE MAHĀMĀYŪRĪVIDYĀRĀJŪ AND EARLY ESOTERIC BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES IN CHINA

The importance of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājū* for the development of early esoteric Buddhism in China can hardly be overestimated. As early as the end of the fourth century it shows up in the *Jizhiguo jing* (寂志果經, Scripture on the Fruits of Aspiring for Quiescence),<sup>94</sup> another translation attributed to Tanwulan. This scripture contains references to the use of spells and incantations, and mentions in passing the Peacock Spell.<sup>95</sup> Although we do not know further details on the context of this scripture, it seems all but certain that a Peacock Spell tradition was already gaining in popularity in China at that time. Unfortunately, we do not know to which recension of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājū* the *Jizhiguo jing* was referring.

Thanks to Strickmann's fascination with the apocryphal *Guanding jing* (灌頂經, Scripture of Consecration),<sup>96</sup> several pieces of information on the impact of the Mahāmāyūrī cult and its scripture(s) on Chinese Buddhist apocrypha during the Nanbeizhao period are now at hand. Already in the first chapter of the *Guanding jing*—in effect a separate scripture with the title *Qiwān erqian shenwang hu piqiu jing* (七萬二千神王護比丘經, Scripture on the Twenty-seven Thousand Spirit Kings Protecting Monks)—we find the story about Svati and the poisonous

snake in a new and greatly expanded version.<sup>97</sup> One can actually argue—with considerable justification—that the *Qiwan erqian shenwang hu piqu jing* is a re-work of the Svati story. In other words, the central message of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* has here been incorporated into an apocryphal scripture of the fifth century.<sup>98</sup> However, in his work on the *Guanding jing* Strickmann devotes much more attention to the *Mouniluotan jing* (which we have already encountered above) than he does to the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*.<sup>99</sup> The former scripture—in a greatly expanded recension—constitutes the eighth chapter of the *Guanding jing*.<sup>100</sup> Strickmann's focus on this scripture over the early recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* is rather peculiar, especially since the list of demons and spells contained in the *Guanding jing*'s version of the *Mouniluotan jing* was lifted almost verbatim from the earlier *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*.<sup>101</sup> Here we should remember that the earliest recension of the latter work, *T. 986*, does not include the list of demons. This means that the *Mouniluotan jing* as a scripture developed in tandem with the later versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, probably a version or recension identical with or close to *T. 987*. Nevertheless, these facts show that there is a direct and rather close link—historically as well as textually—extending from the early versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* to the *Guanding jing*. Granting that the *Guanding jing* is easily one of the most important scriptures in the spell literature of fifth-century China, the incorporation of parts of the earlier text corpus relating to Mahāmāyūrī into this—partly—apocryphal work constitutes rather solid proof that during the middle of the Nanbeizhao period the cult of the Peacock Queen had already spread well beyond the textual confines of its own recensions to be embraced by the developing esoteric Buddhist tradition.

Finally I should like to mention that the earliest known iconographical representations of Mahāmāyūrī are found in the Ellora Caves near Aurangabad in the Deccan. They consist of two nearly identical sculptural groups in high relief, which have been tentatively dated to the early seventh century. Both reliefs are in the form of scriptural tableaux, i.e., they contain narrative elements in contrast to the more formal, monolithic buddha groups (figs. 1–2).<sup>102</sup> Interestingly these early Indian depictions of Mahāmāyūrī reflect the early esoteric Buddhist iconography in India only. Evidently the prototypes that were later transmitted to China and East Asia belonged to different iconographical traditions.<sup>103</sup>

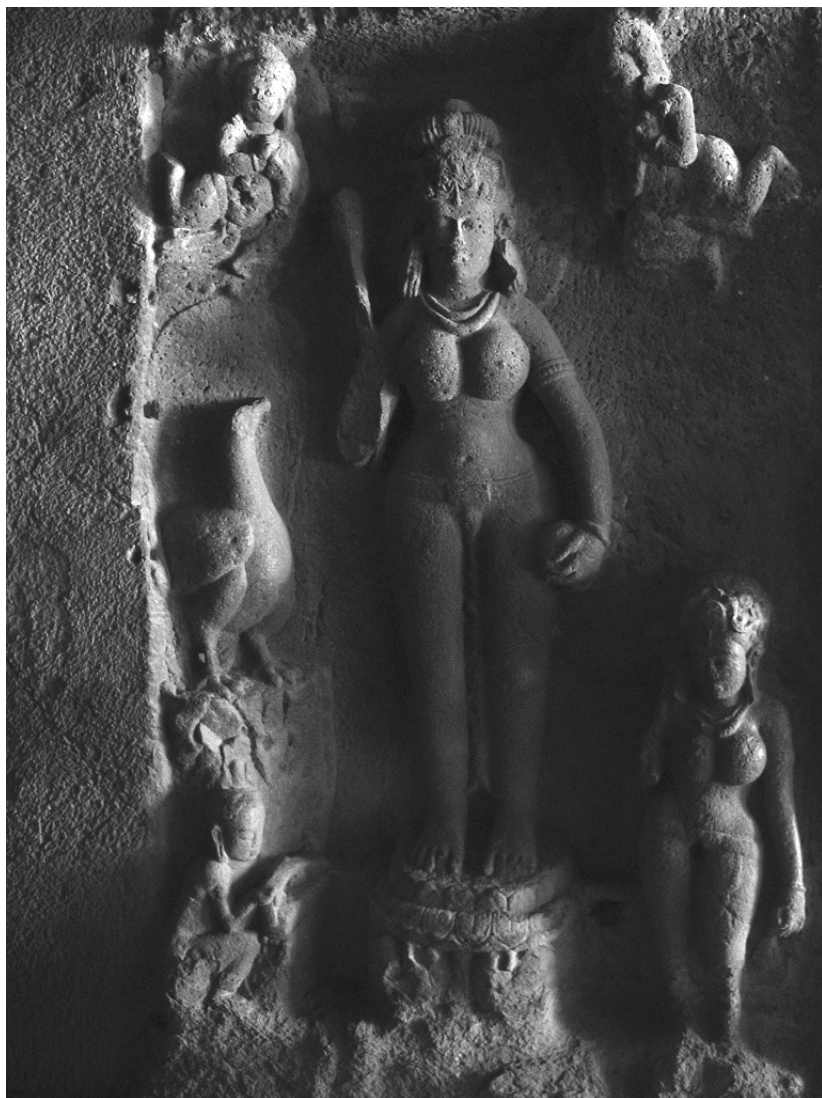


Fig. 1. Mahāmayūrī tableaux. Cave no. 8 Ellora.  
Late sixth century. Photo by author.



Fig. 2. Mahāmayūrī tableaux. Cave no. 6 Ellora.  
Late sixth century. Photo by author.

## CONCLUSION

Curious as it may seem, all the three early versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra* are actually not authentic sutras, at least not in the traditional sense of the word as Buddhist works from India or Central Asia. As we have seen they all lack the formal structure expected of a bona fide sutra, and the basic narrative contained in all three texts has been reduced to something akin to catchwords. In fact only T. 987 contains what can be said to vaguely resemble a formal narrative such as that found in all the later versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, while T. 986 does not even refer to the Svati story. This leads me to conclude that none of these texts are in fact translations of proper sutras, but rather are loose compositions based on some sort of incomplete Sanskrit manuscripts, possibly even based on some sort of oral transmission. I believe that some kind of Sanskrit background is behind all of the three recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, but while all three compositions bear similarities and share a number of more or less identical text-passages, including of course many of the various spells, they are structurally and contents-wise too dissimilar for us to consider them as belonging to the same textual tradition. Even the two Qin versions are sufficiently dissimilar to be considered as such.

Should the three early *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* texts then be considered apocryphal sutras? No, I do not think so—at least not in the usual manner of understanding. And why? Because they are not really fabricated with the aim of promoting a particular religious group or a political agenda as is the case with most apocryphal Buddhist scriptures in Chinese history. The main purpose of all three texts is to promote the Mahāmāyūrī Spell(s). Moreover, none of them features a special doctrine that indicates—fully or in part—purely Sinitic concerns, with the possible exception of the Sinitic elements in Kumārajīva's text, the majority of which are ritual in nature rather than devoted to doctrine. That said, we must conclude that all the three early versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* are variant examples of early *dhāraṇī* scriptures. As such they resemble a host of other similar—including authentic Indian Buddhist—sutras. Furthermore, they all contain authentic—albeit modified—parts that originally would seem to have been part of more fully developed Indian Buddhist scriptures. In this sense we may consider the three early Chinese versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*



as being authentic representatives of early esoteric Buddhist practice in India as well as in China.

It is unclear to what extent the three early *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* recensions relate to the now lost Sanskrit material on which they appear to have been based. There can be little doubt that Peacock King narrative (T. 986) was based on a Prakrit version similar to that included the Pāli *Dīgha-nikāya*. Moreover, it is highly likely that this text was indirectly influenced by the story of Buddha's former existence as a peacock king according to the *jātakas*. However, the actual relationship between the narrative of the Peacock King and that of Svati is not clear. Possibly the imagery of the peacock combined with the magic spell—which is also found in the Pāli material—is what linked the two narratives together. What we do know is that by the time the recension of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, on which the Kumārajīva text is based, had come about—probably sometime during the mid to late fourth century—the narrative of the Golden Peacock King is not mentioned at all, while the Svati story is only referred to.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, the former story did not disappear, as it forms part of Saṅghabhara's Liang recension of the scripture. The story of Svati is completely absent from T. 986, while Kumārajīva's text does mention Svati and his problem with poison, but leaves out the actual story. This means that T. 988 presupposes the existence of T. 987, which contains the earliest reference to Svati, or at least indicates familiarity with the narrative in some form. In addition, a careful comparison between the mantras/spells in Kumārajīva's text and those found in the later recension of the sutra reveals that T. 988 follows T. 987 to a considerable degree. This means that we are now able to understand the historical relationship between the two scriptures and that T. 987 is clearly the older of the two. In concluding the text history of the three early recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, we are now able to establish that T. 986 is the oldest existing version in Chinese, followed by T. 987 with its Svati narrative. The Kumārajīva text, which is essentially a ritual text presupposing T. 987 or is otherwise based on some unknown but largely similar Sanskrit version, should therefore be considered the youngest of the three early *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* recensions.

All of the three early recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* are ritual texts. However, none of them appears to be complete. In fact it is clear that all of them are somewhat truncated and textually heterogeneous. While T. 986 and T. 987 share several things in common

and appear more “Indic” in tone and style, T. 988 is clearly more Chinese in style and format with its several instances of pure Sinitic elements, indicating a conscious adaptation to the local culture on the part of the translator. This is clearly a sign that this recension is later and therefore more developed than the two other texts. A survey of T. 988 reveals that we are not dealing with a proper sutra, but rather with a ritual composition based on an earlier version of a *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra*. Kumārajīva’s text can in fact be seen as a sort of ritual commentary on a supposedly “real” *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra*.

On the basis of the findings presented here the importance of the Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist texts and other derivatives can hardly be overestimated. In fact it is abundantly clear that for the period covering the second to sixth centuries, the Chinese Buddhist material is essential for our understanding of the developments of doctrines and practices in medieval Indian Buddhism. I will even go so far as to claim that no serious research on Gupta and early post-Gupta Buddhism would be complete without a thorough consultation with the Chinese material. While this generally holds true for Mahayana Buddhism in general, it is absolutely vital when dealing with the history and development of esoteric Buddhism. Without the Chinese translations and compositions based on Indian Buddhist scriptures, research into the history of early esoteric Buddhism on the Indian Subcontinent makes little sense.

#### APPENDIX

Five versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra* are mentioned in the *Zhenyuan xinding shijiao mulu* (貞元新定釋教目錄, Catalog of the Newly Established Buddhist Teaching of the Yuanzhao [Era])<sup>105</sup> by Yuanzhao (圓照, fl. eighth century).<sup>106</sup> They are as follows:

1. *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra* (孔雀王咒經). This is Kumārajīva’s text, which is also called the *Scripture of the Great, Golden-hued Peacock King with Method for Setting Up the Ritual Space*, i.e., T. 988.19.
2. *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra* (大金色孔雀王咒經) by an unknown translator and listed in the *Qin lu*. This refers to either T. 986.19 or T. 987.19.

3. *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra* (孔雀王咒經). This is the two-volume translation by the Indian monk Saṅghabhara done during the early Liang, T. 984.19.
4. *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra* (孔雀咒王經). This is the three-volume translation by Yijing done during the early eighth century, T. 985.19.
5. *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī-sūtra* (大孔雀明王經). This is the three-volume translation by Amoghavajra done sometime during the second half of the eighth century, T. 982.19.<sup>107</sup>

This leaves one of the early recensions unaccounted for. The reason for this omission is not known.



## NOTES

1. This term, as well as the alternative “proto-tantra” suggested by Michel Strickmann, is a coined term used to define a particular stage in the development of esoteric Buddhism in both India and China. It is not to be understood as a hermeneutic identifier used by the practitioners themselves. Although early practitioners of esoteric Buddhism may not have referred to themselves as “esoteric Buddhists,” their practices are nevertheless “esoteric” in nature as they involve secrecy, belief in magic, and supernatural powers attained through spells and ritual manipulation of objects. For Strickmann’s views, see *Mantras et Mandarins: Le Bouddhisme Tantrique en China* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 17–58.
2. Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, ed. Bernard Faure, Asian Religions and Cultures (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). See also Henrik H. Sørensen, “Michel Strickmann on Magical Medicine in Medieval China and Elsewhere (A Review of Michel Strickmann: *Chinese Magical Medicine*),” *Journal of the History of Religions* 43 (May 2004): 319–332.
3. Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 108–109, 115, 220–221.
4. Ibid., 108. For some reason Strickmann considers the earliest translation of the scripture into Chinese as having been done in the third century. It was not done before the fourth century. Cf. ibid., 109.
5. Ibid.
6. Cf. Kaikyoku Watanabe, *Studien über die Mahāmāyūrī* (Tokyo: Shūkyō Daigaku, 1912), 357–404.
7. See A. F. Rudolf Hoernle, *The Bower Manuscript* (Calcutta: India Office, 1893–1912) and *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Literature Found in Eastern Turkestan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1916).
8. Kaikyoku Watanabe, “A Chinese Text Corresponding to Part of the Bower Manuscript,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1907, 261–266.
9. See Sylvain Lévi, “Le catalogue géographique des Yakṣa dans le Mahāmāyūrī,” *Journal Asiatique* 11, no. 5 (1915): 19–138.
10. Cf. Ārya-Mahā-Māyūrī *Vidyā-Rājñī*, ed. Shūyo Takubo (Tokyo: Sankibo, 1972).
11. T. 505.14. This scripture was not available in China until the tenth century and must be considered entirely unrelated to the development of the cult of Mahāmāyūrī in East Asia.
12. T. 1428.22. Translated by Buddhayaśas and Zhu Fonian (竺佛念, fl. late fourth to early fifth century) in 405 or 408 CE. The early date of this translation makes its information interesting in relation to the early recensions of the

*Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*. However, it is doubtful whether any direct textual connection can be found between them.

13. T. 1442.22. Translated by Yijing (義淨, 635–713) during the early eighth century.

14. This information was presented by Kenneth Eastman at a lecture in the East Asian Institute, University of Copenhagen on September 7, 1989. Note, however, that most of these scriptures were not available in China at the time the early recensions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* first appeared.

15. T. 2145.55, 1a–114a.

16. *Ibid.*, 10a.

17. Also written 帛尸利蜜多羅. For biographical data, see T. 2145.55, 98c–99a. This account also mentions the Peacock Spell. Cf. *ibid.*, 9a. See also FDC 4:3195c–3196a.

18. A brief but highly relevant discussion of the role of Śrīmitra in the spread and popularization of the use spells in fourth-century China can be found in John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography*, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 10 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 84–85.

19. T. 55.2145, 10a.

20. *Ibid.*, 99a.

21. See Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 67–111.

22. See Arthur F. Wright, *Studies in Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Robert M. Somers (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1990), 34–68.

23. The term *mijiao* (密教) that we today translate with “esoteric Buddhism” of course came about much later.

24. T. 986.19, 477c.

25. T. 154.3, 70a–108c.

26. *Ibid.*, 104b–105a.

27. T. 986.19, 478ab.

28. *Ibid.*, 478a.

29. It is possible that the highly divergent, inconsistent, and often strange transcriptions we encounter in many spells and *dhāraṇīs* in Chinese, sometimes to the point of textual corruption, came about due to the fact that the spells were transmitted orally—not only from Sanskrit to Chinese, but also from Chinese to Chinese across regional boundaries and between different dialects. Hence, there was a greater chance for mistakes to enter. If this is the

case, it would go a long way in explaining why irregularities are particularly numerous in transcribed *dhāraṇīs*.

30. T. 986.19, 478b.

31. Ibid.

32. T. 986.19, 478a.

33. T. 1393.21, 910b–911a. For a discussion of this scripture, see Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 109–113. Strickmann remained undecided as to whether or not the scripture was a genuine Indian work or a Chinese apocrypha. In light of its numerous anomalies and many Chinese elements, I am of the opinion that it is most certainly not a real translation. Moreover, it may have had nothing to do with Tanwulan, its alleged translator. It is possible that it is based on some sort of Sanskrit text, but the early version of the scripture as represented by T. 1393 is in any case a composite.

34. Written in the text as “Moheqiantuo (摩訶乾陀).” Exactly how and why this famous *arhat* is being invoked in the connection with the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* I have not been able to figure out.

35. T. 986.19, 478c.

36. Tanwulan (曇無蘭, fl. late fourth century), to whom the translation of the *Mouniluotan jing* has been attributed, has several translations of *dhāraṇī* scriptures to his name. He is said to have worked in China between 381–395 CE. For additional information on this important monk, see FDC 7:6233c–6234a.

37. T. 987.19, 479a.

38. This in fact refers to an existing tale in the *jātakas*.

39. A class of horse-headed demons who robbed men of their vital energy. In the mature esoteric Buddhist tradition of the Tang, they can be found among the minor divinities of the Dharmadhātu Mandala. For additional information, see FDC 6:5708c–5709b.

40. This translation is tentative, but it appears more plausible than “ordinary utensil.”

41. Here the name of the demoness is directly indicating its nefarious function.

42. Probably indicating the manner in which this demoness is believed to carry off her victims.

43. Probably referring to the affliction of jaundice common to newborn babies. It could also indicate yellow fever.

44. The meaning of this and the following name eludes me. Perhaps the idea is that this demoness is lurking inside the house under the roof.

45. I believe that the text of *T.* 987 has been altered at this point, probably by an old scribal error. *Bian* (便) makes no sense here; clearly *shi* (使) is the correct character to form the name Cishi.

46. The messenger of the king of the netherworld who is sent to the world of humans to summon the spirits of those who have died. Usually it is described as a male spirit, not a female. A much feared and hated spirit within the Chinese cultural sphere. For vivid medieval Chinese accounts of the activities of this messenger, see Donald E. Gjerdtson's important study, *Miraculous Retribution: A Study and Translation of T'ang Lin's "Ming-pao chi"* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989).

47. Actually the name usually reserved for the king of the netherworld. Given that we are dealing with a group of female demons, it is most likely Yāmī who is intended here. This is in fact a good sign that we are dealing with an early scripture, since it shows that the developed Chinese conception of the netherworld in the form of a parallel world, complete with halls and tribunals, as well as judges under King Yāma, had still not come about at the time *T.* 987 was being translated and redacted. For a discussion of the concepts and logic behind the operation of the netherworld, see also Henrik H. Sørensen, "Optional Causality: Karma, Retribution, and the Transference of Merit in the Context of Popular Chinese Buddhism," *Hōrin* 6 (1999): 171–189.

48. *T.* 987.19, 479a.

49. *T.* 1028A.19, 741b–742c.

50. *T.* 986.19, 478a.

51. *Ibid.*, 481a.

52. This scripture is mentioned as having existed in two versions in the *CSJJ*. See *T.* 2145.55, 31c. For additional information, see *FDC* 4:3116bc.

53. *T.* 1406.21, 922a. By an unknown translator. In terms of style and contents it bears many similarities with the early *dhāraṇī* sutras. The *Taishō* version is by and large identical with the version embedded in *T.* 987.

54. *T.* 2154.55, 480b, 481c.

55. *T.* 262.9, 58bc.

56. *Ibid.*, 59a.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*, 59ab.

59. *T.* 987.19, 481ac.

60. *T.* 988.19, 482a.

61. Ibid., 482a. For more on these protectors, see Michel Soymié, “Notes d’iconographie bouddhique—des Vidyārāja et Vajradhara de Touen-houang,” *Cahiers d’Extrême Asie* 3 (1987): 9–26. See also FDC 5:4483c–4484b.

62. See Lü Jianfu, *Zhongguo mijiao shi*, 124–125.

63. T. 988.19, 482b.

64. For a discussion of this phenomena, cf. *The Short Prajñāpāramitā Texts*, trans. Edward Conze (London: Luzac, 1973), vi–vii. See also Donald S. Lopez, Jr., “Inscribing the Bodhisattva’s Speech: On the Heart Sūtra’s Mantra,” *Journal of the History of Religions* 29, no. 4 (1990): 351–372.

65. T. 988.19, 482c.

66. T. 1336.21, 636bc.

67. Ibid., 482c.

68. Ibid., 483a.

69. T. 987.19, 479a.

70. The main spells of the two extant early Āṭavaka scriptures as represented by T. 1237.21 and T. 1238.21, both of which vary considerably from each other, are only partially identical with that found in the Kumārajīva text. This fact indicates that the *Fo shuo Kuangye guishen Atuoju zhou jing* as found in T. 988 was in all probability based on another version of the Āṭavaka Spell.

71. For extensive information on the cult of this demon protector, see Robert Duquenne, “Daigensui (Myōō),” *Hōbōgirin* 6 (1983): 610a–640b. He is the first of the yakṣa generals in the retinue of Vaiśravaṇa, the Heavenly King of the Northern Direction. For some reason Duquenne has failed to mention the *Kuangye guishen Atuoju zhou jing* in this otherwise noteworthy and meticulous study.

72. See T. 1336.21, 628c–630b. There are minor variations in the use of characters for transcription of Sanskrit as well as a few omissions of sounds, but otherwise the two spells are identical. This establishes the *Tuoluoni zaji* version of the Āṭavaka scripture as earlier than those of T. 1237.21 and T. 1238.21.

73. T. 988.19, 481a.

74. When looking at the other sutras translated by Saṅghabhara, we find only one other *dhāraṇī* sutra in addition to the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*. This indicates that he was not a proponent of esoteric Buddhism as such. Cf. T. 2151.55, 364b.

75. T. 984.19, 446b–459a.

76. T. 2157.55, 929ab.

77. T. 984.19, 449b.

78. Ibid., 447a.

79. Ibid., 452ac.

80. Ibid., 447bc.

81. Ibid., 449abc.

82. Ibid., 449a.

83. Ibid., 449c.

84. Ibid., 450a–451c.

85. T. 982.19, 415a–439b.

86. If the two sculptural tableaux featuring *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* as found in the Ellora Caves are anything to go by, we have a fixed iconographical type of the divinity in the Deccan around 650 CE (at the latest).

87. The *kumbhāṇḍa* is a class of horse-headed demons. Cf. *FDC* 6:5708c–5709b.

88. This arrangement constitutes the establishment of the outer boundaries of the ritual space.

89. This comment on what can only be referring to traditional Hindu practices in connection with establishing an altar is highly interesting as it indicates that originally Indian Buddhists did not use cow dung for their makeshift altars. Of course, in the later esoteric Buddhist tradition—such as that represented by the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, etc.—cow dung was universally recommended for esoteric Buddhist altars. Despite this, it is open to debate whether this practice ever became popular among Chinese Buddhists. In the later Shingon tradition of Japan, mud covered with plaster was commonly used as a substitute for dung.

90. This is a very early reference to the use of a *homa* or sacrificial fire in the context of esoteric Buddhism in China.

91. Ibid., 458c–459a.

92. T. 985.19, 459ac.

93. Ibid., 476b.

94. T. 22.1.

95. Ibid., 273c.

96. T. 1331.21. See Michel Strickmann, “*The Consecration Sūtra: A Buddhist Book of Spells*,” in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 75–118.

97. T. 1331.21, 495b, etc.

98. This is the date assigned by Strickmann to the *Guanding jing*. Cf. “*The Consecration Sūtra: A Buddhist Book of Spells*,” 90–93. I have not yet made up my mind whether I agree with this early date or not, but let us accept it as such for the time being.

99. T. 1393.21. Given the textual and structural independence of this scripture from the early versions of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, it is debatable whether it can be considered a translation in the real sense of the word. As for its purported date, we are in need of more precise data. It is not mentioned in the *CSJJ*, but occurs for the first time as an independent scripture in the *Gujin yijing tuji* (古今譯經圖紀, Record with Diagrams of Old and Recently Translated Scriptures) compiled by the monk Jingmai (靖邁, fl. seventh century) dating from 664–665 CE. Cf. T. 2151.55, 356a. Hence, there is good reason to consider its early dating a later attribution.

100. Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 109–113.

101. Ibid.

102. One way of reading the iconography and history of the Indian Mahāmāyūrī images extant in the Deccan can be found in Geri H. Malandra, *Unfolding a Maṇḍala: The Buddhist Cave Temples at Ellora* (Stony Brook: SUNY, 1993), 96–97. Although this study is both an interesting and inherently meaningful undertaking, it is fraught with formal and informal mistakes. Most severe is the author’s superficial understanding of the history and development of esoteric Buddhism in India, which after all is a cornerstone in understanding the Buddhist art of Ellora. For a review of this book see Henrik H. Sørensen, review of *Unfolding a Maṇḍala: The Buddhist Cave Temples at Ellora*, by Geri H. Malandra, *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions* 7 (1994): 105–108.

103. For a discussion of this material, see Henrik H. Sørensen, “A Ming Statue of the *Vidyārāja* Mahāmāyūrī in the Collection of the National Museum of Copenhagen,” *Oriental Art* 37, no. 3 (1991): 137–147.

104. T. 988.19, 483a.

105. T. 2157.55, 771a–1048a.

106. For biographical data on this monk, see *Zhongguo fojiao renming da cidian* (Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Personal Names), comp. Zhenhua Fashi (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1999), 873ab.

107. T. 2157.55, 929ab.





# The Theoretical Foundations of Pure Land Buddhist Practice according to Tanluan

Roger Corless

Duke University (retired)

## I. TANLUAN'S ANNOTATIONS TO THE TREATISE ON GOING TO BIRTH [IN THE PURE LAND]

ANNOTATIONS TO THE *GĀTHĀ on the Resolve to Be Born [in the Pure Land]* and the *Upadeśa on the Sūtras of Limitless Life*, the *Wuliangshou Jing* *Youbotishe Yuansheng Ji Zhu* (無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈註, or, for short, *Annotations to the Treatise on Going to Birth [in the Pure Land]*, 往生論註, *Wangshenglun Zhu*) of Tanluan (曇鸞, traditionally 476–542 CE but more probably c. 488–554 CE)<sup>1</sup> is the earliest extant treatise on Pure Land theory and practice in the Chinese tradition. It is a commentary on the *Gāthā on the Resolve to Be Born [in the Pure Land]* and the *Upadeśa on the Sūtras of Limitless Life* (*Wuliangshou Jing* *Youboti-she Yuansheng Ji*, 無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈), said to have been composed by Vasubandhu and translated by Bodhiruci.<sup>2</sup> Although Tanluan freely draws on references to Amitābha and Sukhāvati in many sutras and śāstras, he concentrates on the smaller and larger *Sukhāvativyūha* and the so-called *Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra* (more properly *Visualization [of Sukhāvati] Sūtra*, 觀經, *Guan Jing*). He seems to have been the first to treat these three sutras as a unit, as if they were a single text, saying that the name *Amitāyus*, “Limitless Life,” is the embodiment, essence, or main theme of the three sutras.<sup>3</sup>

Tanluan's focus is on practice and, following the Vasubandhu text, he organizes his treatise under the heads of five “practice gates” (念門, *nianmen*, literally “recollection” or “meditation” gates)—bowing, praise, resolution, visualization, and turning-towards. He understands *men* (門, gate) not only in its metaphorical sense of a dharma teaching but also literally:

GATE means “entrance and exit.” It is like someone who, finding a gate, comes in and goes out without hindrance. The first four practices

are the ENTRANCE GATES to Sukhāvātī while the last practice is the EXIT GATE of compassionately teaching and transforming [beings].<sup>4</sup>

The exit gate (迴向門, *huixiang men*) is simultaneously understood as the practice of “turning over” (迴施, *huishi*) merit to beings while one is still in samsara, and “turning and [re-]entering” (迴入, *huiru*) samsara after one has attained birth in Sukhāvātī, “teaching and transforming all beings so that they all go together towards (向, *xiang*) the way (道, *bodhi*) of the Buddha.”<sup>5</sup>

All five gates are fairly standard practices. Bowing, repeatedly and often in unison, is a common liturgical exercise, and it is usually combined with praise, or chanting. The bodhisattva resolve (or vow), the distribution of merit, and the compassionate return of the high bodhisattva to samsara are found throughout the Mahayana. Visualization, although it came to be regarded as typical of Vajrayana, seems to have been a distinguishing feature of early Mahayana, and it has even been suggested that Mahayana arose in response to, or dependent upon, visions of the supposedly extinct buddhas.<sup>6</sup>

Where Tanluan is distinctive is in relating all this more or less exclusively to Amitābha Buddha and Sukhāvātī and in providing a firm scholarly base for later Pure Land practice. Visualizing Sukhāvātī and, especially, chanting Amitābha Buddha’s name are relatively simple practices that have been called (not always kindly) “devotional,” and we are sometimes left with the impression that they are not only simple but simplistic, based on fantasy and superstition. Tanluan shows us the dharmic profundity belied by this simplicity. For the purposes of this article, I will concentrate on Tanluan’s discussions of the theoretical basis for the effectiveness of the visualization of Sukhāvātī, the invocation of the name of Amitābha Buddha, faith, and reliance on other-power.

## II. VISUALIZATION

Later Pure Land practice emphasizes the invocation of the name of Amitābha Buddha, but although Tanluan has something significant to say on this (as we shall see in the next section), he deals so extensively with visualization (觀察, *guancha*) that it is not too much to say that *Wangshenglun Zhu* is a text on visualization.<sup>7</sup> Although Tanluan bases himself, as he says, on the sutras, he does not write a

commentary on the sutras. There is nothing like the close adherence to the visualizations to Queen Vaidehī that we find, for example, in his near-contemporary Jingying Huiyuan (淨影慧遠, 523–592 CE).<sup>8</sup> The structure of *Wangshenglun Zhu* is controlled entirely by the root text, or commentary, attributed to Vasubandhu. It seems that Tanluan is addressing an audience that he assumes has good knowledge of the three sutras but does not understand their inner meaning. He functions, in fact, like a dharma master giving instruction to a congregation of learned practitioner-disciples.

The most important aspect of Sukhāvātī, says Tanluan, and the reason why “mixing our minds with it” (to adapt a common Tibetan phrase) is an effective practice, is its purity (清淨, *qingjing*), which he calls a universal feature (總相, *zongxiang*) of the decorations (*vyūha*) of Sukhāvātī (T. 40.828a6).

At the beginning [of his career], the Bodhisattva Dharmākara, in the presence of the Buddha Lokeśvararāja, having awoken to the Calm Knowledge of Non-Arising (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*), established at that moment what we call “Holy Seed Nature” (生種子, *shengzhongxing*), and in that Nature pronounced forty-eight Great Resolutions (*mahā-praṇidhāna*) by the practice of which he made this Land that we call Sukhāvātī to arise. This [Land] is what has been obtained with that [Nature] as cause, and because we say that the cause is in the effect, we call it its NATURE.<sup>9</sup>

Dharmākara, that is to say, made his bodhisattva resolution when he was at the eighth level (of the ten-level bodhisattva scheme according to the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*), the level at which one realizes that reality is fundamentally unarisen,<sup>10</sup> and, firmly established in that mind, he caused Sukhāvātī to arise. This means that Sukhāvātī is “the product of non-production” (無生之無, *wusheng zhi sheng*, T. 40.838c20–21) and “the Realm of Non-Arising” (無生界, *wusheng jie*, T. 40.839b6), and as such it surpasses, or is transcendent to, the Dao (explained by Tanluan as the knowledge or causation-matrix, T. 40.828a16–18) of the triple-world (*trailokadhātu*).<sup>11</sup> This is why Sukhāvātī is called the Pure Land: it is pure not only in its appearance and delights, it is pure because it is removed from the impurity of *vikalpa*, it is the land of *sukha*,<sup>12</sup> the land where *duḥkha* does not exist—i.e., it is extra-samsaric. Yet, it is still “there” in some sense, it is not a phantasm, it is not merely an *upāya*—“it exists extra-phenomenally, and we call it ‘subtle.’”<sup>13</sup>

Really, that is all that needs to be said. If one grasps this point, everything else follows. Since it is axiomatic that Pure Mind cannot be sullied by ignorant mind, but on the contrary Pure Mind can *purify* ignorant mind (as emphasized, for example, in *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*), mixing one's (impure) mind with the purity of Sukhāvatī will naturally transform the mind of the practitioner and lead it out of samsara. Tanluan gives various similes of this: it is like a wishing-jewel (*cintāmaṇi*) "whose nature resembles and accords with dharma" (i.e., it does not bestow samsaric goods, it leads out of samsara); it is like a bamboo tube that straightens a snake, which is naturally crooked, when it slithers inside; it is like the sea whose salty nature overwhelms the freshness of the waters of the rivers that empty into it; it is like the Bodhisattva Priyamkara, "who was so handsome that he gave rise to lust in people, yet whoever lusted after him, the [*Mahāratnakūṭa*] Sūtra says, was either reborn in [the Trāyastriṃśa] Heaven or made the bodhisattva resolution (*bodhicittotpāda*)."<sup>14</sup>

The practitioner need only aspire to birth in Sukhāvatī, and the extra-samsaric nature of Sukhāvatī will transform this dualistic craving into the realization of nonduality.

If a *cintāmaṇi* be wrapped in black or yellow cloth and cast into water, the water [says the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñā-pāramitā-sūtra*] becomes black or yellow in accordance with the color of the object. That pure buddha land has the peerless JEWEL of Amitābha Tathāgata wrapped in the CLOTH of the perfection of the merits of the innumerable decorations, and it is cast into the WATER of the mind of one who is to be born [into Sukhāvatī]. How could this not convert one's false view of BIRTH into the wisdom of NO-BIRTH?<sup>15</sup>

Although Tanluan reserves his main discussion of entering Sukhāvatī and returning to samsara to the fifth practice gate, he refers to these two aspects in regard to visualization. Understanding *vipaśyanā* as *guan* (觀, visualization) he says that it has two meanings: (1) Here and now (in samsara) one creates a mental representation (想, *xiang*) and BEHOLDS the three kinds of excellent decorations whose merits are in accordance with the truth; thus the practitioner obtains true merit and, one's merit being true, one certainly attains birth in that land. (2) Then, having been born in that pure land, one sees Amitābha Buddha. Bodhisattvas who have not yet achieved a purified mind certainly attain the dharma-body of the always-so (*samatādharmakāya*) and, together

with the bodhisattvas of purified mind and the bodhisattvas of the top levels, certainly attain quiescence in the always-so.<sup>16</sup>

This balanced reciprocity between contraction and expansion in Pure Land practice is central to Tanluan's explanation of why the practice is effective. In a famous (and famously obscure) passage called "The Purity Entering the Resolved Mind" (淨入願心, "Jingru yuanxin") he tells us that all the decorations (*vyūha*) flow back into the primary decoration of purity from which they have arisen, in the pure mind of Dharmākara Bodhisattva.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, all the stanzas of the *gāthā* by Vasubandhu arise from and flow back into the one essential *pada* on purity with which the *gāthā* opens: "Thus, I gaze on the marks of that realm / Which surpasses the triple-world's Dao."<sup>18</sup> The *gāthā* as a whole is the expanded mode (廣, *guang*), the first verse is the contracted mode (略, *lüe*), and the practitioner must be aware of both modes because this is the way reality is.

All buddhas and bodhisattvas have a double *dharmakāya*: first, the *dharmatā-dharmakāya*, second, the *upāya-dharmakāya*. The *upāya-dharmakāya* originates from *sheng* (生), the *dharmatā-dharmakāya*, and the *dharmatā-dharmakāya* emerges from *chu* (出), the *upāya-dharmakāya*. These two *dharmakāyas* are different but indivisible; they are one but not the same. Therefore, the co-inherence (相入, *xiangru*) of the expanded and contracted modes finds its unity in the word *dharma*. If bodhisattvas do not realize (知, *zhi*) the co-inherence of the explicate and implicate modes they can neither benefit themselves nor others.<sup>19</sup>

In a dense and even more obscure passage, Tanluan then tells us how this double but nondual *dharmakāya* is related to the nonduality of ignorance and wisdom, samsara and nirvana.

True knowledge is knowledge of the true marks. Because the true marks have no marks, true knowledge has no knowing. The unconditioned *dharmakāya* (無為法身, *wuwei fashen*) is the *dharmatā-dharmakāya*. Because *dharmatā* is quiescent, the *dharmakāya* has no marks. Because it has no marks, there is nothing that it does not mark: therefore, the [formless] *dharmakāya* is none other than the [*rūpakāya*] adorned with the [thirty-two] marks and [eighty] signs. Because it has no knowing, there is nothing that it does not know: therefore, true knowledge is the same as omniscience. If knowledge is classified as true it is clear that knowledge is neither created nor

uncreated. If the *dharmakāya* is categorized as unconditioned it is clear that the *dharmakāya* is neither with form nor formless.

[Objection:] This is a negation of a negation. How is it that this negated negation is not an affirmation? For, the lack of a negation is called an affirmation.

[Reply:] It does not depend on this, for we further negate the affirmation. We negate the affirmation and we negate the negation, up to hundreds of negations, until we reach the place of no analogies.<sup>20</sup>

The structure of this argument is Mādhyamikan, relying upon a treatise by Seng Zhao (僧肇, 374–414 CE) on objectless knowing.<sup>21</sup> Its content, however, is closer to Yogācāra. Tanluan combines the logic of Seng Zhao's Mādhyamika ("true knowledge has no knowing") with what we might call a proto-Yogācāra statement ("true knowledge is knowledge of the true marks"—a fully developed Yogācāra statement might be "true knowledge is knowledge of the hundred *dharmas*") to produce a conclusion about the nonduality of the form and formless *buddhakāyas*. This allows him to recommend the practice of visualization, based on form and leading to formlessness, but to escape the charge that this is dualistic, since the visualization of the form-body is itself precisely the experience of formlessness—as the *Heart Sūtra* says, form and formlessness are nondual.<sup>22</sup> The practitioner does not need to understand this subtlety, but one does, however, have to be *aware* of it—otherwise (as we shall see below, in the section on faith) one would not be practicing in accordance with the double *dharmakāya*.

These passages can perhaps be further understood on the basis of the mutuality, complementarity, or co-inherence of wisdom (*prajñā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) in pure, or buddha, mind, according to which the wisdom aspect is the understanding of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) for one's own benefit and the compassion aspect is the consequent activity in samsara for others' benefit. This distinction is commonly made in Tibetan Buddhism in which, for example, two forms of *bodhicitta* are distinguished (ultimate, or the wisdom aspect, and relative, or the compassion aspect), and the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra systems are known respectively as the wisdom aspect and compassion aspect teachings. Tanluan does not explicitly use this categorization, but he seems to imply it by the way he structures the progress of the Pure Land practitioner. It begins with the compassion of Dharmākara Bodhisattva

that, united with the wisdom of understanding emptiness, produces the Pure Land.

[Vasubandhu says:]

As the right Dao, the greatly compassionate,  
[Sukhāvatī] is sprung from transcendent good roots.

[Tanluan comments:]

This is the Great Dao that is always-so (*samatā*). The Dao that is always-so is called the right Dao (*samyaksaṃbodhi*) because always-so is the essential mark (*sva-lakṣaṇa*) of all the *dharmas*. Because the *dharmas* are always-so, [Dharmākara Bodhisattva] proclaimed his intention in the always-so; because he proclaimed his intention in the always-so his Dao is always-so, and because his Dao is always-so his great compassion is always-so. Great compassion is the cause of the DAO of Buddha; therefore [Vasubandhu] says as the right Dao, the greatly compassionate.

Compassion may be based upon three things: it may be based upon beings, when it is called small compassion; it may be based upon the *dharmas*, when it is called medium compassion; it may be based upon nothing (無, *wu*), when it is called great compassion. Great compassion, then, is the same as TRANSCENDENT (*lokuttara*) GOOD, and because Sukhāvatī IS SPRUNG FROM great compassion, we say that GREAT COMPASSION is the ROOT of the Pure Land.

Therefore[Vasubandhu]says,ITISSPRUNGFROMTRANSCENDENT GOOD ROOTS.<sup>23</sup>

When one is born in Sukhāvatī one attains the wisdom of the *dharmatā-dharmakāya* and the compassion of the *upāya-dharmakāya*, in the power of which one instantly returns to *samsara* to liberate beings although, in one's great wisdom, one knows that there are no beings to liberate.

The bodhisattvas [who return to *samsara*] observe that beings are ultimately nonexistent. Though they liberate limitless beings, in truth there is not a single being who is liberated. They make a show of liberating beings, it is like play.<sup>24</sup>

Sukhāvatī is born from compassion, leads to wisdom, and produces compassion.



## III. INVOCATION

The practice of invoking the name of Amitābha Buddha (念佛, *nianfo*) can be understood in the light, as it were, of the practice of visualization. As Sukhāvātī is a manifestation of the wisdom and compassion of Amitābha, so is his name.

[Vasubandhu says:]

AS THAT TATHĀGATA'S LIGHT IS THE IMAGE OF HIS WISDOM, SO HIS NAME IS [THE IMAGE] OF HIS ESSENCE. . . .

[Tanluan comments:]

[Amitābha's] light illumines the world in the ten directions without hindrance and is able to remove the ignorance (*avidyā*) and delusion (*moha*) of the beings in the ten directions. . . . The unimpeded light (*amitābhā*) of that *tathāgata*'s name [Amitābha] is able to disperse the ignorance of all beings and bring their [bodhisattva] resolution to completion.<sup>25</sup>

It follows, then, that saying the name of Amitābha is “saying” wisdom. But, Tanluan allows an opponent to ask, is this not just a metaphor? Names denote things, they are arbitrary indicators, not the things themselves, and they cannot affect what they signify. In reply, Tanluan distinguishes between two forms of language. Ordinary words are “names that are other than things” (名異法, *ming yi fa*) and are indeed arbitrary.<sup>26</sup> But there are other words—Daoist spells, Buddhist mantras, and, especially, the names of buddhas and bodhisattvas—which are “names that are the same as things” (名即法, *ming ji fa*): these do indeed affect what they signify and, says Tanluan, we all know this because we have used them and experienced their power. Thus, saying “Amitābha” is invoking wisdom.<sup>27</sup> Using the simile of the wishing-jewel again, he illustrates how this works.

[The name of Amitābha] is like a clean *cintāmaṇi* that, when placed in muddy water, cleanses it. If, although muddied by the transgressions of immeasurable births and deaths, one hears of Amitābha Tathāgata, one attains non-arising, for the CLEAN JEWEL of the name is cast into one's muddied mind. By its constant repetition, one's transgressions disappear, one's mind is cleansed, and one goes to birth [in Sukhāvātī].<sup>28</sup>



For Tanluan, the invocation of Amitābha is a mantra and, like a mantra, it must be repeated as often as possible so that it will gradually do its work.<sup>29</sup>

#### IV. FAITH

Although the Amitābha mantra is powerful, it is not automatic. Just as sunlight is invisible if one's eyes are closed, and as water is unable to fecundate a stone because of its resistance, the practitioner needs to appropriate the wisdom-light of Amitābha by turning towards it and being open to it. This responsiveness is called *xin* (信) and is usually translated by that slippery English word "faith." Tanluan links true faith with true practice according to the double *dharmakāya*.

One may invoke the name, keeping it in mind and reciting it, yet ignorance may still persist and one's [bodhisattva] resolution is not perfected. Why? Because one does not [as Vasubandhu says] EXERCISE ACCORDING TO THE TRUTH, one is not IN THIS CORRESPONDENCE of the NAME and ESSENCE. How does one not exercise according to the truth and not be in this correspondence of the name and essence? We say that it is due to not knowing that the Tathāgata has both a true body (實相身, *shixiang shen*) and a body for creatures (為物身, *weiwu shen*).

Further, there are three ways of not being in this correspondence: (1) one's faith (信心, *xinxin*) is not genuine, it is not missing, yet [as Laozi says of the Spirit of the Valley] it "scarcely exists"; (2) one's faith is not unified, it does not have determination; (3) one's faith is not constant, there are gaps in one's recitation. These three are completely interdependent: because of faith not being genuine, one is without determination; being without determination, one's recitation is not continuous: again, if one's recitation is not continuous, one does not attain determined faith (信, *xin*); not attaining determined faith, one's heart-and-mind (心, *xin*) is not genuine. These three complementaries are what we call EXERCISING IN THIS CORRESPONDENCE ACCORDING TO THE TRUTH. Therefore, the Discourse Master (Vasubandhu) bases himself on the words WITH ONE MIND, I [take refuge, etc.].<sup>30</sup>

This passage has been the subject of many interpretations, or shall we say educated guesses, but at the very least it seems to imply that one should commit oneself wholeheartedly, body and mind, to the uninterrupted practice of *nianfo*. Faith, then, for Tanluan, is not

so much belief, or even trust, it is more like faithfulness, remaining true to one's commitment. It is a *xin* that is compatible with Confucian meanings of the character.

Supposing one gets bored, forgets one's commitment, and gaps appear in one's chanting? Then, it seems, one should redouble one's visualization practice.

Visualizing the perfection of the decorations . . . one will be enabled to produce a true and pure faith and certainly be born in that buddha land of blessed peace.<sup>31</sup>

## V. OTHER-POWER

Tanluan was the first Chinese dharma master to use the term that has come to be translated as *other-power* (他力, *tali*; Jpn. *tariki*). In order to pave the way for his advocacy of the way of easy practice of trust (*xin*) in the Buddha Amitābha, he tells us of the problems associated with the way of difficult practice, the chief of which is "There is only one's own power, one cannot rely on the power of another."<sup>32</sup> What he appears to mean is that there is no buddha whom he can take as a teacher. Tanluan is acutely aware not only of living well after the time of Buddha Śākyamuni's disappearance, but of being an inhabitant of non-Buddhist China. "There has never been a buddha amongst us," he laments (T. 40.826b18). He discovers, however, after his meeting with Bodhiruci, that there is a buddha who, though no longer dwelling amongst humans, exists forever, like a Daoist Immortal, in a blessed paradise in the west, and in him he puts his trust.<sup>33</sup> He is minimally concerned, *pace* some of the later Pure Land teachers, with his *inability* to use his own power; he just seems to think it is foolish if, on hearing of the advantages of other-power, one still struggles along on one's own.

Here are some more similes of self-power and other-power. It is like someone who, because of being afraid of the three defilements (*rāga*, *dveṣa*, *moha*) receives the precepts (*vinaya*), and because of receiving the precepts is able to practice meditation, and because of meditation is able to exercise the supernormal powers, and because of the supernormal powers is able to play in the four corners of the world. Such is called self-power. Then again, it is like a lowly person who, instead of riding on a donkey, joins the procession of a world emperor (*cakravartin*) and rides through the air, playing in the four corners

of the world without hindrance. Such is called other-power. How fortunate! Future students will hear of other-power and they can ride upon it and produce the mind of faith! Do not rely on yourselves!<sup>34</sup>

It is sometimes claimed that Tanluan's advocacy of other-power was a major departure from traditional Buddhism, and other-power came to be regarded, especially in Japan, as a distinctively Pure Land feature while the rest of Buddhism was characterized by reliance on self-power. If, however, self-power and other-power are viewed as intrinsically opposed, it needs to be explained how this is not a very un-Buddhist, dualistic position. In fact, it is possible to show that there is no form of Buddhism that can unequivocally and unambiguously be said to be committed to self-power practice.<sup>35</sup> Tanluan and his successors are merely on that end of the self-other spectrum in which they find that, having taken refuge in the Triple Jewel, their practice is assisted by something or someone beyond themselves.

The source of Amitābha's power is rooted in the resolutions he made when he was the Bodhisattva Dharmākara. As we have seen, Tanluan tells us that these resolutions, which are recorded in the *Larger Sukhāvāṭīvyūha*, were made at the eighth bodhisattva level. This is not only the level at which the calm knowledge of non-arising is obtained, it is a level of such power "that it is called the Stage of Perfection, of Birth, of Finality."<sup>36</sup>

The present lordly divine power of Amitābha Tathāgata originates from the forty-eight resolutions of Dharmākara Bodhisattva. His resolution was completed (成, *cheng*) by his power, and his power is perfected (就, *jiu*) by his resolution. The resolution was not vain and the power is not empty. His power and his resolution go together, in the final analysis they are not different, and therefore they are called perfection (成就, *chengjiu*).<sup>37</sup>

That is to say, perhaps, that when reality is seen as it is, practice and attainment become nondual. This is a conclusion that is also reached, *mutatis mutandis*, by teachers in other Buddhist traditions, such as Sōtō Zen and rDzogs chen.<sup>38</sup>

## NOTES

1. T. 40.1819, 826a–844a. Note that *ji* (偈) is the Buddhist pronunciation of the character usually pronounced *jie*. See Robert Henry Mathews, *Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary*, rev. American ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1943), entry 775a.
2. T. 26.1524, 230c–233a.
3. *Fo minghao wei jingti* (佛名號為經體, T. 40.826b14).
4. T. 40.835a, 21–23.
5. T. 40.836a, 25–26.
6. P. M. Harrison, “Buddhānusmṛti in the Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhā-vasthita-samādhi-sūtra,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9 (1978): 35–37.
7. Visualization is repeatedly referred to passim, and about sixty-one percent of the text (nearly thirty-three of the fifty-four columns in the *Taishō* edition—827c29–833c14, 836a28–841b3) is explicitly concerned with visualization.
8. Kenneth K. Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990).
9. T. 40.828c1–4.
10. Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970; original ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1932), 290.
11. 勝過三界道, *sheng guo san jie tao*. T. 40.828a16.
12. The form *sukhā*, as found in the compound *Sukhāvatī*, appears to be a Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit variant, which Edgerton ascribes to metrical considerations. Franklin Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), sub *sukhākarā*.
13. 出有而有曰微, *chu you er yo, yue wei*. T. 40.830a20.
14. T. 40.836b3–c5, 839c17–18, 828c5–6, 857a25–27. See also *Śikṣāsamuccaya* 168: As it is said in the *Upāyakaṣāya-sūtra*, concerning the love of the girl *Srīdakṣiṇottarā* for the Bodhisattva *Priyaṃkara*, “By the vow of *Priyaṃkara* the woman who should look on him with passionate mind would put off her womanhood and become a man, an exalted being. Behold, Ānanda, such are his qualities: by whom some beings go to hell, by the same, when he has brought them to birth amongst heroes, they fall into passion, they go to heaven, they become men” (Śāntideva, compiler, *Śikṣāsamuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine*, trans. Cecil Bendall and W. H. D. Rouse [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971; original ed. London: John Murray, 1922], 164f.).
15. T. 40.839a28–b3.

16. T. 40.836a9–15. The last phrase, 寂滅平等 (*jimie pingdeng*), appears to be a simile of nirvana.
17. The passage begins at T. 40.841b4.
18. T. 26 230c21, 觀彼世界相勝過三界道 (*guan bi shijie xiang shengguo sanjie dao*). This is my interpretation of the phrase 一法句 (*yi fa ju*), based on my understanding of T. 40.828a5–b1 and 838c10–15.
19. T. 40.841b12–17.
20. T. 40.841b21–c1.
21. 般若無知, “Banruo Wuzhi,” *Zhaolun 肇論* 3 (T. 45.153a–154c). English translation, Richard Robinson, “Prajñā Has No Knowing,” in *Early Mādhyamika in India and China* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 212–221.
22. Tanluan does not quote the *Heart Sūtra* because, perhaps, it had not yet been written. Nattier has proposed that it was composed in Chinese c. 650 CE and was subsequently “backtranslated” into Sanskrit. Jan Nattier, “The *Heart Sūtra*: A Chinese Apocryphal Text?” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 15, no. 2 (1992): 153–223.
23. T. 40.828c10–18.
24. T. 40.843b25–27.
25. T. 40.835b13–20.
26. This position is recognizably Buddhist and is in opposition to Confucian *mingjiao* (名教) theory.
27. T. 40.835c2–17.
28. T. 40.839a25–28.
29. Tanluan’s explanation is in line with general Indian tradition as described by Jan Gonda, “The Indian Mantra,” *Oriens* 16 (1963): 244–297. “The mantras relating to the gods represent their essence—they are in a sense identical with them . . .” (p. 274). “The mantras constitute the spiritual body [of the divinity], as known to mind and ear, whereas the tangible and visible image is the manifestation for touch and sight” (p. 283). I am indebted to Richard Payne for alerting me to this valuable study.
30. T. 40.835b20–c2.
31. T. 40.839a20–21.
32. T. 40.826b5–6.
33. According to the *Xu Gao Seng Zhuan* (續高僧傳), Bodhiruci gave Tanluan a text or texts on Amitābha (ambiguously known as *Guan Jing*, *The Visualization Classic[s]*, which may or may not be the famous sutra of the same name) with

the words, “These are the formulae of the Greatest Immortal” (此大仙方, *ci Da Xian fang*, T. 50.470b29). Daoist themes control much of the structure, although not the content, of Tanluan’s work. See my “Tanluan: Taoist Sage and Buddhist Bodhisattva,” in *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society*, ed. David W. Chappell, Buddhist and Taoist Studies II: Asian Studies at Hawaii, no. 34 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 36–45.

34. T. 40.844a21–27. The similes are quoted from the beginning of the *Daśabhūmikavibhāṣā-śāstra*.

35. See my “Self-Power Practice with Other-Power Attitude: An Interpretation of Mind in Shin Buddhism,” *The Pure Land*, n.s., 8–9 (December 1992): 166–205.

36. Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, 290.

37. T. 40.840a13–16.

38. See my “Beginning at the End: ‘No-Practice’ in Shin and Early rDzogs Chen,” *The Pure Land*, n.s., 12 (December 1995): 253–265.

## Looking for Bhairava: Exploring the Circulation of Esoteric Texts Produced by the Song Institute for Canonical Translation

Charles D. Orzech

University of North Carolina, Greensboro

“Then one should, in accord with the method of Mahiṣa mukha (摩訶沙目佉) . . . go to the cemetery at night, naked and with disheveled hair, and take up ash to draw a square mandala.”<sup>1</sup>

IN HIS INFLUENTIAL STUDY of the Tachikawa-ryū's (立川流) notorious skull ritual, James H. Sanford drew attention to the stubborn persistence of “practices and imagery that open the suggestive possibility of unfamiliar, but perhaps fairly direct, links between Japanese *mikkyō* and late tantric developments in India and Central Asia.”<sup>2</sup> As in Japan, in China esoteric Buddhism and the Buddhist tantras had significant and long-lasting impact, particularly during the Tang, but also under the Yuan and following dynasties. The Tang transmission predates the rise to prominence of the cemetery cult, and transmissions following Kublai's conquest of the Song in 1279 rely heavily on imports from Tibet. But during the Song we are faced with the obverse of the Japanese situation explored by Sanford. Translations of the later tantras characterized by the cult of the cemetery (*śmaśāna*, 寒林; *śītavana*, 尸陀林) were produced under imperial patronage. Yet, even though such texts were translated, the prevailing scholarly opinion is that they had no impact in China and disappeared with little trace.<sup>3</sup> Examining evidence in Song catalogues, the diary of the Japanese pilgrim Jōjin, and still extant sculpture from both the Northern and the Southern Song, I argue that the scriptures translated under imperial patronage in the Northern Song did have an impact in China. Indeed, I will show that while some of the translated scriptures were officially logged into the canon and put into circulation, other translations were kept “off the books” and, contrary to prevailing scholarly opinion, there is evidence for the impact of *both* sorts of scriptures.<sup>4</sup>

## COLLECTING

We begin with what was at once a truly visionary and a truly grandiose undertaking at the beginning of the Northern Song (960–1127). After a hiatus of more than a century and a half, the newly ensconced Song regime renewed efforts to translate Buddhist texts into Chinese.<sup>5</sup> Supported by an immense infusion of imperial prestige, cash, and institutional infrastructure, four Song emperors pursued what was to be the last major effort of its kind until the modern period. For one hundred years the Institute for Canonical Translation (譯經院, *Yijing yuan*, soon renamed the Institute for the Propagation of the Teaching, *Chuanfa yuan*, 傳法院) turned out new translations of recently imported Indic works.<sup>6</sup>

The acquisition of the Buddhist scriptures was an integral part of a vision of a great continental empire centered on the Song. Apparently seeking to displace India as the font of the dharma on the continent, the first two Song emperors set out to procure, translate, and distribute *all* the Buddha's teachings.<sup>7</sup> Thus Taizu (太祖, r. 960–976) sent missions to South and Central Asia. Initial feelers led to the dispatch of 157 monks to collect texts—texts that would become the fuel for the imperially sponsored translation institute and for the first full *printing* of the Buddhist scriptures. Shortly thereafter the Court received four Indian monks who came to form the core of the translation team. They were Devaśāntika (天息災, from 978 called 法賢, d. 1000), Dānapāla (施護, d. 1018), Dharmadeva (法天, d. 1001), and Fahu (法護).<sup>8</sup> The first two are among the most prolific translators in Chinese history. For the purposes of the translation project the second emperor Taizong (太宗) in 982 constructed a special building comprising three offices and support structures in the western sector of the Taiping xingguo (太平興國) temple.

In addition to translating newly imported scriptures, an imperially authorized dragnet scoured monastery libraries for Sanskrit manuscripts that had not yet been translated.<sup>9</sup> Taking advantage of new technology, the distribution of the newly translated scriptures went beyond hand copying. For the first time the canon would be printed. A special building, the Institute for Printing the Canon (印經院, *Yinjing yuan*), was erected on the same grounds and dedicated to the printing of a complete edition of the Buddhist scriptures and to issuing periodic updates as new translations became available. Referred to as



the Kaibao canon (first edition, Chengdu, 983) after the reign period in which it appeared, it comprised some 130,000 woodblocks.<sup>10</sup>

Although translation by committee was common in Chinese Buddhist history,<sup>11</sup> the circumstances of translation in the *Yijing yuan* were remarkable:

In the Eastern Hall facing West, powder is used to set out an altar to the sages with openings [consisting of] four gates, each with an Indian monk presiding over it and reciting esoteric spells for seven days and nights. Then, a wooden altar is set up and surmounted with a circle having the syllables of the sages and worthies. [This is] called the Mahādharmā Mandala (大法曼荼羅). The sages and worthies are invoked and ablutions are performed using the *agha* [vessel]. Incense, flowers, lamps, water, and fruits are presented as offerings. Bowing and circumambulating [take place]. Prayers for protection from evil are offered in order to extirpate demons and obstructions.<sup>12</sup>

The process of translation itself was highly structured and proceeded in nine stages:

**First**, the *yizhu* (譯主, Chief Translator), [sitting] on the head-seat and facing outwards, expounds the Sanskrit text.

**Second**, the *zhengyi* (證譯, Philological Assistant), sitting on the left of the head-seat, reviews and evaluates the Sanskrit text with the Chief Translator.

**Third**, the *zhengwen* (證文, Text Appraiser), sitting on the right of the head-seat, listens to the oral reading of the Sanskrit text by the Chief Translator in order to check for defects and errors.

**Fourth**, the *shuzi fanxueseng* (書字梵學僧, Transcriber-monk-student of Sanskrit) listens to the Sanskrit text [recited by the Chief Translator] and transcribes it into Chinese characters. This is a transliteration.

**Fifth**, the *bishou* (筆受, Translator Scribe) translates Sanskrit sounds into Chinese language.

**Sixth**, the *zhuiwen* (綴文, Text Composer) links up the characters and turns them into meaningful sentences.

**Seventh**, the *canyi* (參譯, Proofreader) proofreads the words of the two lands so that there are no errors.

**Eighth**, the *kanding* (刊定, Editor) edits and deletes unnecessarily long expressions and fixes the meaning of phrases.

**Ninth**, the *ruwen* (潤文, Stylist) administers the monks and occupies the seat facing south. [He also] participates in giving style [to the translations].<sup>13</sup>

Records of the ongoing work of the Institute are contained in a variety of sources, but none conveys the flavor and atmosphere of the undertaking better than the *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure Compiled in the Dazhong Xiangfu Period* (大中祥符法寶錄, hereafter *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure*).<sup>14</sup> The bulk of the work, presented in 1013 and covering the first prolific decades of the Institute, consists of periodic dated reports of translations completed, summaries of contents of the works, names of members of the translation teams, and requests for entry into the canon and circulation. It reads much like any bureaucratic progress report. Indeed, this should be borne in mind as we consider the distinctiveness of this enterprise.

The organizing structure of the official government monastery and more particularly the edifice built for the production of translations reflects Song imperial ambitions. I was prompted to reflect on these situations—particularly with regard to the translation of the tantras—by my reading of anthropologist James Clifford’s *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*.<sup>15</sup> In this book Clifford uses Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of a “contact zone” to explore the function and dynamics of museums and the cultural encounters that sometimes take place there. Pratt’s “contact zone” is a “space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.”<sup>16</sup> Clifford turns these observations to museums:

When museums are seen as contact zones, their organizing structure as a *collection* becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship*—a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull. The organizing structure of the museum-as-collection functions like Pratt’s frontier. A center and a periphery are assumed: the center a point of gathering, the periphery an area of discovery. The museum,

usually located in a metropolitan city, is the historical destination for the cultural productions it lovingly and authoritatively salvages, cares for, and interprets.<sup>17</sup>

Broadly speaking, official monasteries in the Tang and Song can be seen as vehicles for the domestication and display of the foreign or strange, and they served some of the traditional functions of a museum/library.<sup>18</sup> Much like a modern museum, the Institute was located at the metropolitan center and served as the repository and destination for a collection of manuscripts. The processing of texts at the Institute resembled a production line more than a monastery. Indeed, although the translation process is framed by esoteric ritual it nonetheless looks remarkably like the situations described by Clifford in encounters between Native Americans and museum officials in majority museums.<sup>19</sup> There too, objects in the possession of the museum are brought out and Native American ritual specialists engage in appropriate ritual and interpretive behavior. The presence of esoteric ritual is overshadowed by the entire building and government presence of the *Yijing yuan* itself. This monastery was simultaneously a museum and a factory for the production of the Buddhist dharma, a place for the collection, selection, and translation of texts that were then enshrined in the newly printed Canon and disseminated to official government monastic libraries and given as prestations to other states.<sup>20</sup>

The translations produced at the Institute came from all periods and schools of Buddhism in India, but it is no surprise—given the time period—that much of what was translated in the *Yijing yuan* we today classify as “esoteric.” The range of such texts included major works such as the new full translation of the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha* (Dānapāla, T. 882), the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (Devaśāntika, T. 1191), the *Guhyasamāja-tantra* (Dānapāla, T. 885), and the *Hevajra ḍākinī-jala-saṃvara-tantra* (Dharmapāla, T. 892). But it also included substantial ritual manuals for the worship of the likes of Vināyaka (Dharmabhadra, T. 1272) and Mārīcī (Devaśāntika, T. 1257) as well as numerous short *dhāraṇī* texts.<sup>21</sup> In the sheer number of texts produced the Song Institute approached the Tang dynasty output, though on average the length of scriptures translated was shorter.<sup>22</sup> Although both Dharmabhadra and Dānapāla produced numerous short transliterated *dhāraṇī* these account for a fraction of the translation output. With the exception of Dharmapāla, whose efforts were focused mainly on Mahayana texts (though he translated the *Hevajra-tantra*), esoteric texts accounted

for roughly half of the output. Further, while most of these were previously untranslated, a significant portion of the translators' work involved retranslation. The Institute continued to put out translations for another six decades after Dharmadeva, Dānapāla, and Devaśāntika left the scene. Even excluding the shorter *dhāraṇī* texts, over half of the translations of these four monks were of "esoteric" materials—including considerable material related to the *siddha* movement and the cult of the cemetery. How were these texts received? What became of them?

Jan Yün-hua's pioneering "Buddhist Relations between India and Sung China" (1966) argued that the Song translations failed to make an impact and offered a variety of reasons, including Chinese Buddhism's own "sectarian growth," government control of translation, and changes affecting Buddhism elsewhere in Asia—particularly "the rise of Tantrism and the general deterioration of the religion in India and Centra Asia due to the spread of Islam."<sup>23</sup> Building on Jan's work, Tansen Sen has problematized and updated some of these conclusions in "The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations during the Song Dynasty."<sup>24</sup> Sen questions the utility of the decline narrative (both for India and for Song China) and focuses on the importance of the Song translations in state-to-state relations on the continent. On the question of their internal impact Sen argues that "shifting doctrinal interest among the members of the Chinese Buddhist community toward indigenous schools and practices rendered most of the new translations and their contents obsolete in China."<sup>25</sup> There is much to recommend this thesis and overall I am in agreement with it, but there are still some unresolved issues. The dismissal of the Song translations as a "failure" begs the question while overlooking important evidence concerning the internal impact of the products of the Institute.

Sen, like Jan, points out that the new Song translations appeared to have stimulated little or no exegetical work, and he argues that the lack of commentary is evidence that the new translations had no impact.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the issue of commentary is an important albeit complicated one, as commentaries sometimes play a role in lineage formation. Many commentaries in Chinese Buddhism are philosophically or doctrinally oriented expositions of the meaning of a text. Thus, for instance, the great *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana-sūtra* produced by Śubhākarasiṃha and Yixing in the mid-Tang has considerable interest in doctrinal or metaphysical topics and may have been related to efforts at lineage

formation.<sup>27</sup> However, despite the overtly doctrinal opening chapter of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, the scripture and its *Commentary* are deeply enmeshed in the construction of altars and the performance of ritual. During the late Tang the performance of ritual and the production of ritual manuals dominates esoteric Buddhist literature. These manuals, I argue, should be seen as another sort of “commentary,” one that is often overlooked. Further, while I agree that Chinese Buddhism was, by the Song, dominated by its own discourses, we should not lose sight of the fact that many of the texts translated at the Institute were ritual manuals or *dhāraṇīs* intended for recitation and not doctrinal treatises. Holding up typical commentarial activity as an indice of the impact and circulation of Buddhist texts and teachings will skew our vision in favor of a certain kind of intellectual tradition, and this may lead us to miss the impact of esoteric Buddhism in ritual and iconography. To complicate matters further, much commentary on esoteric ritual during the Tang was given orally by the *ācārya*. Ironically, we know of this “secret” oral commentary and of some of its contents because of the written records of it linked with various lineages in Japan.<sup>28</sup> Alas, we are not so fortunate for the Song. What we seem to be lacking in the Song are commentaries on key texts such as the *Guhyaśamāja* and the *Hevajra*. It is likely that the lack of such commentaries indicates a lack of *ācāryas* disseminating these teachings. But this does not rule out limited circulation of some texts while others we now deem “important” were ignored. I explore evidence of such circulation below.

The work of the Institute was ostensibly to translate and disseminate the Buddhist teaching—this was, after all, the point of renaming it the Institution for the Propagation of the Teaching. But despite imperial leadership the Institute faced a variety of challenges during its century of operation, including repeated requests by monks at the Institute to shut down the project, calls from members of the court and bureaucracy to shut it down on ideological and financial grounds, a shortage of Sanskrit manuscripts and a shortage of trained Sanskritists.<sup>29</sup> The lack of trained Sanskrit scholars was an issue, though attempts were made to deal with this problem, and while it is true that the period of the most prolific output was during the tenure of Devaśāntika, Dānapāla, and Dharmadeva, Jōjin reports the presence of a number of South Asian and Central Asian monks at the Institute in 1073.

But we should not let these very real difficulties distract us from the question of what, if any, impact the large number of works translated

in the first two decades of the Institute's operation had on Song Buddhism. Both Jan and Sen—following earlier Chinese scholars—also raise the possibility that the new texts were suppressed because they offended Chinese moral sensibilities. I will address this thesis below, but the evidence is scant and equivocal. As Huang Qijiang has shown, successive Northern Song emperors spent a great deal of money and personal prestige on these efforts in the face of mounting criticism from nativistic members of the *Guwen* (“ancient literature”) movement. The printed Chinese translations *certainly* circulated outside of the Song—and new teachings and deities were prominent in Liao and Xixia, and in Tibet and Nanzhao of the time. Indeed, as new translations were produced, new blocks were cut and new scriptures printed and the printed canon and its “updates” figured importantly in state-to-state diplomacy in the late tenth and the first half of the eleventh century.<sup>30</sup> Can we accept that these texts were thoroughly suppressed within the Song borders while being promoted and coveted outside of them? Finally, I argue much of what we call “esoteric Buddhism” found a home in the interstices of already present Chinese Buddhist ideologies and practices and was thus rendered “invisible.”<sup>31</sup>

### NAMING

Before examining these issues in detail it is helpful to consider how modern scholarship understands esoteric Buddhism and how that might differ from Tang and Song understandings of esoteric literature and the religious practices it reflects. Much of the confusion surrounding the topic of esoteric Buddhism stems from a failure to recognize that “esoteric Buddhism” is “the creation of the scholar’s study.”<sup>32</sup> Simply put, the English category esoteric Buddhism came into being in the early twentieth century as a part of the rise of the study of religion, and of Asian religions in particular. It represents a synthesis based upon a wide range of data (South Asian, Central Asian, East Asian) and has its own history and agendas that are distinct from various traditional discourses involving *mantrayāna*, *vajrayāna*, *mijiao*, *mikkyō*, etc. Contemporary scholarship has often treated “esoteric Buddhism,” “tantric Buddhism,” the fourfold doxology of *kriyā*, *caryā*, *yoga*, and *annutarayoga tantra*, as well as other more specialized terms like *Yoginī tantra* as unproblematic, natural, and universal categories. But all of these terms have specific histories.<sup>33</sup> The term “esoteric Buddhism”

as it is now widely used (let alone “tantric Buddhism”) cannot in any unproblematic way be equated with the terms *mijiao* or *mikkyō*.<sup>34</sup> To understand Song reception of the newly translated works requires not only historical research, but also research guided by an awareness of the indigenous taxonomies of the time. These taxonomies dictated what could be easily seen and assimilated and what posed problems, went unnoticed, or went unreported. In short, the question is whether anyone at the time regarded these texts as distinctive, if so, in what ways, and consequently how their circulation was handled. As we will see, different types of texts were handled in different ways.

Much of what modern scholars now classify as esoteric or tantric Buddhism fell into a variety of other indigenous taxonomies. For example, the eighth-century monk Amoghavajra (不空金剛) labeled his Buddhism variously as “the Yoga of the Five Families” (五部瑜伽), “the Yoga of the Eighteen Assemblies” (十八會瑜伽), “the Great Teaching of Yoga” (瑜伽大教), “the Adamantine Vehicle of Yoga” (瑜伽金剛乘), and even “the Esoteric Wheel of Teaching and Command” (祕密教令輪). But, in his own words, much of what he taught was “Mahayana” and the “Yoga” was in no way incompatible with that teaching.<sup>35</sup> These Tang dynasty distinctions are the foundation for Song taxonomies.

A search for Song understandings of the new works being translated leads us first to Zanning (贊寧, 919–1001).<sup>36</sup> The great exegete and monastic leader, writing in the early Northern Song in his *Lives of Eminent Monks Composed in the Song* (宋高僧傳, *Song gaoseng zhuan*), distinguished three kinds of Buddhist teaching, Exoteric (顯教, which he characterizes as “the Vinaya, Sutra, and Abhidharma of all the vehicles”), Esoteric (密教, “which is the method of Yoga: the *abhiṣeka* of the five divisions, the *homa*, the three secrets, and the methods for the mandala”), and Mind (心教, “which is the method of Chan”). He associates the esoteric teaching with the Tang masters Vajrabodhi (金剛智) and Amoghavajra and places them in a taxonomy of “wheels,” calling this one the “Wheel of Instruction and Command” (教令輪, *jiaoling lun*). Elsewhere, in the “Transmission of the Esoteric Basket” (傳密藏, *Chuan mi zang*) found in *Outline of Clerical History* (大宋僧史略, *Da Song Seng shi lue*, T. 2126, commissioned in 998), Zanning presents another taxonomy based on the technology of *dhāraṇīs*, the use of powder mandalas, and Amoghavajra’s introduction of altars for *abhiṣeka* (灌頂).<sup>37</sup>



Despite Zanning's enthusiastic promotion of and intimate connection with the efforts of the Song to translate newly imported Buddhist scriptures, I find in his work no mention of any of these new scriptures being distinctive. Indeed, Zanning's pronouncements appear to be entirely retrospective. While Zanning's "wheel" scheme is innovative his interest in *dhāraṇī* technology and in the taxonomic use of *Mijiao* and *Xianjiao* appear to be in the mainstream. Such *xian/mi* (顯/密, i.e., esoteric/exoteric) distinctions are also found in the work of the eleventh-century Liao dynasty (遼) cleric Daoshen (道殷), who promoted Huayan/*Mijiao* syntheses during the reign of the emperor Daozong (道宗, 1055–1101). Daoshen's *Xianmi yuantong chengfo xinyao ji* (顯密圓通成佛心要集) clearly demonstrates the currency of the *xian/mi* binary distinction during the eleventh century.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps most helpful in this regard are the records produced by the officials of the Institute for Canonical Translation itself in the *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure*. Despite recent scholarly wrangling concerning the term "esoteric Buddhism," the bibliographical taxonomy of the *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure* is stunningly simple. All texts are classified as either Mahayana or Hinayana, sutra, *vinaya*, or *śāstra*. Each entry reports out a title, its classification, where it was preached, and a summary of its contents. All texts are classified as belonging to the "Hinayana Scriptural Collection" (小乘經藏), "Mahayana Scriptural Collection" (大乘經藏), or "esoteric portion of the Mahayana Scriptural Collection" (大乘經藏秘密部).<sup>39</sup> There are also occasional uses of other subsidiary classifiers, such as "Yoga" (瑜伽), "Lineage/School of the Five Secrets" (五密宗), and even the "Section on Subjugation" (降伏部).<sup>40</sup> Contrary to some scholars who have questioned the existence of "esoteric" (秘密) as a category in Song Buddhism, this evidence makes it plain that "esoteric" was a well-understood and frequently employed taxonomic term and a distinct subdivision within the Mahayana. What's more, when we examine what the *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure* dumps into the "esoteric" box we find there everything from simple *dhāraṇī* texts to the *Guhyasamāja*. Apparently the compilers of the *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure* regarded all *dhāraṇī* as "esoteric."

While this information allows us to see certain continuities between the Tang and the Song, it gives us little purchase on Song perceptions of some of the more provocative texts being rendered into Chinese. Doxological categories that would signal the distinctiveness of the cult of the cremation ground, of texts of the *Anuttarayogatantra* or *Yoginī*



tantra, are almost entirely absent. Of course the term *yoginī* (明妃 or 瑜擬尼<sup>41</sup>) appears frequently in a range of material dating back to the *Mahāvairocana-tantra*, but it is not used as a taxonomic category. Further, I have thus far found only a single instance of the term “Highest Yoga” (無上瑜伽, *Anuttarayoga*) in the canon.<sup>42</sup> This occurs in the *Scripture on Safeguarding the Great-thousand Kingdoms* (*Shouhu da qian guo tu jing*, 守護大千國土經, *Mahāsahasrapramardana-sūtra*, T. 999) translated by Dānapāla in 983. I say more about this scripture below. The *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure* records Dānapāla’s 1002 translation of the *Guhyasamāja-tantra* (佛說一切如來金剛三業最上祕密大教王經, T. 885) and summarizes its contents. But aside from a mention of *yoginī* (明妃) it says nothing about its iconography.<sup>43</sup> Also dutifully catalogued is Devaśāntika’s 986–987 translation of the *Great Mārīcī Bodhisattva Sūtra* (大摩里支菩薩經, T. 1257). It contains considerable cemetery imagery, but even in this case the *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure* mentions nothing out of the ordinary.<sup>44</sup>

One indication that someone noted that some of the texts were distinctive appears in the *Chronicle of the Buddhas and Patriarchs* (*Fo zu tong ji*, 佛祖統記, compiled by Zhipan, 志磐, in 1269).<sup>45</sup> It claims to quote an imperial edict of 1017 that begins by defending translation subsidies, but continues with a warning that care must be taken else the “heterodox and orthodox” would get mixed up. It then states that “blood sacrifices are inimical to the True Vehicle and foul curses are contrary to the exquisite principle. This newly translated *Vināyaka-sūtra* in four *juan* is not permitted to be entered into the canon. From now on this [sort of] scripture will not be translated” (T. 2035 49.405c26–406a2).<sup>46</sup> Jan, Sen, and others have cited Zhipan’s comment as evidence that the later tantras offended Chinese sensibilities and were therefore suppressed. But we cannot assume that our own or even later Chinese attitudes and mores concerning what is or is not transgressive apply during the Song. Sex could be found in certain Buddhist ritual texts from at least the Tang (and this does not even broach the subject of sexuality in Daoist ritual), and though it is clear that certain passages were rendered obliquely, such obfuscation also occurred in South Asia and is one way to render passages meant for initiates.<sup>47</sup> So, too, ritual violence and its iconographic representation is not unknown in esoteric texts and practices, as is evident from the use of *homas* of subjugation.<sup>48</sup> Transgression, in short, is a “cultural system.”<sup>49</sup> Whether we take Zhipan’s comment as a genuine report of

the eleventh century (I have been unable to locate notice of such a proscription in contemporary sources) rather than of Zhipan's own time and concerns, it is nonetheless witness to familiarity with and rejection of certain of the texts produced at the Institute.<sup>50</sup>

But exactly what was so alarming? The objections cited here pertain to "blood sacrifices" (葷血之祀, literally "sacrifices of flesh and blood") and to "curses" (厭詛之辭, literally "abominable curses"), which are judged to be contrary to the "True Vehicle" (真乘) and to its "exquisite principle" (尤乖於妙理).<sup>51</sup> It seems likely that these are objections to common elements of the cemetery cult. And even this was not new. Elements of cemetery practice including the use of human bones in ferocious *homa* offerings and the revival of corpses dates at least as early as Śubhākarasimha's (善無畏, Shanwuwei, 637–735) 726 translation of the *Subāhuparipṛcchā* (蘇婆呼童子請問經).<sup>52</sup> However, unlike earlier translations where the import of the passages appear to have been rendered discretely, some Song translations were transparent and seem to revel in gory cemetery sorcery.<sup>53</sup>

In this regard the *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure* may be as interesting for what it does not record as for what it does record. As the official gateway to the canon, the *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure* took careful account of the work of the Institute between 983 and 1013. The precision of its entries coupled with records of canons produced from the Song printings in Liao, Korea, and elsewhere and the attribution of translators of texts highlights certain glaring omissions. The omissions include texts such as Devaśāntika's translation of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (大方廣菩薩藏文殊師利根本儀軌經, T. 1191 translated between 983 and 1000), and Dharmabhadra's translation of a text dedicated to Vajrabhairava (T. 1242 translated between 989 and 999 quoted at the head of this essay). Both should have appeared in the reports but do not. Intriguingly a four-volume text dedicated to Vināyaka (金剛薩埵說頻那夜迦天成就儀軌經, T. 1272) that might be the one cited in the *Chronicle* "proscription" was translated by Dharmabhadra sometime between 989 and 999, but it, too, is notably absent from the *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure*. What are we to make of the omissions? Are these silences evidence that texts not mentioned in the *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure* circulated only outside of the Song boundaries? How could such a prohibition be policed? Are they mere oversights, or does their omission reflect official suppression? Or perhaps the silence about their production should alert us to the fact that the distinctive

character of some of these texts was noted and resulted in their being given special attention.

### CONTROLLING

Although there was mounting opposition to the grand vision of the early Song emperors, the Institute remained in operation for a century. We are afforded a unique glimpse of the Institute for the Propagation of the Dharma near the end of its existence by the Japanese Tendai monk Jōjin (成尋, 1011–1081), who documented his journey to Tiantaishan and Wutaishan in 1072–1073 in *San Tendai Godai san ki* (參天台五臺山記).<sup>54</sup> Forced to take a route through the capital Bianliang (汴梁) to procure travel clearance for his pilgrimage to Wutaishan, Jōjin spent considerable time at the Institute and his record preserves information concerning the new translations and xylographic texts produced there.<sup>55</sup> Jōjin was well qualified to appreciate what he encountered as he had undergone esoteric initiations, and his diary includes, for instance, a discussion of the difference between rainmaking techniques transmitted through the lineage of Kūkai and that transmitted through Fachuan (and thus learned by Jōjin). While at the Institute Jōjin spent time with Tibetan, South Asian, and Central Asian monks examining recently translated scriptures, some Mahayana, some esoteric, and also discussing points in Sanskrit texts. Further, one can still feel the excitement he records when he unwraps and examines newly translated and printed volumes from the Institute.

The picture that emerges from Jōjin's account is a mixed one. Almost all of the texts mentioned by Jōjin were translated in the early Northern Song under the auspices of the Institute for Canonical Translation. About half of these are Mahayana or Mainstream Buddhist texts (the latter designated 小乘 or Hinayana in the terms used in the *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure*), while half are loosely "esoteric" (designated 大乘秘密部). Most of the esoteric texts Jōjin mentions are short *dhāraṇīs*. However, T. 892 (佛說大悲空智金剛大教王儀軌) is the *Hevajra ḍākinījālasaṃvara-tantra* (translated by Dharmapāla in five *juan*, 1054–1055 CE, T. 892).<sup>56</sup>

Jōjin's diary discusses interesting temples, iconography, deities, altars, and so forth. Along with the humdrum temples with sixteen arhats, Kṣitigarbha, the Ten Kings, and so on, Jōjin mentions temples connected with eight *vidyārājas* and even individual deities such

as Trailokyavijaya. But the most striking account—and from the perspective of this inquiry the most important—describes a group of pavilions just beyond the Longru dian (隆儒殿) on the imperial palace grounds. Jōjin's morning visit to the complex was cut short and he made a special arrangement to return that afternoon. He observed that

all [the palaces] are elevated on stone mounds like mountains. Permission [to enter] is dependent on official authorization. Persons lacking such are stopped. . . . When one arrives at the environs of the imperial hall those lacking permits are stopped. All the great masters were individually screened. . . . The imperial palace hall is on the south side and not easily seen. Its halls and towers all have imperial thrones, day beds, etc. Each one has a guard. Who can venture to tell how many people are within the palace [compound]? Right in the middle is the Shangzao (賞棗) palace with unimaginably opulent paintings. Finally we saw Dalun mingwang (大輪明王, Mahācakra Vidyārāja). A snake coiled around each of his two forearms. His right hand grasped a cudgel and the cudgel was surmounted by a skull. A snake was coiled around the cudgel and the skull. On the buddha's uṣṇīṣa was a transformation buddha."

Jōjin then describes Dali mingwang (大力明王). "The left and right of its terrifying three faces were red, while its primary body was black. On the top of its central face was a transformation buddha. There were two snakes, one coiled around his forearm."<sup>57</sup>

The first of these deities is a form of Vajrapāṇi (Mahācakra Vajrapāṇi) drawn from the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (大方廣菩薩藏文殊師利根本儀軌經, T. 1191) translated by Devaśāntika sometime between 983 and 1000.<sup>58</sup> The second image is likely from the *Mahābala-sūtra* (佛說出生一切如來法眼遍照大力明王經, T. 1243) translated by Dharmapāla in 983. Asked whether there such deities are found in Japan Jōjin replied, "there are no [such images]."<sup>59</sup>

It is abundantly clear that the Institute was still a going concern during Jōjin's visit in 1073 with a contingent of foreign and indigenous monks on hand. Jōjin's description of the temple cited above should give us pause concerning the argument that the newly translated tantras were not instantiated in practice and remained hidden in a few scriptural repositories. At least one very elaborate temple on the palace grounds testifies to more than a textual existence. But I also call attention to the fact that access to *temples* in the capital enshrining deities connected with cemetery imagery was highly

restricted. Although some of the texts containing the trappings of the cemetery cult were included in the canon and sent both abroad and to major government monastic institutions, it appears that the active engagement of some of this material was reserved for a small number of initiates in the upper circles of the Song court. This would explain the fact that key texts were rendered and printed *but not reported out* in the normal workings of the Institute bureaucracy. In short, these were “off the books.” It would also explain what was obviously a well funded and carefully guarded temple complex on the imperial grounds replete with the trappings of iconography drawn from the later tantras. This pattern of controlled access is not extraordinary with regard to the tantras in South Asia, and Kublai put in place similar forms of controlled access when he came to power.

#### APPROPRIATING

But the life of a cult depends upon integration into a network of human social relations.<sup>60</sup> What of the “life” of those texts like that dedicated to Mārīcī that were “officially” printed, enshrined in the canon, and distributed—those texts with elements of the later tantras that were “on the books”? Is there any sign of *their* circulation and impact? In short, yes, there is. While there were certainly teachers with coteries of disciples at various points in time transmitting traditions that would have been recognized by South Asian *ācāryas*, it may well be that a major but largely unrecognized impact of esoteric Buddhism in China was in the new ways that these transmissions were assimilated to existing forms of Chinese Buddhism and the way that various ideological, iconographic, and ritual elements were incorporated into other traditions or took on a life of their own.<sup>61</sup> For instance, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra* (大乘莊嚴寶王經, T. 1050 *Dacheng zhuangyan baowang jing*) translated by Devaśāntika (天息災) in 983 and the source of Avalokiteśvara’s famous mantra *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ* gained wide influence in China.<sup>62</sup> Jōjin mentions looking at the Sanskrit manuscript of this text.<sup>63</sup> So, too, we find a cult to the goddess Cunti as the summation of the esoteric tradition promoted by the Liao cleric and Mi/Huayan synthesizer Daoshen.<sup>64</sup> There is also evidence of the spread of iconographic imagery from the *Māyājāla-tantra* (佛說瑜伽大教王經, T. 890), a text mentioned by Jōjin, as far afield as in Sichuan, Yunnan, and Dunhuang.<sup>65</sup>

Iconography can sometimes provide clues to the circulation of texts, and the presence and persistence of images of a deity can be an indication of its incorporation in a living cult. For instance, Baodingshan (寶頂山) and Beshan (北山) near the city of Dazu (大足) in Sichuan are among the best known for preserving *in situ* Song sculpture. Esoteric sculpture began to appear in the mid-Tang period (early 700s) in what are now Dazu and Anyue (安岳) in Sichuan.<sup>66</sup> Sculpture of Avalokiteśvara and Hārītī as well as the *vidyārājas* can be dated to the mid-Tang. Toward the end of the Tang the government ceded broad powers to provincial military leaders in an effort to stem the rising tide of chaos and banditry. One of these men was Wei Junjing (韋君靖). Wei had risen from the local militia and was put in charge of a large portion of central Sichuan. Over the next decade Wei commissioned the carving of the cliff-side ringing his Yongchang fortress on what is today called Beishan. The carving he began in 892 continued until 1162. The imagery is a mix of Mahayana and esoteric sculpture—depictions of the Pure Land, images of Avalokiteśvara, and also of protectors including Vaiśravaṇa (dressed in heavy armor of the period) Mahāmāyūrī Vidyārājñī (大孔雀明王), and Māricī (摩里支). Though the fortress is gone Beishan still dominates nearby Dazu city. Across central Sichuan other fortresses soon gained divine protection.

At roughly the same time that General Wei was building his fortress a charismatic lay teacher named Liu Benzun (柳本尊, his name identifies him as an incarnation of Mahāvairocana) was gaining a following not too far away. He was reputed to have focused on the mantra teaching promulgated by Amoghavajra's heirs and to have practiced a variety of austerities including various acts of self-mutilation.<sup>67</sup> His efforts resulted in a reputation for sanctity and for having mastered the supernormal powers. After his death well placed patrons continued to promote his cult.

During the Northern Song—precisely the period of the great translation activities at the court—local elites in Sichuan continued the tradition of monumental sculpture. Indeed, there was an increased pace of building, partly in response to more settled conditions. By the time of the collapse of the Northern Song in 1126 (the Song's old enemy the Liao, 遼, had been overrun by the Juchen *jušen*[?], 女真, in 1125, who in turn toppled the Northern Song), deities and practices classified as “Yoga” or “Esoteric” had been in circulation for at least





Fig. 1. Protectors of the Dharma at Baodingshan. Photo by author.

three centuries. The rump Song state (Southern Song) endured and indeed flourished until finally vanquished by Kublai.

In 1179 a layman named Zhao Zhifeng (趙智風, b. 1159) championed the deeds of Liu Benzun and promoted a synthetic Buddhism heavily colored by Huayan and esoteric influences. His efforts led to the carving of a vast new complex of grottos near Dazu. Over the next seventy years local artisans supported by the local elites produced images and tableau that illustrated popular scriptures and synthesized current Mahayana and esoteric imagery. Prominent among these are sculptures depicting Mahāvairocana, Liu Benzun's austerities, and stunning images of Mahāmāyūrī and other *vidyārājas*.

Although textual studies have formed the basis for the investigation of Buddhism during the Song and earlier periods, evidence from still extant artistic work can provide important clues to the dissemination of texts and practices. For instance, near the present-day entrance to the Baodingshan grotto is a tableau of nine fearsome (and rather comical) "Protectors of the Dharma" (figure 1). The same set of nine are also found at nearby Longtuoshan where they are identified with the inscribed title of the *Scripture for Safe-guarding the Great-thousand Kingdoms* (T. 999, *Shouhu dachian guotu jing*), translated by Dānapāla

in 983.<sup>68</sup> These images were completed between 1177 and 1249. Their presence demonstrates that texts translated and reported out of the Institute certainly circulated and that some of them apparently gained popular status.

A more intriguing example is the exquisite image of Mārīcī, goddess of the dawn and patroness of the military arts at Beishan (figure 2). This image is dated to the Northern Song period. Although texts concerning Mārīcī had long circulated in China (Amoghavajra translated one) her iconography in these early texts is decidedly vague.<sup>69</sup> The *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure* records that in 986-987 Devaśāntika headed the team that translated the *Great Mārīcī Bodhisattva sūtra* 大摩里支菩薩經 (T 1257 Sanskrit: *Mārīcīdhāraṇī(sūtra)* which corresponds to an extant Sanskrit manuscript as well as to the description in the *Sādhanaṃālā*).<sup>70</sup> Her iconography there is very specific and corresponds at many points with the image seen here, including her faces, implements, smile, chariot, boar vehicle, and so forth. There is no other easy explanation for this image apart from the circulation of—and in some quarters the popularity of—the text translated by Devaśāntika, a text that contains a range of practices associated with the *śītavana* or cemetery.





Fig. 2. Mārīcī, Beishan. Photo by author.

## NOTES

1. *The Scripture Containing the Buddha's Discourse on the Rites for Contemplation and Siddhi Pertaining to the Wheel of the Auspicious Yoga Tantra of Vajrabhairava*, T. 1242, 佛說妙吉祥瓔珞大教金剛陪囉俎輪觀想成就儀軌經 (trans. by Dharmabhadra between 989 and 999 CE), 203c9. Versions of parts of this essay were presented at the Buddhism Section of the 2006 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion and as a Numata Lecture at The Institute for Buddhist Studies in Berkeley in April 2007. I would like to thank Mary Ellis Gibson and Tony K. Stewart for their suggestions.
2. James H. Sanford, "The Abominable Tachikawa Skull Ritual," *Monumenta Nipponica* 46, no. 1 (1991): 19–20.
3. The prevailing opinion is set out by Jan Yün-hua in a ground-breaking two-part article, "Buddhist Relations between India and Sung China," in *History of Religions* 6, no. 1 (August 1966): 24–42, and vol. 6, no. 2 (November 1966): 135–168. Despite the great detail in the account, the brief conclusion leaves many questions unanswered; see 139–144. Tansen Sen's important reexamination of the Song translation effort clears up many of the unanswered questions, but reiterates much of Jan's position on the internal impact. See "The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty," *T'oung Pao* 88 (2002): 27–80.
4. Arguments from silence assuming that the tantras translated by the Song Institute found no audience and had no circulation in China beg the question. Not only were texts containing the panoply of practices connected with the *siddha* movement in India translated during the Song, but there is considerable evidence that some of this material did find an audience, though not the wide audience that many earlier translations found. A more nuanced view, based on a variety of circumstantial evidence (the great expense of these translation projects, their circulation outside of the Song, their distribution within the Song, and their differential treatment in Song reports) as well as direct evidence of their circulation and the evidence gleaned from Jōjin's iconographical descriptions points to a more complex situation with different levels of restricted access and circulation.
5. The last imperially sponsored translator of note was the monk Prājñā 般若, who was active in the Tang court at the beginning of the ninth century. Yoritomi Motohiro's 頼富本宏 *Chūgoku mikkyō no kenkyū* 中国密教の研 (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1979) has an extended treatment of his activities on pp. 5–109.
6. Founded in 982 the Institute was not disbanded until 1082.
7. This did not mean that patronage was limited to Buddhism. Indeed, the Song emperors seemed almost to anticipate the double-facing administration

and rhetorics of later dynasties, on the one hand promoting themselves as continent-wide Buddhist universal monarchs, on the other as great patrons of decidedly Chinese traditions of Daoism and Confucianism. For details see Huang Chi-chang 黃啟江, "Imperial Rulership and Buddhism in the Early Northern Sung," in *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China*, ed. Frederick P. Brandauer and Chun-Chieh Huang (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1994), 144–187.

8. This Fahu returned to India in short order and is not to be confused with a second monk, Dharmapāla 法護 (963–1058), who translated the *Hevajratantra*. A solid account of the work of these translators was published by Jan in "Buddhist Relations between India and Sung China," 24–42. There is still confusion regarding the identity of two of the translators—specifically whether Faxian was renamed Faxian or whether Tianxizai was renamed Faxian. Jan takes up the issue on pp. 34–37. Although Sen, "The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty," 43ff., treats the name confusion as solved, the confusion is early and is still puzzling.

9. As Sen points out ("The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty," 41), in 1027 monks at the Institute requested the whole enterprise be closed down for lack of manuscripts. However, we also know that an order promulgated in 992 had required that all foreign monks surrender Indic manuscripts before being allowed a court audience (*Fozu tongji* 401a13–14). But by 1025 we find notice of an edict putting a stop to sending such to the capital (*Song hui yao* 197, fanyi 4: 7717b; 7: 7851a), and *Fozu tongji* (410a14–15) reports that by 1041 there were too many Sanskrit manuscripts. We need to be very careful interpreting these highly political documents.

10. Work on printing had begun in Chengdu in 972, and after completion of the new Institute and the building of the Yinjing yuan on its grounds in 982 work was transferred there. The next year the newly integrated projects were renamed the Institute for the Propagation of the Teaching (Chuanfa yuan, 傳法院). For these developments see *Fozu tongji*, T. 2035 49.398c17–20.

11. For a recent discussion of the process see Daniel Boucher, "Gāndhārī and Early Chinese Buddhist Translations Reconsidered: The Case of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, no. 4 (1998): 16–20.

12. I follow Sen's translation of *Fozu tongji*, T. 2035 49.398b2–b8, with minor emendations. The passage contains parenthetical remarks, most of which I left untranslated except for the comment on "vessel."

13. A description of the building and the process of translation can be found in *Fozu tongji*, juan 43–44, T. 2035. My translation follows and summarizes Sen, who presents a fine and full translation in "The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty," 35–36. The original is 398b8–18.

14. This catalogue is an essential resource for the study of the period. Issued in 1013, the *Catalogue* was compiled under the leadership of Zhao Anren 趙安仁 (958–1018). It is found in *Zhonghua da zang jing* 中華大藏經, vol. 73 (H1675), pp. 414–523. It is now available in electronic facsimile at <http://www.fjd.com/booklib/Index.html>.
15. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
16. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 6–7.
17. Clifford, *Routes*, 192–193.
18. Though museums today are distinguished from libraries, museums previously included libraries and served as repositories of both textual material and artifacts.
19. See esp. *ibid.*, 204–213. For Clifford, “majority museums” are museums constructed by the dominant culture.
20. As Huang notes, Taizong used the establishment of printing at the Institute to “circulate widely the work it had produced.” Indeed, Taizong began the practice of awarding printed canons to revered or important visitors. Such a set was given to the Japanese monk Chōnen 澄然 (938–1016) as well as Korean envoys on behalf of their king. See Huang, “Imperial Rulership and Buddhism in the Early Northern Sung,” 152 and n. 45. These events are related in *Fozu tongji*, T. 2035 49.399a16–400c. Sets of the Canon were requested by the Uigurs, the Vietnamese, and the Xi Xia. The Tanguts requested a sixth set in 1073, the Vietnamese requested another version in 1098–1099, and so on. See Sen, “The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty,” 40–41. Both the Khitan and the Korean cut their own canons and were in competition with the Song in these inter-state prestations. On the development of the Canon see Lewis R. Lancaster, “The Rock Cut Canon in China: Findings at Fang-Shan,” in *The Buddhist Heritage*, ed. Tadeusz Skorupski (Tring, UK: The Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1989), 144–156, and Lewis R. Lancaster and Sung-Bae Park, *The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). This latter with updates is available at [http://www.acmuller.net/descriptive\\_catalogue](http://www.acmuller.net/descriptive_catalogue).
21. Takeuchi Kōzan 武内孝善 has surveyed the evidence and puts the number of esoteric works translated as 123, totaling 228 *juan*, while 44 Mahayana works totaling 169 *juan* were translated. See “Sōdai honyaku kyōten no tokushoku nit suite” 宋代翻譯經典の特色について, *Mikkyō bunka* 密教文化 113 (February 1975): 35. In “The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty,” Sen—like Jan—repeats the assertion that “a majority of Song translations are short esoteric *dhāraṇīs* that follow a fixed template” (p. 54). By my count, *excluding* short *dhāraṇī* texts, esoteric texts accounted for over

50 percent of the four major translators' output, and a number of these texts were quite substantial.

22. Sen, in "The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty," conveniently summarizes the data on translation output at the Institute between 982 and 1037 found in Song bibliographies as some "two hundred sixty three translations."

23. Jan, "Buddhist Relations between India and Sung China," 139.

24. Sen, in "The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty," rightly underscores the centralized and political role of the Institute and its projects, especially as these relate to diplomacy (see esp. pp. 38–43). Huang Chi-chang's "Imperial Rulership and Buddhism in the Early Northern Sung" is especially good on this; see pp. 149–158.

25. Sen, "The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty," 31.

26. Though some of the translations did stimulate considerable Imperial preface-writing and some commentary, the newer cemetery texts apparently did not.

27. The Liao dynasty monk Jueyuan 覺苑 (fl. 1055–1100) wrote a sub-commentary on the Śubhākarasiṃha and *Yixing Commentary*. It is in the *Taishō* supplement 新纂續藏經 439.

28. Records purporting to record oral transmissions are found in such collections as the Byakuhōkushō 白寶口抄 (compiled by Ryōson 亮尊, c. 1287, *Taishō* supplement vol. 6), Kakuzenshō 覺禪鈔 (compiled by Kakuzen 覺禪, 1143–ca. 1219, *Taishō* supplement vol. 3), and Bessonzakki 別尊雜記 (compiled by Shinkaku 心覺, 1171–1175, *Taishō* supplement vol. 3).

29. See Sen, "The Revival and Failure of Buddhist Translations During the Song Dynasty," 41. The initial shortage of Indic manuscripts prompted a further scouring of monastic libraries that resulted in a surfeit of texts. For this situation see *Fozu tongji*, T. 2035 49.410a15–17. Soon the problem was a lack of experienced translators.

30. See note 19 above for state-to-state exchanges. Lewis Lancaster has written on the production of various canons and their relationships to each other. Again see note 19 above. For the purposes of this essay, the production of blocks was as follows: The first printing of 983 comprised what are now numbered K1–1087 in the Korean canon. Around the year 1000 a "second Song canon was cut to include texts translated up to that time. These are K1088–1256. Sometime later a third set of blocks was cut for what is now K1257–1407. Finally, around 1083 another set was cut to include the rest of the post-1000 translations, now numbers K1408–1497." Personal communication from Lewis Lancaster, January 2007.



31. I make this argument in "The 'Great Teaching of Yoga,' the Chinese Appropriation of the Tantras, and the Question of Esoteric Buddhism," *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 34 (2006): 68–71.
32. Paraphrasing Jonathan Z. Smith's observation concerning the term "religion": "Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study." *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi.
33. See, for instance, Jacob Dalton's recent analysis, "A Crisis of Doxography: How Tibetans Organized Tantra During the 8<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> Centuries," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28 (2005): 115–181.
34. Nor can Chinese *mijiao* simply be equated with Japanese *mikkyō*. What's more, such categories should be distinguished from analytic definitions as, for instance, one that defines esoteric Buddhism as religious systems originating in medieval Indian Samanta feudalism, organized around metaphors of kingship and characterized by transmission through a series of progressively restricted consecrations (*abhiṣeka*) at the hands of an *ācārya*.
35. For a full discussion see Richard K. Payne's introduction to *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 1–31, and my discussion of Amoghavajra in "The 'Great Teaching of Yoga,'" 45–52.
36. Albert Welter's "A Buddhist Response to the Confucian Revival: Tsan-ning and the Debate Over *Wen* in the Early Sung" sets Zanning in the context of the issues he cared about most and is written with exceptional clarity. It is in Peter Gregory and Daniel Getz, eds., *Buddhism in the Sung* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 21–61.
37. I have treated Zanning's "wheel" taxonomy in "The 'Great Teaching of Yoga,'" 61–68. Robert Sharf has a treatment of Zanning's "Transmission of the Esoteric Basket" in "On Esoteric Buddhism," which appears as appendix A of *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 272–273.
38. T. 1955. The question of whether a viable esoteric/exoteric taxonomy existed in the Song-Liao period has been challenged by Robert Sharf, who briefly examines Daoshen's work in *Coming to Terms*, 273–274. Richard McBride, in "Is There Really 'Esoteric' Buddhism?" *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 27, no. 2 (2004): 329–356 follows Sharf's lead in his suspicions of the esoteric/exoteric taxonomy. However, Robert M. Gimello has recently explored the importance of this distinction in Daoshen's work, decisively refuting readings by Sharf and McBride in "Manifest Mysteries: The Nature of the Exoteric/Esoteric (*Xian* 顯 / *Mi* 密) Distinction in Later Chinese Buddhism," unpublished paper, presented at the American Academy of Religion, Washington, D.C., November 21, 2006. This plus the evidence from

the *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure* examined below should lay the issue to rest.

39. See, for example, *Zhonghua da zang jing*, volume 73, p. 420, which has all three classifications.

40. *Ibid.*, 456.

41. This second transliterated form occurs only in the *Hevajra*.

42. The term *zuishang yuqie* 最上瑜伽 occurs frequently but does not seem to function doxologically.

43. *Zhonghua da zang jing*, volume 73, p. 472. Indeed, the *Guhyasamāja* is rendered in a way that without a mandala for reference and the explanation of an *ācārya* there is little that would set it apart from previously translated works.

44. The translation was logged in *Catalogue of the Dharma Treasure*, *Zhonghua dazang jing* 73 434a. For a sample of various spells and mundane operations see T. 1257 21.264b. The same catalogue notes the translation of the *Mahādaṇḍa dhāraṇī-sūtra* 大寒林聖難拏陀羅尼經 (T. 1392, translated by Fatian in 984), but this is really a *dhāraṇī* text and the *śmaśāna* (寒林 indicated in the Chinese title) is little more than window dressing.

45. For Zhipan see Jan Yun-hua, “Buddhist Historiography in Sung China,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 114 (1964): 371–372.

46. A *Vināyaka-sūtra* (T. 1272) in four *juan* is indeed found in the Canon. It was translated by Dharmabhadra.

47. Charles Willemen notes in his translation and study of the Chinese *Hevajratāntra* that Dharmapāla “rendered the Indian original in a very tactful, deliberately abstruse way, but remaining true to the actual proceedings of the Indian original.” Indeed, the translation appears to be a very sophisticated effort that negotiated both the linguistic peculiarities of the original and the moral limitations of the audience. See *The Chinese Hevajratāntra*, *Orientalia Gandensia* VIII (Ghent: Rijksuniversiteit Te Gent, 1983), 29. Secrecy and its opposite—deliberate and flagrant transgressiveness—are well-known tropes in the tantras. As Ronald M. Davidson has observed, secrecy coupled with titillation may have been the most effective strategy for the propagation of a religious system. *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 245–247.

48. The iconography of the *vidyārājas* and their role in *homas* for subjugation was a prominent selling point of Tang esoteric Buddhism. For this see Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom*, 160–162, and chap. 6, “Lords of Light,” 169–205.

49. Though in some cases texts proclaim and perform their own transgressiveness. A good example is the opening scene of the *Buddhakapālayoginī-tantra-rāja*, during which the Buddha dies during intercourse with his consort, scandalizing and confounding the assembled audience. For a discussion of this text see Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 247–252.

50. Perhaps we should read the *Chronicle* as a reflection of attitudes among some members of the sangha in the late Southern Song, or even as reflecting certain Tiantai positions of the time.

51. The language used here appears nowhere else in the Chinese Buddhist canon, and while I can find neither four-character phrase elsewhere in Chinese literature, both phrases have echos in classical texts.

52. See for instance *T.* 895, *juan* seven from 18.726c29–727c22, or Ratnacinta's late seventh-century translation of the *Scripture of the Amoghapāśa dhāraṇī* 不空罽索陀羅尼自在王咒經, *T.* 20.1097, which includes straightforward instructions for spells for resurrecting corpses to help find buried treasure (425b22) and spells for entering the bedchambers of *asura* women (425c24–426b1).

53. This is certainly the case for the Vajrabhairava text (*T.* 1242) cited at the head of this article. See for instance 21.204a23ff, 207a18ff, etc.

54. It is found in *Dai Nihon Bukkyō zensho* 大日本佛教全書 (Tokyo: Bussho Kankōkai hensan, Fukkokuban, 1978–1983), 15:321–490. The record—replete with daily weather reports—runs to some 169 double pages. Much scholarly interest has focused on the anthology of poems written by Jōjin's mother titled *Jōjin Azari no Haha no Shū* 成尋阿闍梨母集. For a treatment see Robert Borgen's "Jōjin Azari no Haha no Shū, A Poetic Reading," in *The Distant Isle: Studies and Translations of Japanese Literature in Memory of Robert Brower*, ed. Thomas Blenman Hare, Robert Borgen, and Sharalyn Orbaugh (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1997), 1–34. Borgen also has a useful introduction to Jōjin's diary in "San Tendai Godai san ki as a Source for the Study of Sung History," *Bulletin of Sung Yuan Studies* 19 (1987): 1–16. Charlotte von Verschuer has an excellent treatment in "Le voyage de Jōjin au mont Tiantai," *T'oung Pao* 77, nos. 1–3 (1991): 1–48.

55. Jōjin's home monastery was Enryakuji 延暦寺 on Mt. Hiei. He arrived in 1072 and sent a cache of printed texts back to Japan in 1073 covering translations made since Chōnen's 涯然 mission in 984. Unfortunately, the list of the texts he sent back to Japan is no longer extant.

56. The translation was presented to the emperor Renzong 仁宗 at the end of Zhihe 至和 1 (February 1054–January 1055). For a valiant effort at trying to identify all of the texts mentioned by Jōjin see Fujiyoshi Masumi, "Jōjin no motarashita higa no tenseki: Nissō bunka kōryū no hitokusari," *Bukkyōshi gaku kenkyū* 23, no. 1 (January 1981): 33–70.



57. *San Tendai Godai san ki*, 137a.

58. T. 1191 is Devaśāntika's translation of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*. The deity is described at 876b4–c01. Mention of a similar deity also occurs in T. 1169 and T. 890 translated by Dharmabhadra. T. 890 is Dharmabhadra's translation of the *Māyājālamahātantra*. T. 1243 is the *Mahābala-sūtra*. It is notable that snake iconography also plays a prominent part in the iconography of Kuṇḍali Vidyārāja, who sometimes holds a *cakra*.

59. *San Tendai Godai san ki*, 137a.

60. See Gregory P. Grieve, *Retheorizing Religion in Nepal* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 92–95.

61. See my discussion of the use of the term “esoteric Buddhism” in “The Great Teaching of Yoga.”

62. The mantra is found at T. 1050 20.61b14 唵(引)麼拏鉢 訥銘(二合)吽(引).

63. *San Tendai Godai san ki*, 118b.

64. For a discussion see the unpublished paper by Robert Gimello, “Manifest Mysteries: The Nature of the Exoteric/Esoteric (Xian 顯 / Mi 密) Distinction in Later Chinese Buddhism,” presented at the American Academy of Religion, November 2006. The relevant texts are *Foshuo qijudi fomuxin da zhunti tuoluoni jing* (T. 1007), translated in 685 or 686; *Foshuo qijudi fomu zhunti daming tuoluoni jing* (T. 1075), translated in 723; *Qijudi fomu suoshuo zhunti tuoluoni jing* (T. 1077), translated between 742 and 774; and *Qifo judi fomu xin da zhunti tuoluoni fa* (T. 1078) and *Qijudi dubu fa* (T. 1079)—two different redactions of the same work by Śubhākarasiṃha.

65. The translation is by Dharmabhadra, was executed between 889 and 899, and is noted by Jōjin in *San Tendai Godai san ki*, 153b. *Foshuo yuqie dajiaowang jing*. See the discussion in Gimello, “Manifest Mysteries,” 4.

66. English sources for Buddhist sculpture in Sichuan are limited, but see Angela Falco Howard, *Summit of Treasures: Buddhist Cave Art of Dazu, China* (Trumbull, CT: Weatherhill, 2001). Sources in Chinese, in turn are many, but a good place to start is Chen Mingguan's *Dazu shike kaocha yu yanjiu*, *Zhongguo sanxia chubanshe*, 2001.

67. For Liu Benzun see Howard, *Summit of Treasures*, 100–103 and 170–177, and Chen Mingguan, “Sichuan moyai zao xiang ‘Tang yuqie bu zhu zong te wang’ Liu Benzun hua dao ‘shi lian tu’ diaocha bao ji caiyi,” in *Dazu shike kaocha yu yanjiu* (Chongqing: Congqing chubanshe, 2001), 205–237.

68. See Howard, *Summit of Treasures*, 90–91.

69. The texts include the Liang period T. 1256, three Tang texts attributed to Amoghavajra (T. 1254, 1255, and 1258), and the section of Atigupta's *dharanī*

collection (T. 901, 869–874). For a treatment of these earlier texts see David Avalon Hall, “Marishiten: Buddhism and the Warrior Goddess” (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1990), chaps. 3 and 4.

70. The extant Sanskrit is *Māyāmarīcījātatantrād uddhṛtakalparājaccīmaṇḍalav idhimarīcījātdvādaśasahasrād uddhṛtakalpahrdayasaptaśata*. See “Taishō Index to the Descriptive Catalogue of the Korean Canon” at [http://www.hm.tyg.jp/~acmuller/descriptive\\_catalogue/indexes/index-taisho.html](http://www.hm.tyg.jp/~acmuller/descriptive_catalogue/indexes/index-taisho.html). Mārīcī’s iconography is discussed in Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography: Mainly Based on the Sādhnamālā and Other Cognate Tāntric Texts of Rituals* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1993; repr. of Oxford University Press, 1924), 93–100.

## Just Open Your Mouth and Say “A”: A-Syllable Practice for the Time of Death in Early Medieval Japan

Jacqueline I. Stone

Princeton University

JAPANESE BUDDHISTS OF THE EARLY medieval period often sought to die in a ritualized fashion that would encourage right mindfulness in their last moments. One's thoughts at the time of death were held to exert a particular force over one's postmortem fate; persons who died with a mind calmly focused on the Buddha were believed thereby to escape the miserable cycle of samsara and achieve "birth in a pure land" (*ōjō*, 往生), where one's eventual attainment of buddhahood would be assured. Such exemplary deaths are described in great numbers in *ōjōden* ("accounts of birth in the Pure Land," 往生傳) and other Buddhist hagiographical literature of the latter Heian period (794–1185), while texts of instruction for deathbed practice (*rinjū gyōgisho*, 臨終行儀書) offer recommendations for how practice in one's last days or hours should be conducted. The most sought-after postmortem destination was the Pure Land of Utmost Bliss (Skt. *Sukhāvatī*; Jpn. *Gokuraku jōdō*, 極樂淨土), the realm of the Buddha Amida (Skt. *Amitābha*, *Amitāyus*), said to lie billions of worlds away in the western quadrant of the cosmos. The scholar-monk Genshin (源信, 942–1017), whose treatise *ōjō yōshū* (Essentials of Birth in the Pure Land) contains the first set of instructions for deathbed practice compiled in Japan, recommended contemplation at life's end of Amida's physical marks; his radiant light, embracing the devotee; and his welcoming descent (*raigō*, 來迎), together with his host of attendant bodhisattvas, to escort the dying person to his pure land. Along with his emphasis on visualization practice, Genshin also considered the chanting of Amida's name to be an important aid to deathbed contemplation and especially efficacious in one's final moments, far more so than at ordinary times.<sup>1</sup> And indeed, the chanted *nenbutsu*, or invocation of Amida's name ("Namu Amida-butsu"), quickly gained currency as a deathbed practice. However, as we know from *ōjōden*, biographical notices, court diaries, and tale literature, practice

in one's final days or hours was by no means confined to the chanted nenbutsu; a great range of practices was recommended and employed at life's end, whether to achieve birth in Amida's Pure Land or in some other superior realm. This essay will consider those recommendations surviving from the late Heian and Kamakura periods (1185–1333) for use of the esoteric Buddhist A-syllable contemplation (*ajikan*, 阿字觀) as a deathbed practice. A-syllable contemplation was decidedly a minority practice in the deathbed context, where references to it are short and few. Yet these brief notices introduced into consideration of life's final moments a logic and set of assumptions radically different than those underlying the mainstream discourse of "dying and going to the Pure Land" and thus complicate our picture of early medieval attitudes toward death. Before addressing this topic, however, let us first review the general features of A-syllable practice.

#### THE A-SYLLABLE CONTEMPLATION

*Ajikan*, the A-syllable contemplation, has been described by one Shingon scholar as "the most concise and versatile of Mikkyō's hundreds of ritual practices."<sup>2</sup> Like many esoteric meditations, it is aimed at realizing the unity of the adept with the dharma-body of the cosmic buddha, Dainichi Nyorai (大日如来, Skt. Mahāvairocana Tathāgata). The A-syllable is a *shuji* (Skt. *bīja*, 種子) mantra, a mantra consisting of a single "seed" syllable, and is thus representative of a range of practices employing letters or sounds as objects of meditation and visualization, practices whose origins may be traced to the pre-Buddhist Indian Vedic tradition. The A-syllable appears in a number of Mahayana sutras, where it carries the meanings of primal origin, the universal ground of phenomena, and the ultimately inexpressible nature of reality. As Richard Payne has shown, these meanings derive from the A-syllable's function in Sanskrit phonology and grammar: as the first element of the Sanskrit syllabary, the primordial vibration from which the universe arose, it is associated with the origin of things; as a vowel sound integral to all other Sanskrit syllables, it denotes the universal or all-pervasive; and, as a negative prefix, it suggests the ineffability of the ultimate reality.<sup>3</sup> In the esoteric Buddhist tradition (Jpn. Mikkyō, 密教), it is commonly identified with the "originally unborn" (Skt. *ādyanutpāda*; Jpn. *honpushō*, 本不生).<sup>4</sup>

Kūkai (空海, 774–835), revered as the founder of the Japanese esoteric Shingon school, explained that the A-syllable, like all mantras, comprises the three aspects of voice (*shō*, 聲), word or letter (*ji*, 字), and true aspect (*jissō*, 實相). As “voice,” it is the sound produced when one opens one’s mouth and exhales. As “word,” it is the name of the dharma-body buddha, and the meaning of the dharma-body is the unborn, which is the true aspect of all things.<sup>5</sup> In actual practice, “voice” means intoning the letter A on the outbreath, while “letter” involves contemplating the written form of the A-syllable, usually in the Siddham orthography and often depicted atop a lotus blossom on a white moon disk. The A-syllable may either be written out as a *honzon* (本尊) or icon to be used as an object of contemplation, or it may be visualized internally. And “true aspect” corresponds to contemplating the meaning of A as the originally unborn. Thus, despite the primarily ideational associations of such English words as “contemplation” or “meditation,” *ajikan*, like most esoteric practices, involves all “three mysteries” (*sanmitsu*, 三密) of body, speech, and mind, the three avenues by which the practitioner aligns his or her actions, words, and thoughts with those of the cosmic buddha and thus manifests awakening.<sup>6</sup>

The earliest instructions for A-syllable contemplation produced in Japan are found in the *Ajikan yōjin kuketsu* (阿字觀用心口決, Oral Transmissions Concerning Instructions for A-syllable Contemplation) attributed to Kūkai’s disciple Jichie or Jitsue (實慧, 786–847), which is said to be the basis of subsequent instruction manuals for this practice.<sup>7</sup> Altogether, there are more than a hundred extant texts concerning A-syllable contemplation, along with a considerable body of commentary, and a number of interpretations and variations may be found.<sup>8</sup> Some versions of the meditation involve contraction and expansion exercises in which, coordinating one’s visualization with the breath, one envisions the A-syllable alternately contracting and entering one’s breast and then expanding to fill the practice hall and even the universe itself, thus realizing the originally unborn as identical to oneself and all sentient beings.

Association of the A-syllable with the sound of the exhaled breath helped to characterize it as a naturally inherent mantra, and thus, a particularly apt representation of the dharma-body that manifests itself as all phenomena. This theme is developed in the work of Kakuban (覺鑊, 1095–1143), the Heian-period systematizer of Kūkai’s thought who

is also known as the founder of the “new doctrine” (*shingi*) school of Shingon. Kakuban writes:

From the moment you are born into this world crying “A!,” whenever you are delighted you laugh “A!,” and whenever you are sad you grieve “A!” There is not a single occasion when you do not say “A!” This A is the seed [mantra] representing the natural principle endowed with the virtue of the dharma nature. Thus all sorts of sounds and voices [produced by] any phenomenal existence, either good or evil, or [by] any non-sentient existence, such as the land, mountains, rivers, the earth, sand, pebbles, as well as the birds and beasts, are nothing other than the natural *dhāraṇīs* of the letter A.<sup>9</sup>

In the late Heian and Kamakura periods, simplified forms of A-syllable contemplation were developed, along with claims that this practice is complete and perfect, containing all merits within itself and enabling the realization of buddhahood within a very short time. Kakuban, for example, who wrote extensively on A-syllable contemplation, says,

The three poisons and ten evils will change into the merits of the maṇḍala. The four *pārājika* offenses and five heinous deeds will transform and return to the secret practices of yoga. The hundred and sixty deluded attachments, without being cut off, will end of themselves; the eighty-four thousand defilements, without being countered, will at once expire. [The practice to achieve buddhahood requiring] three incalculable *kalpas* is condensed into half a thought-moment; the extended practices of the six *pāramitās* are encompassed within [this] single [A-syllable] contemplation. The dark sleep of delusion and samsara is now forever ended; the moon of enlightened wisdom and nirvana here for the first time appears. Those of shallow contemplation and limited practice shall, without discarding their present body, achieve the highest grade of superior birth in the Pure Land, while those of deep cultivation and great assiduity shall, without transforming their mind, become great radiant Dainichi of the realm of Esoteric Splendor. In its ease of cultivation and realization, no path could surpass this practice. But what dharma could be more difficult to encounter?<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, the Shingon monk Chidō (智道, fl. latter thirteenth century) writes:

Because all the doctrines preached in the hundreds and thousands of sutras and treatises in their entirety are encompassed by this one syllable [A], reciting this one syllable produces the same amount of merit as reading the entire Buddhist canon. . . . Even the merit produced by reciting without any knowledge is no trivial amount. The amount of merit produced by adding to one's recitation of this syllable even one instant of belief in the principle of the unborn, therefore, could not be explained completely even after infinite *kalpas*.<sup>11</sup>

Such claims are strikingly similar to those put forth by the so-called "single-practice" movements of the Kamakura period. Hōnen (1133–1212), teacher of the exclusive nenbutsu, and his followers maintained that simply chanting the name of Amida Buddha with faith is alone sufficient to achieve birth in Amida's Pure Land. In similar fashion, Nichiren (1222–1282) and his disciples asserted that the *daimoku* or title of the *Lotus Sūtra* contains all the Buddha's practices and resulting virtues and that chanting the *daimoku*, "*Namu Myōhō-rence-kyō*," enables the direct realization of buddhahood. Nor were such claims limited to the new sectarian movements of the time. Within the Buddhist establishment as well, other practices were in some cases promoted as being perfect and complete, containing all possible merits; easy to perform; and quickly resulting in liberation. One example is the "contemplation of suchness" (*shinnyōkan*), in which the practitioner simply cultivates, in all actions of daily life, the mental habit of regarding self, others, and indeed all phenomena as identical to suchness.<sup>12</sup> A-syllable contemplation was similarly recommended, by Kakuban and others, as a simple, self-sufficient practice. It never achieved the popularity of the nenbutsu or the *daimoku*, in part because it was never institutionalized as the signature practice of a particular sect; in addition, as Payne has argued, although A-syllable contemplation is relatively simple to perform, it still requires some basic knowledge of the logic and ritual forms of esoteric Buddhist practice, which would in effect have placed it beyond the reach of persons not trained in that tradition.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, we can understand it as one among a larger group of practices that, in early medieval Japan, were being promoted as easy, all-encompassing, universally accessible, and offering quick attainment of birth in a pure land or other liberative state. It was in part these qualities that were seen, at least by a few

writers, as particularly suiting A-syllable contemplation for one's final hours.

#### THE BEGINNINGS OF DEATHBED A-SYLLABLE PRACTICE

The earliest Japanese text to recommend A-syllable contemplation for the time of death is the *Byōchū shugyō ki* (Notes on Practice During Illness) by the monk Jichihan (實範, a.k.a. Jippan or Jitsuhan, c. 1089–1144), which he wrote while ill in the winter of 1134.<sup>14</sup> Regarded as the founder of the Nakanokawa branch of Shingon, Jichihan was versed in Hossō and Shingon teachings and also studied Tendai doctrine, including Tendai Pure Land thought. He was one of the earliest figures in what later became known as Japan's *himitsu nenbutsu* (秘密念佛) tradition, or “esoteric” Pure Land thought, which was first introduced to English-language scholarship by James Sanford.<sup>15</sup> Over and against conventional understandings of the Pure Land as an ideal, transcendent realm posited in contradistinction to this defiled world, and of Amida Buddha as a savior who descends to welcome devotees at the moment of their death, *himitsu nenbutsu* thought regards Amida as immanent in the body and mind of the practitioner, and his Pure Land as inseparable from our present reality. In his *Byōchū shugyō ki*, Jichihan takes the conventions of deathbed practice aimed at birth in Amida's Pure Land as set forth in Genshin's *Ōjō yōshū* and reworks them in this esoteric conceptual frame. The buddha whom the dying person should visualize, according to Jichihan, is indeed Amida—not Amida of the Pure Land located billions of worlds away in the western direction, but the Amida who is “the lord of the lotus section,” one of the five divisions of the “perfected body assembly” of the Diamond Realm Mandala.<sup>16</sup> The emphasis of Jichihan's text is not on Amida's descent to welcome the dying but on realization of the nonduality of the buddha and the practitioner: “Truly we will be born into that [pure] land that is none other than our mind,” he writes. “The one who contemplates and that which is contemplated, the one who achieves birth and the birth that is achieved, are in no way separate from the single great dharma realm.”<sup>17</sup> Jichihan further defines appropriate deathbed practice, not as an invocation of Amida's salvific power, but as an esoteric three mysteries practice, centering on contemplation of the syllable A.

The *Byōchū shugyō ki* first mentions the A-syllable in connection with repentance (*sange*) carried out as death nears to remove various



karmic hindrances that might otherwise arise to hinder right mindfulness in one's final moments. Rites of repentance performed shortly before death seem to have been widespread in Heian Japan, and various methods were employed. Jichihan recommends the chanting of mantras or *dhāraṇīs*, such as the Superlative Spell of the Buddha's Crown (Skt. *Uṣṇīṣavijayā*, Jpn. *Sonshō Butchō*), the Mantra of Light (*Kōmyō Shingon*), or the Amida Spell.<sup>18</sup> The practice of chanting esoteric spells to remove karmic hindrances at the time of death was already a well established practice but lacked explicit theoretical justification. Jichihan here provides an esoteric doctrinal explanation: all such recitations are to be performed as part of “three mysteries” practice, or ritual union with the body, speech, and mind of an esoteric deity. One should form the appropriate *mudrā* with one's hands, chant the preferred mantra or *dhāraṇī* with one's mouth, and contemplate that mantra with one's mind, firmly believing that its essence is the fundamental syllable A, the originally unborn, and that all sins will thereby be eradicated.<sup>19</sup> Here the A-syllable contemplation is assimilated to the notion of “formless repentance,” the eradication of sin by insight into the empty, unproduced nature of the *dharmas*.

A distinctive feature of the *Byōchū shugyō ki*, possibly Jichihan's innovation, is his synthesis of the deathbed nenbutsu with A-syllable contemplation. In his *Ōjō yōshū*, Genshin had outlined nenbutsu practice for three kinds of occasions: ordinary times, special retreats, and the time of death. The *Byōchū shugyō ki* similarly outlines three kinds of three mysteries practice, focusing on A-syllable contemplation. The first method, for everyday use, is a traditional form of the three mysteries, in which the practitioner forms the basic *mudrā* corresponding to the object of worship—that is, the particular buddha, bodhisattva, or other deity employed as the focus of practice; recites that deity's mantra; and contemplates that mantra as embodying the three inseparable meanings of the syllable A: empty (*kū*), existing (*u*), and originally unborn (*honpushō*), whose oneness constitutes the dharma body that is in turn identical to the mind of the practitioner. “Because of inconceivable emptiness, the karmic hindrances one has created are destroyed in accordance with the teaching. Because of inconceivable existence, the Pure Land toward which one aspires is achieved in accordance with one's vows. What is called the ‘unborn’ is the middle way. And because of the middle way, there are no fixed aspects of either karmic hindrances or the Pure Land.”<sup>20</sup> Jichihan's second kind of

three mysteries practice, intended for “when one has extra time, or is physically weak,” begins his assimilation of the nenbutsu to A-syllable meditation. Here, the practitioner’s reverent posture is the paradigmatic “mystery of the body”; in this light, all movements of the body are *mudrās*. Chanting Amida’s name is the paradigmatic “mystery of the mouth” and, on this basis, all words and speech are mantras. The “mystery of the mind” is contemplating the meaning of Amida’s name, both as a whole phrase (*kugi*, 句義) and as three individual syllables (*jigi*, 字義). As a whole, it signifies *amṛta* (*kanro*, 甘露), meaning that the Buddha has freed himself from all hindrances, fevers, and poisons, reaching the cool of nirvana, and causes all beings who bear him in mind to become equal to himself. Individually, the three characters in the name “Amida” are equated with three fundamental esoteric meanings of the syllable A: A indicating the originally unborn, which is the middle way; *mi*, the great self that is without self and enjoys perfect freedom; and *da*, moment-to-moment accordance with suchness, which is liberation.<sup>21</sup> Jichihan’s third kind of three mysteries practice, to be employed for the moment of death, is considerably simplified: one should form the *mudrā* of the object of worship (Amida), chant his name, and single-mindedly take refuge in the myriad virtues of the middle way. Here, the elements of visualization and contemplation found in conventional three mysteries practice are vastly simplified, while that of invocation is paramount. Thus Jichihan introduced into the deathbed context the logic of esoteric practice for realizing buddhahood in this very body, transforming the deathbed nenbutsu, via its assimilation to A-syllable meditation, from an invocation to Amida as a savior figure into a rite of union with the dharma-body buddha. In this regard, the *Byōchū shugyō ki* is an epochal text.

A-syllable meditation also figures prominently in a set of deathbed instructions composed by Kakuban, mentioned above, in his *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū* (Collection of Secret Essentials for a Lifetime). Composed sometime between 1134 and 1143, this work draws explicitly on Jichihan’s *Byōchū shugyō ki*.<sup>22</sup> Like Jichihan, Kakuban stresses the efficacy of chanting mantras and *dhāraṇīs* as a form of repentance for removing karmic hindrances at the hour of death. Whatever incantation may be employed, “The sick person should contemplate the essence of that mantra as the meaning of the syllable A, believing deeply and without doubt that his sins will thereby be eradicated.”<sup>23</sup> Kakuban also adopted Jichihan’s idea of deathbed contemplation as a form of three

mysteries practice, based on either the A-syllable or the moon-disk contemplation, and the *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū* includes a detailed theoretical discussion of both. Since the A-syllable is often drawn or visualized against a moon disk, the two contemplations are closely related; Kakuban in particular regarded these contemplations as “two but not two” and often combined them in his thought and practice.<sup>24</sup> Here, he says that they enable the practitioner to arouse the *samādhi bodhicitta* (*sanmaji bodaishin*), in which one perfects the three mysteries and thus realizes one’s identity with the cosmic buddha.<sup>25</sup> Kakuban goes beyond Jichihan in explicitly identifying Amida with Dainichi Nyorai, the buddha of the esoteric teachings.

Apart from this *sahā* world, there is no Land of Utmost Bliss to contemplate. How could it be separated by tens of billions of other lands? And apart from Dainichi, there is no separate [buddha] Amida. . . . Amida is Dainichi’s function as wisdom. Dainichi is Amida’s essence as principle. . . . When one contemplates in this way, then, without leaving the *sahā* world, one is immediately born in [the Pure Land of] Utmost Bliss. . . . This is the subtle contemplation for realizing buddhahood with this very body.<sup>26</sup>

Parenthetically we may note that other works by Kakuban—not specifically related to the moment of death—move still farther in the direction of assimilating the nenbutsu to the A-syllable as a naturally inherent mantra. We have already seen that the A-syllable was understood as the primordial sound and associated with the breath, on which sound is carried; A-syllable practice, like a number of esoteric contemplations, involves mindfulness of the breath. Kakuban identified the inbreath with the seed syllable A and the outbreath with the seed syllable HŪṂ, which together he regarded as the fundamental mantra of Amida. Thus the cycle of breathing in and out becomes both the mantra of Amida and Amida himself: “I breathe Amida and Amida breathes me,” as Sanford has summarized it.<sup>27</sup> Later commentators would develop this association in a number of directions, asserting, for example, that the inhaled breath is Amida descending to welcome the devotee (*raigō*) and outbreath, being born in the Pure Land (*ōjō*); with this understanding, at each breath, one is welcomed by Amida Buddha and goes to his Pure Land.<sup>2</sup>

Neither Jichihan nor Kakuban provides much detail about how A-syllable contemplation is actually to be conducted in one’s last mo-

ments. It appears that the dying person is simply to recite the nenbutsu or some other mantra with faith in the ultimate identity of himself, the buddha, and the unborn, represented by the syllable A. However, subsequent writings recommending A-syllable practice for the deathbed indicate that the A-syllable is itself to be intoned, not simply contemplated as the essence of other mantras. One can cite several possible reasons for this. First, Buddhism in the Heian and Kamakura periods was broadly speaking a mantric culture, in which, across sectarian divisions, invocations of all types tended to supersede inner contemplation and visualization practice. The chanting of Amida's name, for example, appears to have been far more widespread at all social levels than was silent meditation on Amida's marks and attributes. Genshin's *Ōjō yōshū*, which recommends internal visualizations of Amida, may have been somewhat anomalous in this regard; most Heian nenbutsu practice was vocalized, in the same manner as esoteric mantras.<sup>29</sup> And, among the "three mysteries" of esoteric practice, mantra was often accorded a preeminent place. Kakuban provided what might be seen a doctrinal basis for this vocal emphasis with his teaching of "realizing buddhahood through [performance of] a single mystery" (*ichimitsu jōbutsu*, 一密成佛). That is, if one performs only the "mystery of speech"—mantra recitation—with firm faith in Dainichi Nyorai, the mysteries of the body and mind will be completed by Dainichi's empowerment.<sup>30</sup> Especially in death-related contexts, Buddhist incantations of all sorts were deemed efficacious in releasing the dead from the sufferings of the six paths, pacifying vengeful spirits, and bringing about birth in a pure land, whether for oneself or for others. Thus rites related to death, such as "preemptive funerals" (*gyakushu*, 逆修)—services for postmortem welfare performed in advance of an individual's death—as well as funerary and memorial rites usually involved the recitation of spells, including the nenbutsu and esoteric mantras and *dhāraṇīs*.<sup>31</sup> The same was true of deathbed practice, and in this particular setting, vocalized practice assumed an added significance. For those in pain, or without extensive training in meditation, chanting was deemed more practicable than inward contemplation or visualization. Also, if "right mindfulness at the last moment" were to be understood solely as an inner state, not susceptible to observation by third parties, survivors could never be certain whether or not a given individual had indeed achieved correct mental focus at the end and might be left in some doubt about that person's postmortem fate. Thus right mindfulness at

the time of death quickly came to be interpreted in terms of conformity to proper ritual conduct; those who died calmly with Amida’s name or some other holy invocation on their lips were thereby assumed to have reached the Pure Land or achieved an otherwise liberating death. Vocal practice at the end accordingly achieved the status of a “proof” of that individual’s *ōjō* and was thus reassuring to surviving disciples and family members. Vocalization at death of the A-syllable would have presumably carried a similar assurance.

#### A-SYLLABLE INVOCATION AS “EASY”

There is some suggestion that the six-character nenbutsu gained popularity at least in part as a deathbed practice, where its relative ease of performance would have much to recommend it. At a time when one might be physically impaired, in discomfort, or even wracked by pain, chanting *Namu Amida-butsu* would certainly have been easier than reciting a sutra, whether in its entirety or in part. *Ōjōden* hagiographies whose subjects recite, for example, a chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* on their deathbed are invariably described as completing their recitation before passing peacefully away; in reality, however, sutra chanting as a deathbed practice would have carried the risk that one might die in mid-recitation, a death that might well have been seen as lacking in aesthetic completeness, if not downright inauspicious. In contrast, someone who died chanting the nenbutsu, whether many times or few, could be said to have died with Amida’s name on their lips.<sup>32</sup> Based on scriptural sources, ten nenbutsu in one’s last moments were deemed sufficient to achieve birth in the Pure Land; some medieval Japanese sources say that a single nenbutsu is enough.<sup>33</sup> While chanting ten or even one nenbutsu sounds simple enough under ordinary circumstances, we have evidence that Buddhists in Japan’s early medieval period experienced considerable anxiety over whether or not they would be able to focus their thoughts and utter the Buddha’s name when they faced death. Nothing less than one’s salvation depended on it. Genshin had written that a single reflection on the Buddha at death outweighs in its effect the karmic acts of a hundred years.<sup>34</sup> In the liminal potency of that moment, even a sinful person, it was believed, could achieve birth in the Pure Land by the power of his final nenbutsu. By the same token, however, it was thought that even a virtuous person, by a single stray, desultory thought at the end, could thereby short-circuit the

merit of a lifetime's practice and fall back into the samsaric realms. Death could take one without warning, and *in extremis*, even one "*Namu Amida-butsu*" might prove too much for some persons to manage. The ideal of right mindfulness at the time of death thus provided immense hope for salvation but also generated fears, and some individuals offered prayers years in advance for proper mental concentration in their final moments.<sup>35</sup>

Once the final nenbutsu had been assimilated to the A-syllable, however, the possibility arose that a single utterance of "A" might suffice as a deathbed practice. And indeed, the *Kōyōshū* (孝養集, Collection on Filial Piety), a work attributed to Kakuban but probably from the late Kamakura period, contains this passage:

If [the dying person] concentrates his mind on the Buddha for even a single moment and chants the name [of Amida] even once, then a transformation buddha [manifested by Amida] and attendant bodhisattvas will come to welcome that person [and escort him to the Pure Land]. But if he cannot manage to chant all six characters "*Namu Amida-butsu*," then he should [simply] chant the single syllable "A" of Amida, and thereby, all [requirements for *ōjō*] will be fulfilled.<sup>36</sup>

The unknown compiler of *Kōyōshū* does not explicitly state here that the "A" to be recited is the A-syllable of Shingon *ajikan* practice, but we may assume this identification, because the association of Amida with the A-syllable was by this time well established and because this work was deliberately attributed to the esoteric master Kakuban, known for his writings on A-syllable contemplation. The claim that chanting the single syllable A fulfills all requirements of deathbed practice may have proved enormously reassuring to those attending the deathbed of fellow practitioners, respected teachers, or beloved relatives. Not only is saying "A" easier than saying "*Namu Amida-butsu*," but one imagines that, since "A" is the sound of the exhaled breath, indeed the essence of all sounds, almost any inarticulate sigh or groan on the part of the dying person, even if unconscious, could have been construed as a final utterance of the A-syllable, and thus as guaranteeing that individual's liberation from samsara.

While *Kōyōshū* identifies the A-syllable with the nenbutsu, as Jichihan and Kakuban had done, we also find works that argue the superior ease of deathbed A-syllable invocation by placing the two

practices in opposition. For example, the *Buppō yume monogatari* of Chidō, mentioned above, contains this passage:

[The Pure Land practice of] chanting *Namu Amida-butsu* involves many words and is prone to distraction. Because the breath that comes out when one simply opens one’s mouth always is the sound “A,” even in the midst of distraction, there could be no easier practice. . . . At the very last, when facing the end in death, one should [simply] open one’s mouth, place one’s attention on the “A” breath, and experience the end.<sup>37</sup>

This passage is representative of a number of arguments occurring in Kamakura-period Buddhist writings that attempt to counter the growing influence of the chanted nenbutsu, specifically the exclusive nenbutsu advocated by Hōnen, by appropriating Hōnen’s claims for the nenbutsu as an “easy practice” in order to promote in its place a different practice altogether—in this case, the A-syllable contemplation—that is said to be easier still. For example, Nichiren (日蓮, 1222–1282), who advocated exclusive devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra*, wrote:

For those who have faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*, in the hour of death, even if they do not mentally contemplate the Buddha, verbally recite the sutra, or [physically] enter the practice hall, they will without intent illuminate the dharma realm and without making an utterance, recite all sutras; without taking up the scriptural rolls, they have the merit of clasping all eight scrolls of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Is this not a vastly easier practice than attempting—as devotees of the provisional teaching of the nenbutsu do—to chant ten nenbutsu on one’s deathbed in the hope of achieving right mindfulness?<sup>38</sup>

#### A-SYLLABLE CONTEMPLATION AS “NATURAL”

Some references to deathbed practice in Shingon writings of the Kamakura period recommend A-syllable contemplation, not merely as easy, but as natural, in the sense of conforming to the inherent nature of reality. An example occurs in the *Kakukai Hōkyō hōgo* (覺海法橋法語, Bridge of the Law: Kakukai’s Discourse on the Dharma), a short sermon-like tract (*hōgo*) recording the teachings of the Shingon master Nanshō-bō Kakukai (南勝房覺海, 1142–1223), who served from 1217 to 1220 as the thirty-seventh superintendent of Kongōbuji at the Shingon monastery on Mt. Kōya.<sup>39</sup> In this essay, his sole extant work,



Kakukai argues—very much against the prevailing attitudes of his day—that aspirations for birth after death in any particular pure land arise from deluded attachment and are inconsistent with the insight that the whole universe is Dainichi Nyorai’s realm. “Those who truly aspire to unexcelled enlightenment (Skt. *bodhi*) in accordance with this [Shingon] teaching do not consider in the least where they will be reborn or in what form,” he asserts. This is because, for one awakened to the originally unborn nature of the dharmas, all places are the pure land that is Dainichi’s Practice Hall of Esoteric Splendor (Mitsugon Dōjō, 密嚴道場). From this perspective, Kakukai argues that the entire notion of fixing one’s aspirations on a particular postmortem destination is misconceived:

When we thoroughly contemplate the arising and perishing of the *dharmas*, in truth we cannot be one-sidedly attached to [Maitreya’s] Heaven of Satisfaction, nor to [Amida’s land of] Utmost Bliss. . . . If we simply purify the mind, we shall feel no distress, even if we should assume the forms of such [lowly] creatures as dragons and *yakṣas*. . . . Our partiality for the human form and our bias against the strange forms of other creatures are due to our lack of understanding. Regardless of transmigration, we shall suffer no discomfort. . . .<sup>40</sup>

This position leads Kakukai also to reject formalized conventions of deathbed practice designed to control the liminal possibilities of the last moment and ritually direct one’s passage to the next life:

Nor do I consider what kind of *mudrā* to make at the moment of death. Depending on my state of mind, I can abide [in right mindfulness] in any of the four postures [walking, standing, sitting, or lying down]. What kind of action is not *samādhi*? Every thought and every utterance are meditations (*kannen*) and mantras (*shingon*) of attainment (*siddhi*, *shitsuji*). . . . [At death] the practitioner should simply chant the A-syllable with each breath and mentally contemplate the true aspect, [that all things] arise in accordance with conditions.<sup>41</sup>

Kakukai here suggests that A-syllable contemplation is the practice that conforms to the way things truly are—that is, dependent upon conditions, empty, and nondual—and that mindfulness of this reality will free one from attachment and lead to the liberating insight that all places are equally the realm of the cosmic buddha. Death, he implies, is not a critical moment of transition that needs to be ritualized in some



special fashion; the practice sufficient in life is sufficient at the last moment as well.

A stronger, more explicit statement to this effect appears in the *Rinjū yōjin no koto* (臨終用心事, Admonitions for the Time of Death) by the esoteric master Dōhan (道範, 1178–1252), who was Kakukai's disciple.<sup>42</sup> Dōhan writes:

The syllable A as existence arising through conditions corresponds to birth. The syllable A as the emptiness of non-arising corresponds to death. Thus dying in one place and being born in another is nothing other than the syllable A. . . . This is why Vairocana takes this single syllable as his mantra. . . . Birth and death are nothing other than the transformations of the six elements transmigrating in accordance with conditions. Buried, one becomes dust and is no different from the great earth of the syllable A. Cremated, one becomes smoke and is equal to the wisdom fire of the syllable RA. In contemplating the non-transformation of the six elements, there is no longer arising and perishing, only the naturally inherent four mandalas that are the buddha essence.<sup>43</sup>

Here a subtle but crucial shift has occurred. Where Jichihan, Kakuban, and Kakukai had seen A-syllable contemplation as a practice for realizing the true nature of things as conditioned and empty and thus offering liberation at the time of death, Dōhan suggests that living and dying *in and of themselves* constitute A-syllable practice and thus naturally conform to true reality. In other writings, he would develop Kakuban's associations of Amida with the breath, equating the out and in of the breath with the name and essence of Amida, with the Diamond and Womb Realm mandalas, with wisdom and principle, and with outward manifestation and inner enlightenment; simply breathing in and of itself becomes the uninterrupted nenbutsu. In fact, Dōhan argues, it is only in this secret, esoteric sense that the conventional ideal of uninterrupted nenbutsu practice can be realized.<sup>44</sup> This argument does not occur in his *Rinjū yōjin no koto*; like Kakuban, Dōhan seems to have reserved his most radically immanentist views of the nenbutsu for doctrinal writings not specifically related to deathbed practice. His *Rinjū yōjin no koto* does not altogether reject the notion of death as a perilous transition to be ritually negotiated, as Dōhan also advises the practitioner to seek the empowerment (*kaji*, 加持) of the Shingon founder Kūkai in order to attain birth in a pure realm.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, in the passage

just cited, by assimilating both birth and death to two aspects of the syllable A, Dōhan moves toward redefining A-syllable contemplation—not in Kakukai's sense, as a practice for realizing that birth and death are inseparable from the true aspect of the *dharmas*—but as already naturally embodied in the mere facts of being born and dying.

This radically nondual perspective is explicitly introduced into the deathbed setting in writings such as Chidō's *Buppō yume monogatari*, cited above. To cite the relevant passage more fully:

At the very last, when facing the end in death, one should [simply] open one's mouth, place one's attention on the "A" breath, and experience the end. In that moment, because all affairs also come to an end, no matter how one may ponder, one can reach no conclusion. If one tries to contemplate the meaning [of the A-syllable] too intently, it will become a hindrance. Merely ending one's life on the single A syllable without any intense contemplation is attaining self-realization beyond thought [i.e., perfect awakening without delusion or mental effort].<sup>46</sup>

Here the equation of A-syllable with the breath as a naturally inherent practice seems to have fused with, indeed virtually replaced, the ideal of right mindfulness at the time of death. In his discussion of the esoteric *nenbutsu*, James Sanford has noted that, once the *nenbutsu* is identified with the breath, "to live at all, simply to produce the two-part instinctual rhythm of breathing in and out, becomes a constant intoning of the *nenbutsu*."<sup>47</sup> In the passages from Dōhan and Chidō just quoted, something similar is happening with the A-syllable. Once the A-syllable is identified with the breath and with inherent principle, the two-part alternation of being born and dying in and of itself becomes A-syllable practice and the expression of innate enlightenment. Whether or not such arguments carry ideas of innate enlightenment so far as in effect to deny the very need for Buddhist practice is an important question, although one that exceeds the scope of this essay.<sup>48</sup> At the very least, one imagines that these claims may have greatly obviated the need for concern about achieving correct mental focus at the time of death: simply to exhale and die is itself liberation.

Equations of birth and death with the true aspect of reality—the rise and fall of phenomena in accordance with conditions—were by no means limited to interpretations of A-syllable contemplation or to Shingon tradition. The so-called "oral transmission" or *kuden* literature

produced across schools and lineages during Japan's medieval period, which were shaped by esoteric sensibilities and notions of original enlightenment (*hongaku hōmon*, 本覺法門), are full of such statements: "Unproduced birth and death are without beginning or end . . . birth and death are originally blissful, but people are deluded and perceive them as suffering. Remove this [false] view immediately and you shall reach the state of buddhahood."<sup>49</sup> "Our red color at birth indicates the wisdom of suchness that accords with conditions, while our white bones after death indicate the principle of suchness that is unchanging."<sup>50</sup> "To become white bones is to see the dharma nature. . . . [Dead and abandoned in the cemetery ground,] one produces neither a single thought of deluded attachment nor cherishes the slightest desire. This state, without suffering or joy, is called the direct path to buddhahood, the true pure land. Those ignorant of this teaching think that buddhahood is distant and seek the dharma apart from their own mind."<sup>51</sup> However, such statements tend chiefly to appear in doctrinal works concerned with promoting insight into the nonduality of samsara and nirvana or with advocating the position that enlightenment is not the end result of a linear process of cultivation but inherent from the outset, having only to be realized. They do not address the concrete facts of how one should face death, nor do they usually occur in protocols for deathbed practice, where the last moment typically figures as a critical transition, pregnant with soteriological potential but also danger, and in need of ritual control. It may not be too much to suppose that the assimilation of deathbed nenbutsu to the A-syllable contemplation, associated as that contemplation was with the breath and with inherent principle, enabled some slippage between the two discourses, allowing some thinkers to reconceive deathbed practice, not as ritual control over a perilous transition on which one's postmortem liberation depends, but as a paradigmatic expression of innate enlightenment that, once recognized, or even accepted on faith, finds expression in the natural utterance of "A" on the last outbreath.

In conclusion, it should be noted that all the passages discussed above recommending A-syllable contemplation at the time of death are drawn from prescriptive literature. It is difficult to know how widely they may have been carried out, let alone with what mental attitude on the part of the practitioner. Compared to records of people chanting the nenbutsu, the Mantra of Light, the Superlative Spell, or other *dhāraṇī* or passages from the *Lotus* or other sutras, one finds very few

historical notices of A-syllable practice at the time of death.<sup>52</sup> Enkyō (圓鏡), abbess of Hokkeji, writing in 1304 about the nuns active in the Kamakura-period revival of her temple, names several women who passed away while doing A-syllable contemplation, though she provides no details.<sup>53</sup> The monk Ryūgyō Hōin (隆暁法印) of Ninnaji, out of pity for those who died during the great famine of the Yōwa era (1181–1182), is said to have organized a number of *hijiri*, or semi-recluse ascetics, who wrote the A-syllable on the forehead of each corpse they encountered to establish a karmic bond between that person and the Buddha, performing this service for more than 42,300 deceased over a two-month period.<sup>54</sup> This act seems to have been based less on a non-dual understanding of the A-syllable as a naturally inherent practice than on its perceived mantric power to pacify the dead and lead them to liberation. Nonetheless, however limited actual use of the A-syllable contemplation as a deathbed practice may have been, the intriguing possibility remains that its occasional adoption in this context, if only at the level of prescription, helped some individuals to rethink “right mindfulness at the last moment,” not in terms of exercising control over a potentially dangerous transit from this defiled world to a remote pure land, but as a natural expression of innate enlightenment.

## NOTES

1. *Ōjō yōshū* 往生要集, *Genshin, Nihon shisō taikēi* 6, ed. Ishida Mizumaro (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970), 296 (hereafter NST). Genshin’s instructions for death-bed practice are found at 206–217 and have been translated in part by James C. Dobbins, “Genshin’s Deathbed Nembutsu Ritual in Pure Land Buddhism,” in *Religions of Japan in Practice*, ed. George J. Tanabe, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 166–175.
2. Taikō Yamasaki, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism*, trans. and adapted by Richard Petersen and Cynthia Petersen (Boston: Shambala, 1988), 191.
3. Richard K. Payne, “Ajikan: Ritual and Meditation in the Shingon Tradition,” in *Re-Visioning “Kamakura” Buddhism*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 222–224.
4. Scriptural sources for A-syllable contemplation include *Darijing* 3, *Taishō* 848, chap. 6, 18:19c–24a, and *Putixin lun*, *Taishō* 1665, 32:574a–b; see also the discussion of the A-syllable in *Darijing shu* 7, *Taishō* 1796, 39:649a–657c.
5. *Shōji jissō gi* 聲字實相義, *Kōbō Daishi zenshū*, ed. Mikkyō Bunka Kenkyūjo, 8 vols. (Wakayama Prefecture, Kōyasan: Mikkyō Bunka Kenkyūjo, 1965–1968), 1:524; *Kūkai: Major Works*, trans. Yoshito S. Hakeda (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 239.
6. As Payne has noted, the modernist assumption that ritual and meditation constitute two different, opposing categories simply does not apply to A-syllable contemplation, an observation that applies to esoteric Buddhist practice in general. See “Ajikan,” 221.
7. *Taishō* 2432, 77:415a–416a.
8. Sawa Ryūken and others, eds., *Mikkyō jiten* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1975), 6–7. For a description of some forms of A-syllable contemplation, see Yamasaki, *Shingon*, 190–215, and Payne, “Ajikan,” 228–231.
9. *Ajikan gi* 阿字觀儀, in *Kōgyō Daishi zenshū*, ed. Tomita Kōjun, 2 vols. (1935; repr., Tokyo: Hōsenji, 1977), 2:999–1001 (hereafter KDZ), and *Kōgyō Daishi senjutsu shū*, ed. Miyasaka Yūshō (1977; rev. ed., Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1989), 1:226–228 (hereafter KDS). The KDZ version preserves the original *kanbun*; KDS has been rendered into Japanese and includes notes. The English translation is from Ryūichi Abé, “From Kūkai to Kakuban: A Study of Shingon Buddhist Dharma Transmission” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1991), 394, slightly modified.
10. *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū* 一期大要秘密集, KDZ 2:1210–1211; KDS 1:169–170.
11. *Buppō yume monogatari* 佛法夢物語, in *Kana hōgo shū, Nihon koten bungaku taikēi* 83, ed. Miyasaka Yūshō (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1964), 223–223 (here-

after NKBT); William M. Bodiford, trans., “Chidō’s *Dreams of Buddhism*,” in *Religions of Japan in Practice*, ed. Tanabe (see note 1), 243, slightly modified. A virtually identical text, the *Yume no ki* (夢記 or 由迷能起) attributed to Hakuun Egyō (白雲慧暎, 1223–1297), a disciple of the Zen teacher Enni, appears in *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho*, ed. Suzuki Gakujitsu Zaidan, 100 vols. (Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujitsu Zaidan, 1970–1973), 48:269b (hereafter DNBZ).

12. On *shinnyokan* (眞如觀), see Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 191–199, and “The Contemplation of Suchness,” in *Religions of Japan in Practice*, Tanabe (see note 1), 199–209.

13. “Ajikan,” 236–237.

14. *Byōchū shugyō ki* 病中修行記, *Shingonshū anjin zensho*, ed. Hase Hōshū (Kyoto: Rokudaishinbōsha, 1913–1914), 2:781–785 (hereafter SAZ). I am indebted to James Sanford for introducing me to this text. For discussion, see Ōtani Teruo, “Jichihan *Byōchū shugyō ki* ni tsuite,” *Bukkyō bunka kenkyū* 13 (1966): 43–58; Marc Bunjisters, “Jichihan and the Restoration and Innovation of Buddhist Practice,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 26, nos. 1–2 (1999): 65–70; and Jacqueline I. Stone, “The Secret Art of Dying: Esoteric Deathbed Practices in Heian Japan,” in *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations*, ed. Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline I. Stone (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 144–151. I have followed Bunjisters in adopting the pronunciation “Jichihan.”

15. James H. Sanford, “Breath of Life: The Esoteric Nenbutsu,” in *Esoteric Buddhism in Japan* (1994), repr. in *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 161–189, and “Amida’s Secret Life: Kakuban’s *Amida hishaku*,” in *Approaching the Land of Bliss*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 120–138.

16. The “perfected body assembly” (*jōjinne*, 成身會) consists of Dainichi Nyōrai in the center, surrounded by four directional buddhas: Ashuku (Akṣobhya) to the east; Hōshō (Ratnasambhava) to the south; Fukūjōju (Amoghasiddhi) to the north; and Amida (known also as Muryōjubutsu, 無量壽佛) to the west. Each of the five buddhas is surrounded within a moon disk by four attendant bodhisattvas; Amida and his attendants compose the “lotus section” (*rengebu*, 蓮華部). Scholars for some time assumed that a reference in *Byōchū shugyō ki* to Amida’s land as located “in the western direction” (SAZ 2:783) reflected Jichihan’s uncritical incorporation of conventional, exoteric understandings of the Pure Land as lying apart from this world. However, as Ōtani has noted, such assumptions overlook the identification of Amida in the very same passage as “lord of the lotus section,” a clear reference to the Diamond World Mandala (“Jichihan *Byōchū shugyō ki* ni tsuite,” 50).

17. *Byōchū shugyō ki*, SAZ 2:784.

18. There exist both a longer and shorter version of the esoteric Amida Spell, or Amida Dhāraṇī, based on the *Wuliangshou yigui* (*Taishō* 930). Their recitation is said to eradicate sins and bring about worldly benefits as well as birth in the Pure Land.

19. *Byōchū shugyō ki*, SAZ 2:782.

20. *Byōchū shugyō ki*, SAZ 2:784. This interpretative structure is very close to that of the Tendai threefold truth, in which the extremes of “emptiness” (*kū*) and “conventional existence” (*ke*) are simultaneously affirmed and negated by the middle (*chū*), and may reflect the influence of Jichihan’s Tendai studies.

21. This passage bears some structural similarity to the equation in medieval Tendai thought of the three characters A-mi-da with the threefold truth of emptiness, conventional existence, and the middle. See for example Sueki Fumihiko, “Amida santai-setsu o megutte,” *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 28, no. 1 (1979): 216–222. Correlations of the three syllables of Amida’s name with esoteric meaning are further developed by Kakuban in his *Amida hishaku*. See Sanford, “Amida’s Secret Life,” 132–133.

22. *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū* is included in *KDZ* 2:1197–1220 and *KDS* 1:157–176. Some scholars have maintained that the *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū* was composed not by Kakuban but by Butsugon (佛嚴, fl. late twelfth century), himself in Kakuban’s lineage. See Stone, “The Secret Art of Dying,” 171–172n63 for a summary of the scholarship on this issue, and 151–159 for a discussion of deathbed protocols described in the text. I have treated the *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū* here as Kakuban’s work.

23. *KDZ* 1:1201; *KDS* 1:160.

24. See Ryūichi Abé, “Bridging Ritual and Text: Kakuban’s Writing on Meditative Practice,” in *Kōgyō Daishi Kakuban kenkyū*, ed. Kōgyō Daishi Kenkyū Ronshū Henshū Iinkai (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1992), 1076–1073 (reverse pagination) (hereafter *KDKK*), and Hendrik van der Veere, *Kakuban Shōnin: The Life and Works of Kōgyō Daishi* (Tokyo: Nombro, 1998), 161–164.

25. *KDZ* 2:1201–1213; *KDS* 1:160–172.

26. *KDZ* 2:1214; *KDS* 1:172.

27. Sanford, “Breath of Life,” 172. For Kakuban’s understanding of Amida and of the nenbutsu, see 169–175.

28. For example, on medieval Tendai transmissions concerning Amida as the breath of life, see Hazama Jikō, *Nihon bukkyō no kaiten to sono kichō*, vol. 2: *Chūko Nihon Tendai no kenkyū* (1948; repr., Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1975), 275–297. For the broader influence of this idea, see Kushida Ryōkō, *Shingon mikkyō seiritsu katei*



*no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1964), 219–227, and Sanford, “Breath of Life,” 180–188.

29. Hayami Tasuku, *Jōdo shinkō ron* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku Shuppan, 1978), 117–121.

30. Matsuzaki Keisui, *Heian mikkyō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2002), 599–604.

31. Hayami Tasuku, *Heian kizoku shakai to bukkō* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1975), 183–196.

32. Takagi Yutaka, *Heian jidai Hokke bukkōshi kenkyū* (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1973), 451–463, esp. 462.

33. Amida’s famous eighteenth vow promises birth in his pure land to all who aspire to this goal with sincerity and call him to mind “even ten times” (*Wuliangshou jing*, *Taishō* 360, 12:268a); in addition, the *Meditation Sūtra* claims that even an evil person, if he encounters a good friend (*zenchishiki*, 善智識) who instructs him at the hour of death so that he is able to sustain ten thoughts of Amida, shall, with each thought, erase the sins of eight billion *kalpas* and be born in Amida’s Pure Land (*Guan Wuliangshou fo jing*, *Taishō* 365, 12:346a).

34. *Ōjō yōshū*, *NST* 6:214.

35. On the moment of death as the focus of both hopes and anxieties, see Jacqueline I. Stone, “By the Power of One’s Last *Nenbutsu*: Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan,” in *Approaching the Land of Bliss*, ed. Payne and Tanaka (see note 15), 77–119.

36. *DNBZ* 43:30b.

37. *NKBT* 83:222–223; trans. Bodiford, “Chidō’s *Dreams of Buddhism*,” 243, slightly modified.

38. *Shugo kokka ron* 守護國家論 (1259), *Shōwa teihon Nichiren shōnin ibun*, ed. Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo, 4 vols. (Minobu-chō, Yamanashi Prefecture: Minobusan Kuonji, 1952–1959; rev. 1988), no. 15, 1:111 (hereafter *Teihon*).

39. In *Kana hōgo shū*, *NKBT* 83:55–58; trans. with commentary by Robert E. Morrell in his *Early Kamakura Buddhism: A Minority Report* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1987), 89–102.

40. *NKBT* 83:57; trans. from Morrell, *Early Kamakura Buddhism*, 99–100, slightly modified.

41. *NKBT* 83:57; trans. from Morrell, *Early Kamakura Buddhism*, 100, slightly modified.



42. SAZ 2:792–775. I am indebted to James Sanford for introducing me to this text. For more on Dōhan’s esoteric nenbutsu thought, see his “Breath of Life,” 175–179.
43. SAZ 2:793. Dōhan alludes here to A VI RA HŪṂ KHAM, the root mantra of Dainichi.
44. *Shoshin tongaku shō* 初心頓覺鈔, cited in Kushida, *Shingon mikkyō seiritsu katei no kenkyū*, 217–218. See also Sanford, “Breath of Life,” 178–179.
45. SAZ 2:792.
46. NKBT 83:223; trans. Bodiford, “Chidō’s *Dreams of Buddhism*,” 243, slightly modified.
47. Sanford, “Amida’s Secret Life,” 121.
48. For discussion of this issue in the context of medieval Tendai thought, see Stone, *Original Enlightenment*.
49. *Tendai Hokkeshū gozu hōmon yōsan* 天台法華宗牛頭法門要纂, *Tendai hongaku ron*, NST 9, ed. Tada Kōryū and others (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973), 38.
50. *Ongi kuden* 御義口傳, *Teihon* 3:2691.
51. *Mongu ryaku taikō shikenmon* 文句略大綱私見聞, *DNBZ* 5:150b–c.
52. A more detailed study of this subject might investigate the possibility of A-syllable deathbed practice in other Buddhist cultures. Raoul Birnbaum, for example, notes a passage from the *vinaya* compendium of the Chinese master Jianyue Duti (見月讀體, 1601–1679), which advises monastic practitioners to prepare for sleep—and thus ultimately, one might assume, for death—by first chanting Amitābha’s name and then visualizing the character “A” within a disk, reciting it twenty-one times in a single breath (*Pini riyong qieyao*, *XZJ* 106:135a). See Birnbaum’s “Deathbed Image of Master Hongyi,” in *The Buddhist Dead*, ed. Cuevas and Stone (see note 14), 195.
53. *Hokke metsuzaiji engi* 法華滅罪寺緣起, *Yamato koji taikan*, ed. Iwanami Kojirō (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1976–1978), 5:143a. I am indebted to Lori Meeks for providing me with this reference. The relevant passage is translated in her “Nuns, Court Ladies, and Female Bodhisattvas: The Women of Japan’s Medieval Ritsu-School Nuns’ Revival Movement” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2003), 142–144.
54. *Hōjōki* 方丈記, in *Hōjōki*, *Hosshinshū*, ed. Miki Sumito (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1976), 24.



# The Shingon Subordinating Fire Offering for Amitābha, “Amida Kei Ai Goma”

**Richard K. Payne**

Institute of Buddhist Studies

## INTRODUCTION

EXAMINATION OF THE RITUAL corpus of contemporary Shingon Buddhism reveals that it has a very complex history, and that it includes practices devoted to a much greater variety of deities than one might expect from textbook summaries. These latter tend to highlight contrasts and to reduce the complexities of history to simplistic formulae. In the case of Shingon, the focus of attention is placed almost solely on the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana (Dainichi Nyorai, 大日如来)—as if the Shingon tradition were organized around the figure of a central deity in a fashion mimicking Christianity. Such a representation of the tradition, however, marginalizes the many other forms of practice found within the Shingon tradition. At the same time it distorts the historical record and the perception of Shingon per se, and our understanding of the dynamics of Japanese religion, including Buddhism, as a whole.

The formulaic reductions found in textbooks and other popular treatments all too frequently lead to mistaken conceptions. As these misleadingly simplistic formulae become increasingly standardized in the educational system, they come to constitute what Francis Bacon referred to as “idols of the theatre,” sources of error based upon “received or traditional philosophic systems.”<sup>1</sup>

One way in which mistaken conceptions are created is when an accurate characterization is mistakenly thought to entail the negation of its opposite. Specifically of interest here is the true general claim that “all Pure Land practitioners are devoted to Amida.” It is sometimes assumed that this claim asserts an exclusive relation, in other words it is mistakenly concluded that “no practitioners of other forms of Buddhism are devoted to Amida.”<sup>2</sup> In this case the exclusive devotional focus on Amida found in the Pure Land Buddhist tradition is misunderstood to mean that devotion to Amida is only found in the Pure

Land tradition. The much more complex actuality is that many other Buddhist traditions also revere Amida, and indeed Amida has been—and continues to be—one of the most popular buddhas throughout Mahayana Buddhism. One of the Buddhist traditions in which Amida plays a significant role is the Shingon tradition.<sup>3</sup>

There are two additional sources for such pseudo-problems. The first of these is the tendency to project the idea of strict sectarian affiliation familiar from the present—both in Japan and the West—back onto the medieval situation. Prior to the restrictions imposed on Buddhist institutions during the Tokugawa era, lineal affiliation based on ordination and initiations should not be equated with exclusive sectarian affiliation.<sup>4</sup> The second additional source is the tendency to treat founders as if their ideas were created *ex nihil*. While this may serve the interests of sectarian apologists who wish to emphasize the unique creativity of the founder of their own sect, it is historically misleading. The romantic notion of the creative genius, whether in the field of art or of religion, promotes an unrealistic view, that of the isolated individual solely expressing his or her own most unique experiences and insights as the sole source of progress and novelty in the world. For the study of religious praxis, a metaphor different from that of the isolated artistic genius is more appropriate. At any one time, a wealth of religio-philosophic ideas is present in a sociocultural milieu. Some individuals are in a sense catalytic, in that out of this solution they crystallize a new form. This metaphor may help us to balance the creative contribution with the reality of ideas already in circulation.

One strategy for avoiding these sources of error is to shift away from presuming that all religion is necessarily fundamentally motivated by doctrine. If instead of taking a doctrinally informed view of Shingon—one that, for example, places Dainichi in a role comparable to the Christian creator god—we examine the actual practices of the tradition, we find a much more varied reality.

The *goma* (Skt. *homa*, 護摩), a ritual in which votive offerings are made into a fire, is widely practiced in Shingon Buddhism, and includes forms devoted to Amitābha (Amida, 阿弥陀). From textbook summaries, this might seem surprising, as according to such summaries, Amitābha is associated with Pure Land, rather than Shingon. In the following we explore some of the theoretical implications of shifting from a doctrinally informed model of Japanese Buddhism to one based on actual practices, and follow with a specific example, a *goma* devoted

to Amitābha, the Amida Kei Ai Goma (阿弥陀敬愛護摩, employed for gaining the love and respect of others).

In addition to giving doctrine a privileged position, modern Western historical studies of Japanese Buddhism have usually been structured according to sectarian forms familiar from our own time. Thus, studies of the Pure Land sects<sup>5</sup> have generally linked the practice of vocal nenbutsu (*shōmyō nenbutsu*, 稱名念仏), exclusivistic devotion to Amida, and desire for birth in Sukhāvātī—Amida’s Pure Land—together as if they form a monolithic whole. Approaches to the history of Buddhism that look only at sectarian history narrowly defined tend to promote sectarian lineages as the exclusive historical conveyors of a tradition, excluding from consideration figures and movements that may have been instrumental in the history of that tradition. In the case of Pure Land Buddhism, such a perspective also tends to give the practice of vocal nenbutsu, devotion to Amida, and desire for birth in Sukhāvātī the appearance of being a closely integrated whole that is unique to the Pure Land sects.

The same kind of dynamic affects the representations of Shingon. Summary descriptions that work by highlighting contrasts and the presumption that all religions are necessarily exclusivistic can all too easily effectively produce a distorted, almost grotesque caricature of the tradition. As with Pure Land a set of three elements are identified with Shingon—the symbolic centrality of the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana, the doctrinal emphasis on awakening in this present embodiment (*sokushin jobutsu*, 即身成仏), and ritualized visualization practices. These three can be (mis-)taken as forming the same kind of unique whole for Shingon as vocal nenbutsu, devotion to Amida, and desire for birth in Sukhāvātī do for Pure Land Buddhism. While Japanese Buddhism was forced into a form of institutional organization based on exclusive sectarian identity during the Tokugawa era, modern Shingon practice can be examined “archeologically” as a record of the complex history of actual praxis. The contemporary fire offering (*homa, goma*, 護摩) devoted to Amitābha that is translated below provides an example of the complexity hidden behind the grotesque distortions of overly simplistic “textbook” representations of both the Shingon and Pure Land traditions.

We find, for example, that belief in the existence of pure lands, devotion to Amida, and vocal nenbutsu practice were very widespread throughout Japanese Buddhism in the Heian and Kamakura eras. The

common association made between devotion to Amida and *mappō*—belief that the dharma has declined to the point of its being ineffective in enabling ordinary foolish beings to become awakened—is also problematic in light of broader, synchronic perspectives on Buddhist practice. While *mappō* was central to Pure Land cosmology and conceptions of the path, it did not play any such role in Shingon practices devoted to Amida.

A full picture of the context of the rise of Pure Land Buddhism in Heian and Kamakura Japan would require the examination of a wide variety of related practices and beliefs that formed the religious culture of the time as a whole. For example, a variety of meditative nenbutsu practices were developed on Mt. Hiei and spread within the Tendai sect.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, recitation of the title of the *Lotus Sūtra* (*daimoku*, 題目) existed in a variety of forms prior to Nichiren.<sup>7</sup> To use a metaphor from chemistry, there were a wide variety of different elements in solution, some of which crystalized into a particular form when the catalyst of Hōnen and Shinran were added.

The phrase “Kamakura Buddhism” is still frequently used to refer to the forms of Buddhism newly established during the Kamakura era, such as Pure Land, Zen, and Nichiren. Historiographically, these new forms are then taken as characterizing Buddhism of the period. However, during the Kamakura era itself Shingon-shū was by far much more influential than the then only newly established forms. The new Buddhisms are typically the ones identified with reform and popularization, while the established forms are treated as decadent and otiose. However, there were reformers within the Shingon sect itself,<sup>8</sup> and there were several leaders who made efforts to reach out to the general population.<sup>9</sup> The influence of Shingon-shū during the Kamakura era was only exceeded by that of Tendai-shū. However, the esoteric half of Tendai was itself deeply informed by Shingon-shū, and, therefore, would have had many of the same kinds of teachings and practices, as well as effects, on the broader religious culture of the time.

#### DISTORTING PRESUMPTIONS

It is not all that uncommon to come across authors who write as if their discovery of beliefs or practices that relate to Amida (Amitābha, or Amitāyus) in any Buddhist tradition other than Pure Land or Shin indicates either an influence by Pure Land Buddhism, or an appropriation

from Pure Land Buddhism. The rhetorical connotations (or, metaphoric entailments) of both of these causal notions—*influence by and appropriation from*—are based upon two presumptions. First, they presume a greater separate identity throughout the course of Buddhist history than we now have reason to believe has been the case. This presumption itself seems to be based on the idea that the kind of sharp sectarian delineations found in both modern Japanese Buddhism and modern Christianity are the norm for all religious traditions.

Second, they presume an imbalance of some kind. Influences flow from the greater or stronger to the lesser or weaker, making the latter derivative from the former. Appropriation presumes that the one doing the appropriation sees something of value in that which is being appropriated, something that is needed in place of some lack or inadequacy in the appropriator's own tradition.

Two examples, ready at hand, demonstrate the character of the usual formulations of the relation between tantric Buddhism and Pure Land. The first is from a general survey of Japanese religion: "Mukū, who became abbot of Kongōbu-ji, on Mount Kōya, in 894, regularly practiced the nenbutsu and can be regarded as the originator of the Shingon lineage of Pure Land teachings."<sup>10</sup> Here it is not the facts that are at issue, but the interpretation and implication that are problematic—that Mukū was "the originator of the Shingon lineage of Pure Land teachings" seems to indicate, first, that there were no such teachings within Shingon prior to his time, and second, that a specific "Shingon lineage of Pure Land teachings" was created at that time. While the latter may simply be the consequence of overly-loose usage of the term "lineage," the first implication is certainly mistaken, as will be further discussed below.

The second example is from Marc Buijnsters's study of Jichihan (ca. 1089–1144), in which he convincingly demonstrates the importance of Jichihan in the developments in Buddhist praxis (that is, the dialectic of thought and practice) during the late Heian era. Buijnsters calls attention to the fact that although Jichihan was a Tendai monk deeply trained in tantric Buddhism (*mikkyō*), Gyōnen "considered him . . . one of the six patriarchs or sages of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism."<sup>11</sup> A majority of the scholarship on Pure Land Buddhism focuses almost exclusively on the schools established by Hōnen and Shinran, framed historically by the lineage of ancestors defined by Shinran. For this reason Gyōnen's



evaluation of Jichihan's importance to the establishment of the Pure Land tradition has gone largely unnoticed and unmentioned.

Buijnsters highlights the importance for Japanese Pure Land attributed to Jichihan by Gyōnen in such a fashion as to create the appearance of it being an incongruity. However, an important reason for the appearance of incongruity results from the reduction of Pure Land and tantric Buddhist (that is, Shingon) thought to slogans.

The underlying principle of the doctrines in the Shingon school implies that the practitioner strives for the realization of direct enlightenment in this world and in the present body (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏). In the Pure Land teaching, on the other hand, this world is considered as impure (*edo* 穢土), and the ulterior aim is rebirth in the paradise of a saving buddha (*gongu jōdo* 欣求淨土), which is situated outside the world. . . . It seems that there is hardly any room to unite these two ideologies.<sup>12</sup>

And indeed, reduced to such simplistic formulae, there is not. It is, however, both inaccurate and misleading to represent religious traditions as if they were only axiomatic–deductive systems, ones in which doctrinal slogans serve as the axioms. There is an important difference between the wonderfully messy character of lived religious traditions and the logically coherent religio–philosophic systems of thought to which some theologians and philosophers of religion would like to reduce them.

Buijnsters argues that Jichihan “tried both to actualize and simplify esoteric practice.”<sup>13</sup> One instance is Jichihan's explanation of the visualization of the syllable A (*ajikan*, 阿字觀). In one presentation Jichihan gives the standard three-part interpretation of it as originary, all-per-vading, and empty.<sup>14</sup> A second instance is Jichihan's presentation of the triple mystery (*san mitsu*, 三密) of the identity of the practitioner's body, speech, and mind with the body, speech, and mind of the deity. According to Buijnsters, Jichihan here introduces what is a new interpretation of the three syllables of the name of Amida and the three aspects of the significance of the syllable A:

At this point, Jichihan distributes the threefold explanation of the A-syllable over the three syllables of Amida's name: “A” symbolizes that all things are uncreated 不生, “mi” that the self is not subject to changes 有, and “da” that the true state of things is enlightenment

空.<sup>15</sup> In this way, Jichihan actualized esoteric practice by being the first who conflated the visualization of the A-syllable and the visualization of Amida.<sup>16</sup>

This kind of interpretation of the name of Amida as emblematic of tantric teachings seems to have been influential on Kakuban, whose work on this is much more widely known.<sup>17</sup>

On the basis of these and other examples, Buijnsters concludes that “it was Jichihan with whom the development of esoteric Pure Land thought started.”<sup>18</sup> And, slightly more cautiously, “Jichihan was one of the first who tried to adapt Pure Land thought to Shingon doctrines.”<sup>19</sup> Again, it is not the facts about Jichihan’s work that are at issue here, but rather these latter conclusions about his primacy.

In considering these historiographic issues, it seems that one of the main problems is the ambiguity inherent in the use of the phrase “Pure Land” to refer to a kind of Buddhism. The received sectarian understanding—now no longer accepted uncritically—is that there is a monolithic, continuous, singular, and distinct tradition of Pure Land Buddhism. According to this image of Pure Land Buddhism, it originated in India with the preaching by the Buddha Śākyamuni of the three Pure Land sutras and was transmitted to China and then to Japan, where it was perfected in the work of Hōnen and Shinran. Upon reflection it should be clear that this is a sectarian mythistoric construct.<sup>20</sup> As such, it is no doubt useful, but much less so as a framework for historical understandings in *stricto sensu*. By employing the phrase “Pure Land Buddhism” uncritically, the kinds of misleading interpretations and pseudo-problems discussed here seem almost inevitable.

As I have suggested elsewhere, it may be appropriate to employ a revised set of categories that avoid inappropriately carrying a connotation of clearly delineated, separate sectarian identities.<sup>21</sup> Once having separated sectarian intents from scholarly ones, this would next involve distinguishing our usages between doctrinal and philosophic on the one hand, and socio-historical on the other. For the latter usages, use of the phrase “Pure Land Buddhism” would be limited to those religious movements that are self-identified as such.<sup>22</sup> Thus, by “Pure Land Buddhism” we would be identifying those movements that claim that identity as their own, specifically the Jōdo and other sects that employ the phrase in reference to themselves. For other forms of praxis, the terminology of “cult” seems more than adequate. Thus, what we have is a Shingon Amida cult that employs tantric elements in at least

some of its practices (such as the *goma* ritual translated below), and not a “Shingon Pure Land lineage.” At the same time, the terminology of “cult” would help to avoid the presumption that religions can be defined by a logically coherent systematization of their doctrine.

#### ON THE SHINGON CULT OF AMIDA

The Japanese tantric Buddhist tradition of Shingon takes as its main buddha the figure of Dainichi Nyorai. However, the Shingon tradition has a large number of rituals devoted to a wide variety of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other deities within its ritual corpus—including rituals devoted to Amida. In part this is because both Shingon and Pure Land originate in the same early medieval period of Indian Buddhism.

The practices of the Shingon tradition are based upon two ritual lineages that had been brought to China in the seventh century. The two complexes of ritual lineage, mandala and sutra, were introduced to China by Śubhākarasiṃha (673–735) and Vajrabodhi (671–741). Śubhākarasiṃha is considered to be responsible for the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi* ritual lineage, while Vajrabodhi is credited with the *Vajraśekhara*.<sup>23</sup> Huiguo (Jpn. Keika, 惠果, 746–805) had received initiation into both lineages, and in turn initiated Kūkai into both as well. Upon his return to Japan, Kūkai worked to create a unified system out of these two lineages, and is now considered the founder of the Shingon tradition in Japan.

#### India: Iconography of Amitābha in the Two Mandalas

Amitābha is found in both of the two mandalas described by the two texts that are central to the Shingon tradition. Attention to the iconography of tantric mandalas is not simply an art historical matter. Because the mandalas were used in tantric ritual, such iconography points directly to the ritual praxis of medieval Indian tantric Buddhism. The two mandalas central to the Shingon tradition as it developed in Japan are linked to two sutras and to two ritual lineages. The Taizōkai Mandara (Skt. Mahākaruṇā Garbha Mandala, or more briefly Garbha Mandala) is described in the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi-sūtra*,<sup>24</sup> while the Kongōkai Mandara (Skt. Vajradhātu Mandala) is described in the *Vajraśekhara-sūtra*.<sup>25</sup>

The presence of Amitābha may be dismissed as simply evidence of a rhetorical strategy of incorporating everything—all buddhas, bodhisattvas, protectors—into a single imperium dominated by Mahāvairocana. However, there is a direct correlation between the mandalas and ritual altars.<sup>26</sup> It seems reasonable, therefore, to assume that the importance of Amitābha along with the other figures was not solely rhetorical, but was also based in the cultic practices of the groups out of which the two texts arose.

Within the medieval Indian Mahayana context of tantric origins, there is a suggestive similarity between the idea of buddha-fields (Skt. *buddhakṣetra*), such as Amitābha's Sukhāvātī (Jpn. Gokuraku, 極樂, commonly rendered into English as "the Pure Land"), and mandalas. Buddha-fields are often located in particular cardinal directions—Amida's of course being in the western direction, both in the cosmology of medieval Buddhism and in mandalas. It is tempting to speculate that at some point the idea of there being buddha-fields located in various cardinal directions was combined with the symbolic representation of the mandala as imperial court,<sup>27</sup> producing a systematic and complete cosmology, one in which the buddha-field of the main buddha of a practice is located in the center and the buddha-fields of attendant buddhas are located in each of the four directions. This fivefold system—center and four cardinal directions—later becomes a frequently recurring organizing principle for much of Mahayana symbolism and thought, both in Tibetan and East Asian Buddhism.

The Shingon-shū vision of the universe as experienced by awakened consciousness is that of a vast, integrated whole that contains a great number of buddhas, bodhisattvas, guardians, and other deities. This universe may be experienced under two modes, awakened wisdom and compassionate action. These two modes are represented as two mandalas, awakened wisdom by the Vajradhātu Mandala, and compassionate action by the Garbhakośadhātu Mandala, rendered into English as the Vajra-World Mandala and the Matrix-World Mandala (Kongōkai Mandara, 金剛界曼荼羅, and Taizōkai Mandara, 胎藏界曼荼羅, respectively). At the center of each of these two mandalas is Dainichi Nyorai (Mahāvairocana Tathāgata), who is surrounded by four attendant buddhas, including Amida (Amitābha). The Shingon practitioner accesses the two mandalas by means of ritual practices. Generally speaking, Shingon practices are structured meditations utilizing visualization as a key element in the ritual performance. The

uniquely tantric aspect of such rituals is that the visualization is of the practitioner's identity with the deity evoked in the ritual.<sup>28</sup>

The Shingon tradition considers the two mandalas to form a whole, each reflecting the other. This complex is known as the dual mandala (Jpn. *ryōbu mandara*, 兩部曼荼羅) system, and functions as an organizing principle for its practices and teachings.<sup>29</sup> The Vajra-World Mandala expresses the cosmic embodiment of wisdom, while the Matrix-World Mandala expresses the cosmic embodiment of compassion. Each of the mandalas employs a structure of five buddha families (Skt. *kula*), and each family is headed by one particular buddha. Amida finds a prominent place in both mandalas as the head of the lotus family (Skt. *padmakula*, Jpn. *rengebu*, 蓮華部), not surprisingly located in the western quarter of each of the two mandalas.<sup>30</sup>

### Mahākaruṇā Garbha Mandala

In the Garbha Mandala there are twelve "halls," the central of which is an eight-petalled lotus blossom, which in some renderings is white and in others red.<sup>31</sup> Seated upon the pericarp of the lotus is the main buddha of the Shingon tradition, Mahāvairocana. On the petals of the lotus, in the four cardinal directions, are four *tathāgatas*: Ratnaketu (Jpn. Hōdō) to the east, Saṃkusumita-rāja (Jpn. Kaifuke ō) to the north, Amitāyus<sup>32</sup> (Jpn. Amida) to the west, and Divyadundubhi-meghanirghoṣa (Jpn. Tenkurai on) to the south. In the four intercardinal directions are four bodhisattvas seated on the rest of the eight lotus petals: Samantabhadra (Jpn. Fugen) to the southeast, Mañjuśrī (Jpn. Monjushiri) to the southwest, Avalokiteśvara (Jpn. Kanjizai) to the northwest, and Maitreya (Jpn. Miroku) to the northeast.<sup>33</sup>

The thirteenth chapter of the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi-sūtra*, "Access to the Existence of the Esoteric Mandala," describes an almost identical mandala that is to be visualized in the center of one's heart. Ryūjun Tajima explains that what one is accessing is "the state that consists of finding oneself equal to the Dharmakāya Buddhas."<sup>34</sup> The sutra states:

Then the world-honored one said to Vajradhara, the Master of Mysteries: "A person of good birth (*kalaputra*) vigilantly attends to the mandala of the inner heart. Master of Mysteries! We find that we ourselves are of the nature of the Dharmadhātu. By the *adhiṣṭhāna* of mantras and *mudrās* is produced the *adhiṣṭhāna* of your heart; it is pure by nature, and by the protective action of the *karmavajra* (*vajra*

with four branches, cruciform) all stains are purified and cleaned. . . . The mandala [of the inner heart] is square with four entrances; one faces west, and it is entirely surrounded by encircling paths. In the interior appears a great, royal lotus of eight petals produced by your spirit;<sup>35</sup> from the stem it opens into pistils and stamens adorned and very beautiful. The Tathāgata is found in the center of the lotus. His body is the most excellent in the world. He has surpassed the form of body, of speech, and of thought; he has attained the form of the heart;<sup>36</sup> he has attained the delicious, supreme fruit. On the eastern side [of Mahāvairocana], Hōdō Nyorai (Ratnaketu Tathāgata); on the south side, Kaifukeō Nyorai (Saṃkusumita-rāja Tathāgata); on the north side, Koin Nyorai (Divyadundubhi-megha-nirghoṣa Tathāgata); on the west side, Muryōju Nyorai (Amitāyus Tathāgata); on the south-east side, Fugen Bosatsu (Samantabhadra Bodhisattva); on the northeast side, Kanjizai Bosatsu (Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva); on the southwest side, Myōkichijō Dōji (Mañjuśrī Kumāra); on the northwest side, Jishi Bosatsu (Maitreya Bodhisattva). On each of the pistils and stamens rests the mother of buddhas and bodhisattvas (Buddhalocanā) and the acolytes of the six *pāramitā samādhis*. Below are ranged a multitude of wrathful *vidyādhara*s. It is Vidyādhara Bodhisattva who constitutes the stem (of the flower), placed in the midst of a great, endless ocean. All of the terrestrial *devas* (*jigo ten = bhauma*)<sup>37</sup> and others surround the flower in infinite numbers.”<sup>38</sup>

This description differs from the Garbha Mandala in that the places of Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya are inverted.<sup>39</sup>

Iconographically, Amitāyus is shown as a buddha, with a red robe (Skt. *kāśāya*, Jpn. *kesa*) covering both shoulders, seated in lotus posture (Skt. *padmāsana*, Jpn. *kekka-fuza*) on a jewel lotus. His hands form the Amitābha *dhyāna mudrā*<sup>40</sup> (Jpn. Amida *jō in*): both hands palm up on the lap, right hand resting atop the left, the top two phalanges of the index fingers held upright and touching back to back, while the tips of the thumbs touch the tips of the index fingers.<sup>41</sup>

### Vajradhātu Mandala

The Vajradhātu Mandala is divided into nine assemblies, represented by nine squares arranged three by three. The central and most important of these is the karma assembly.<sup>42</sup> As in the Garbha Mandala, four buddhas are arranged in the cardinal directions around the centrally placed Mahāvairocana. Akśobhya (Jpn. Ashuku) is to the east,

Ratnasambhava (Jpn. Hōsho) to the south, Amitābha (Jpn. Amida) to the west, and Amoghasiddhi (Jpn. Fukūjōju) to the north. In the Vajradhātu Mandala each of the five buddhas is himself surrounded by four bodhisattvas<sup>43</sup> arranged in the cardinal directions. Around Amitābha are Vajradharma to the east, Vajratikṣṇa to the south, Vajrahetu to the west, and Vajrabhāṣa to the north.

Amitābha is also referred to as Lokeśvara-rāja and as Avalokiteśvara-rāja, because “Examining the degree of development of beings, he makes known that all *dharma*s are originally pure in nature, like a lotus blossom.”<sup>44</sup> According to “oral tradition recorded in Bunpi’s *Hizōki*,”<sup>45</sup> Amitābha is gold in color and makes the *samādhi mudrā*, that is, the same *mudrā* as in the Garbha Mandala representation.

### China: Tantric Interpretations of the Amituo Cult

The important role of Amitābha in the tantric streams of Buddhist praxis (thought and practice) is continued in China. In his work on the doctrinal history of Pure Land Buddhism in China, Mochizuki discusses the introduction of tantric iconography of Amitābha in the mandalas introduced during the Tang dynasty. Citing the *Zuzōshō* by Ejū, Mochizuki tells us that in the second volume of this work Ejū explains that there are two kinds of Pure Land mandalas in the tantric teachings. Quoting Mochizuki *in extenso*,

According to the second volume of the *Zuzōshō* written by the Japanese monk Ejū, there are two kinds of maṇḍalas in the secret teachings: first is a maṇḍala drawn according to the specifications given in a tantra. In such a maṇḍala the central deity is the Buddha Amitābha surrounded by the eight great bodhisattvas who are sitting on the eight petals of the lotus flower. These eight are Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, Ākāśagarbha, Samantabhadra, Vajrapāṇi, Mañjuśrī, Sarva-nivāraṇaviśkambin, and Kṣitigarbha. This maṇḍala is based on the teachings of the *Pa-ta p’u-sa man-t’o-lo ching*,<sup>46</sup> a tantric text first translated into Chinese by Amoghavajra.

The second type of maṇḍala is the *Amida ku-hon mandara* (Maṇḍala of the Nine Grades of Rebirth), as introduced to Japan by the master Eun. In the middle of it is a fully opened, eight-petaled lotus flower, and in the middle of this flower sits the Buddha Amitābha with his hand in the *mudrā* symbolizing the highest grade of the highest rank of rebirth. On each of the eight petals sit eight other figures of Amitābha, with their hands in mudrās expressive of the remaining



eight grades and ranks of rebirth. In the four corners of this maṇḍala sit the deities Dharma, Artha, Hetu, and Vāc. In the second enclosure of the maṇḍala there are the twelve buddhas of light, the four *saṃgraha* deities, and the outer four pūjā offerings. In the third level enclosure sit the twenty-four bodhisattvas; there are six bodhisattvas in each corner, for a total of twenty-four bodhisattvas. However, the Bodhisattva Dharma from the inner enclosure (the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara) is added to these twenty-four for a total of twenty-five bodhisattvas.<sup>47</sup> We can see from this description, then, that from the time of the introduction of the secret teachings, or tantra, into China by the masters Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra, a certain type of tantric Amitābha maṇḍala became popular in China.<sup>48</sup>

Another instance is Yu-yen (?–1101), abbot of the Ch'ung-shan ssu Monastery and author of the *Hsüan-ch'ien pei-chien*, his major work, and of the *Ching-t'u hsiu-yin huo-tui*. According to Mochizuki, "It is reported that Yu-yen always sought rebirth in the Pure Land and cultivated the Pure Land faith most diligently."<sup>49</sup> In his discussion of the various kinds of teachings that lead to birth in the Sukhāvatī, Yu-yen explains that

The Tathāgata, through his expedience in teaching, set up various different teachings, such as single-minded acts of good (*ting-shan*), mentally dispersed acts of good (*san-shan*), the power of the Buddha (*fo-li*), or the power of the dharma (*fa-li*). Single-minded acts of good refer to "the marvelous insight attained through cultivation of the mind"; mentally dispersed acts of good are the cultivation of the ten recitations, "repeated continually, sound following sound"; the power of the Buddha means that one can attain rebirth through receiving the power of the great compassion and vows of the Buddha; and the power of the dharma signifies the recitation of mantras, receiving the tantric abhiṣeka [empowerment or ordination, *kanjō*, 灌頂], and if empowered sand is sprinkled over a corpse, the deceased will be reborn into the Pure Land.<sup>50</sup>

Here we find a tantric interpretation of Pure Land ideas and practices in China contemporaneous with Jichihan in Japan, which leads one to suspect that such interpretations were much more widespread within East Asian Mahayana than could be explained if Jichihan were the first to have created such interpretations. This includes not only the equation of the power of the dharma to mantra recitation and tantric empowerment, but also the practice of empowering sand with mantra so as to assist the dead to be born in Sukhāvatī. Although Mochizuki's

summary does not specify, this is presumably a reference to the practice of empowering sand with the Clear Light Mantra (Kōmyō Shingon, 光明眞言), made popular in Japan by Myōe Kōben (1173–1232).<sup>51</sup>

In 1200, under the rule of the Hsi-hsia in North China, the master Chih-kuang wrote the “Secret Mantras as the Perfect Cause of Rebirth” (“Mi-shou yuan-ying wang-sheng chi,” 1 *chuan*, T. 46, 1956). Mochizuki tells us that in this work

he gives the *mūla-mantra* of the Buddha Amitābha [阿弥陀仏根呪], his Heart Mantra [阿弥陀心呪], the One-Syllable Mantra of Amitābha [阿弥陀一字呪], and the One Hundred and Eight-Syllable Dhāraṇī of the Tathāgata Amitāyus the King [無量壽王如来一百八多陀羅尼]. . . . He explains further that by recitation of these mantras, one will be able to extinguish the weighty transgressions incurred by the five heinous crimes and be reborn directly into the pure land of Sukhāvati.<sup>52</sup>

Although there may have been relatively few such explicitly interpretive works in China, their very presence is more than suggestive.<sup>53</sup> This work, particularly in light of the works and mandalas already discussed, demonstrates that the Amituo cult played an important role within the broad range of tantric praxis in China, and that the goal of birth in Sukhāvati was not thought to be contradictory to tantric praxis.

#### Japan: Amida Cult and Nenbutsu Recitation in Shingon-shū

It appears that the Kōya *hijiri* were one of the main vehicles for the spread of the cult of Amida within the context of the Shingon tradition. Mount Kōya was established by Kūkai in the second decade of the ninth century<sup>54</sup> and became one of the most important centers of the Shingon tradition. By the beginning of the eleventh century, however, the temples had suffered from repeated fires, and the mountain was almost empty of practitioners. At that time Jōyo (Kishin Shōnin; 958–1047) initiated efforts to revive the mountain. Much of the fundraising for these efforts was handled by the Kōya *hijiri*, who combined devotion to Kūkai with recitation of the Amida nenbutsu. As the Kōya *hijiri* traveled around the country they spread the cult of Kūkai and nenbutsu recitation.<sup>55</sup> Kōyasan itself came to be identified with Amida’s Pure Land. The bridge at the base of the mountain is known as Gokuraku-bashi. (Today, the rail line ends there, and the final station is likewise known as Gokuraku-bashi.)

Kakuban (1095–1143), founder of the Shingi (new teachings)<sup>56</sup> Shingon-shū, seems to have been the Shingon priest most instrumental in integrating Amida and nenbutsu into the Shingon tradition. Motivated to reinvigorate both practice and study, as abbot of the Daidenpōin, Kakuban integrated what he had learned from several traditions, including Pure Land,<sup>57</sup> establishing what is known to us today as Shingi Shingon. In his *Gorin Kuji myō himitsu shaku* he equates Amida with Dainichi Nyorai.<sup>58</sup> This identity provided a doctrinal basis for the practice of reciting Amida nenbutsu within the Shingon tradition. Kakuban also built a temple devoted to nenbutsu practice, the Mitsugon-in (密嚴院).<sup>59</sup> The name of this temple refers to Mahāvairocana's pure land, known as the Terrace of Esoteric Grandeur.<sup>60</sup>

Kakukai (1142–1223) of the Sambōin-ryū, apparently influenced by Kakuban's thought although not a disciple, equated the pure lands of Amida, Maitreya, and Mahāvairocana. However, not only are Gokuraku Jōdo (Amida's Pure Land of Supreme Bliss), Tosotsuten (Maitreya's Heaven of the Satisfied Gods), and Mitsugon Dōjō (Mahāvairocana's Terrace of Esoteric Grandeur) ultimately the same, they are all identical with this world. This interpretation is in keeping with the fundamental soteriological principle of the Shingon tradition, "becoming Buddha in this body" (*sokushin jōbutsu*, 即身成佛).<sup>61</sup>

The practice of nenbutsu in Shingon would, of course, be understood very differently from the understanding of it in Shin. It would simply be another instance of a mantra or *dhāraṇī*,<sup>62</sup> of which there are many hundreds in the Shingon tradition. The term "mantra" has basically the same meaning as nenbutsu (*buddhānuṣṃṛti*, 念仏), that is, to "hold mentally." Jan Gonda defines mantra as "means of creating, conveying, concentrating and realizing intentional and efficient thought, and of coming into touch or identifying oneself with the essence of divinity which is present in the mantra."<sup>63</sup> *Anuṣṃṛti* means "to keep in mind," and *buddhānuṣṃṛti* is to keep the Buddha in mind.<sup>64</sup> Thus, mantra is a vocal means by which one is able to keep the Buddha in mind.

While there are hundreds of mantras known to the Shingon tradition, some of these spread to popular use. One of the most popular mantras in medieval Japan is the Kōmyō Shingon (光明眞言), or Clear Light Mantra. Like other esoteric practices, its use was not delimited by sectarian boundaries, and was widely employed in such public functions as funerals. For example, during the Zen Abbot Meiho's funeral in 1350 the Kōmyō Shingon was recited "by a group of 100 monks,

chanting nonstop in three shifts.”<sup>65</sup> In addition, other *dhāraṇīs*, such as the Great Compassion and Śūraṅgama, that were “mentioned in Chinese monastic regulations”<sup>66</sup> were employed.<sup>67</sup>

Probably the most common mantra for Amida in the Shingon tradition is ON AMIRITA TEISEI KARA UN (*om amṛta-teje hara hūṃ*).<sup>68</sup> This is, for example, the mantra used when Amida is invoked as a member of the “thirteen buddhas” (*jūsan butsu*, 十三仏). This is a group of buddhas that seems to have become popular in the later medieval period, and includes (1) Fudō Myōō (Acalanātha Vidyārāja, 不動明王), (2) Shaka Nyorai (Śākya Tathāgata, 釋迦如来), (3) Monju Bosatsu (Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, 文殊菩薩), (4) Fugen Bosatsu (Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, 普賢菩薩), (5) Jizō Bosatsu (Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, 地藏菩薩), (6) Miroku Bosatsu (Maitreya Bodhisattva, 彌勒菩薩), (7) Yakushi Nyorai (Bhaiṣajya-guru Tathāgata, 藥師如来), (8) Kanjizai Bosatsu (tantric name for Amida; Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, 觀自在菩薩), (9) Seishi Bosatsu (Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva, 勢至菩薩), (10) Mida Nyorai (Amitābha Tathāgata, 彌陀如来), (11) Ashuku Nyorai (Akṣobhya Tathāgata, 阿閼如来), (12) Dainichi Nyorai (Mahāvairocana Tathāgata, 大日如来), and (13) Kokūzō Bosatsu (Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattva, 虛空藏菩薩). This grouping is particularly associated with the sequence of post-mortem memorial services. For example, Fudō Myōō would be the chief deity of the first service, while Kokūzō would be the chief deity of the fiftieth anniversary service.

#### CONCLUSION: THREE SOURCES OF PSEUDO-PROBLEMS

From its very beginnings in India it seems that the tantric tradition of Buddhism contained within itself cultic practices devoted to Amitābha and the *shōmyō* nenbutsu-like practice of mantra recitation. When these were established in Japan, they contributed to the religious culture of the Kamakura era and were spread to the general populace via the efforts of many Shingon masters, as well as by the Kōya *hijiri*. As such they formed part of the religious culture, out of which Pure Land Buddhism arose, and were in turn brought to the foreground by such figures as Kakuban and Kakukai—probably as a result of the rising general devotion to Amida stimulated by the Pure Land sects themselves. What seems to have not been changed, at least among practitioners of the Shingon ritual tradition, was the soteriology of “becoming awakened in this body.” This was not displaced by aspiration for rebirth in

the Pure Land, nor do the two seem to have been seen as necessarily contradictory. It is only under a much more narrowly exclusivistic interpretation of Pure Land teaching that the two can be considered to stand in opposition. Many monastics important during the Kamakura, such as Jōkei, were extremely eclectic in their devotions, including practices devoted to Amida along with many others.<sup>69</sup>

At the same time that Shingon practitioners did not see any particular incongruity in including Amida cult practices within the range of tantric practices, Shingon thinkers generally do not appear to have accepted the doctrine of *mappō*. This idea that the dharma is in a process of decay and has reached such a state that it is no longer effectively available, leaving only the vows of Amida as effective for us in this period, takes on a central, motivating role in the cosmology of Pure Land Buddhism. Such a position, though, is consistent with the Shingon position that practice has as its goal awakening in this lifetime.<sup>70</sup>

As discussed in the Introduction, the reduction of religious traditions to simplistic formulae, the presumption of exclusive affiliation, and the metaphor of founder as romantic creative genius all create pseudo-problems for the study of religion in general, and the study of the role of Amida in tantric Buddhism in particular. Abandoning these presumptions, we may then be able to perceive the complexities of actual historical processes more accurately.

## TRANSLATION OF THE AMIDA KEI AI GOMA

### Introduction

Shingon rituals can be divided into two categories, those that employ ritual identification (Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*, Jpn. *kaji*, 加持, and also *nyū ga ga nyū*, 入我我入) and those that do not. Those that do not may in a technical sense not be considered tantric rituals per se, while those that do are. This Amida Keiai Goma is tantric, since it includes ritual identification—the visualized identity of the practitioner's body, speech, and mind with the body, speech, and mind of Amida. This is in keeping with the soteriology of the Shingon tradition mentioned above, *sokushin jōbutsu* (becoming awakened in this body). The function of ritual identification is to give the practitioner access to his or her own already awakened consciousness. The inherent purity of the practitioner's mind and its identity with the mind of the buddhas is not

just symbolized by ritual identification, but is rather made present in “this body.”

Shingon rituals are categorized into five kinds according to function (*goshuhō*, 五種法): (1) *sokusaihō* (息災法), rituals for protection from calamities (probably the most commonly performed today in Japan); (2) *sōyakuō* (増益法), rituals for prosperity and increase of merit; (3) *kōchōhō* (鉤召法), rituals for summoning; (4) *keiaiō* (敬愛法), rituals for love and respect (rendered here as “subordination”); and (5) *jōbukuō* (調伏法), rituals for subduing one’s enemies.

The ritual manual translated here is number five from a collection entitled *The Complete Goma Collection* (*Goma zenshū*, 護摩全集; Osaka: Tōhō Publishers, 1982).

#### RITUAL MANUAL FOR THE SUBORDINATING FIRE OFFERING DEVOTED TO AMITĀBHA, THE BUDDHA OF INFINITE LIGHT, CHUIN LINEAGE

Next: entering the *homa*.

Following the additional recitations, hang the rosary on the left wrist, throughout the *homa*.

First, empowerment of Mahāvairocana: form the wisdom fist *mudrā*, recite the mantra ON BAZARA DATO BAN.

Next, empowerment of the Lord of the Assembly—Shōkannon: make the lotus blossom assembly heart *mudrā*: the two hands form an inner fist, extend the great finger of the right hand, empower the four actions, recite ON ARORIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, empowerment of the chief deity: form an outer fist, lotus blossom between the two [hands], empower the four actions, recite ON ROKEI JINBARA KIRIKU SOWAKA.

Next, visualize the three identities using the *dharmadhātu* meditation *mudrā*. Contemplate the following: the heart of the Tathāgata is identical with what actually exists, what actually exists is identical with the fire of wisdom; the hearth is identical with the body of the Tathāgata, the fire is identical with the *dharmakāya* fire of wisdom; the mouth of the hearth is identical with the mouth of the Tathāgata; the fire is nothing other than the wisdom within the practitioner’s body. Thus, the mouth of the Tathāgata’s body, the mouth of the body of the hearth, and the mouth of the practitioner’s body are all three the same.

Next, empower the poppy seeds: take the censer and place it in the left corner of the altar. Next, take the bowl of poppy seeds from the left table and place it where the censer had been; empower using the single-pronged *vajra*, reciting the mantra of the Fire Realm seven times (there is an oral instruction: recite the single syllable chant twenty-one times); at the end scatter the poppy seed to the four directions, to the four corners, above and below, with the right hand. Beginning from the northeast corner, recite the chant of the Fire Realm once for each of the directions, throwing a total of ten times. Then return the bowl to its original location.

#### FIRST, THE SECTION FOR AGNI

Start with Agni's *mudrā* and name: grasp the right wrist with the left hand; bend the thumb of the right hand, placing it in the middle of the palm; the remaining fingers extend straight out. Empower the four places, recite UN AGYANAU EI BASYU KYARADA JYAKU.

Next, take the rosary and recite the short Agni mantra 108 times.

Next, take the ball incense, chip incense, and flowers, placing them in order beside the hearth. Next, take the *vajra* bell and place it where the ball incense had been on the left table. Next, take the three-pronged *vajra* and hold it in the left hand. Next, take the powdered incense and *pujā* offerings from the right table and then place them beside the hearth. Next, untie the string around the twenty-one pieces of sapwood, turn the base toward the practitioner, and place on the *vajra* plate. Throw the string into the hearth.<sup>71</sup> Next, take the pincers and insert the offering wood, piling it up in the hearth in sequence. From the orientation of the practitioner, in sequence from left to right place six sticks in line; eleven sticks total. Next, with the pincers, insert a piece of pine into the flame of the lamp on the right and place it under the right corner of the fire wood.

Next, take the fan and fan the flames. Hold the fan partially open in the right hand, recite the mantra and fan three times; imagine a syllable KAN (*hām*) on the surface of the fan; it changes, becoming a wind *cakra*; recite ON BOKU JINBARA UN, three times. Close it in the right hand and return to its original location.

Next, purification: sprinkle the wood in the hearth three times, sprinkle directly, recite the *kili kili* chant [ON KIRI KIRI BAZARA UN HATTA<sup>72</sup>].



Next, empower the firewood on the hearth: using the three-pronged *vajra*, empower by reciting the *kili kili* chant three times.

Next, invite Agni, form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā* [lit. *samādhi añjali*].

First, visualize one's own body: visualize a syllable RAN (*raṃ*) above your heart moon *cakra*; this changes, becoming a triangular fire *cakra*. Your entire body becomes this fire *cakra*; the fire *cakra* changes, becoming the white body of the four-armed Agni, blazing flames completely surrounding his body; this is the great body of the vast *dharmadhātu*.

Next, empower oneself: form the *mudrā* of Agni, recite the short chant, adding the appropriate phrase: BASYU KYARADA JYAKU; empower the four actions.

Next, request Agni into the hearth: take one flower, empower it by reciting the short chant of Agni three times, place it on top of the firewood in the hearth.

Next, visualize Agni in the middle of the hearth: form Amida's meditation *mudrā*, and visualize the flower going to the middle of the hearth, becoming a lotus leaf seat, over which is a syllable RAN (*raṃ*), which changes, becoming a wish-fulfilling jar; the wish-fulfilling jar changes, becoming the body of Agni, white in color, complete with four arms. His first right hand bestows fearlessness, his second holds a rosary. His first left hand grasps a sage's staff, his second grasps a water bottle. Blazing flames surround his body.

Next, request Agni to arise from the mandala: form Agni's *mudrā* and recite his mantra, beckon three times with the wind finger. Next, form and recite the *mudrā* and mantra of the four wisdoms: recite ON AGYANAU EI BASYU KYARADA EI KEI KI JYAKU UN BAN KOKU JYAKU.

Next, contemplation: form Amida's meditation *mudrā*, and imagine inviting Agni, located in his original place in the mandala, to mysteriously unite with the Agni in the hearth, forming a single body, not two.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "Only desiring that Agni descend to this seat and compassionately accept this marvelous *homa* offering."

Next, rinse the mouth: sprinkle directly three times, imagine washing the mouth of Agni, recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "Sincerely offering perfumed water for rinsing the mouth, only requesting that Agni accept this *homa*, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*."

Next, powdered incense, three times; recite ON AGYANAU EI BASYU KYARADA JYAKU each time.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā*, and imagine the incense entering Agni's mouth, going to the lotus blossom of his heart, becoming excellent offerings. Limitless, ocean-like clouds of powdered incense flow from his heart, through his body, and out his pores, offered to all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, solitary enlightened ones (*pratyekabuddhas*), auditors (*śrāvakas*) and worldly deities (Vedic *devas*).

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "I now present the powdered incense offering, only requesting that Agni accept this *homa*, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*."

Next, ghee, large and small ladles three times each; chant, visualization and declaration as with the powdered incense; same with the sap wood and following; except contemplate "limitless ocean-like clouds of ghee flow out," and so on; change declaration to "ghee offering."

Next, sap wood, three pieces, "limitless, ocean-like clouds of pieces of wood flow out," and so on; "pieces of wood for the *homa*."

Next, food, three ladles, "limitless, ocean-like clouds of food offerings flow out," and so on; "food offering."

Next, five cereals, three ladles, "limitless, ocean-like clouds of the five cereals flow out," and so on; "five cereals offering."

Next, flowers, three times, "limitless, ocean-like clouds of flower offerings flow out," and so on; "flower offering."

Next, ball incense, three times, "limitless, ocean-like clouds of ball incense flow out," and so on; "ball incense offering."

Next, chip incense, three times, "limitless, ocean-like clouds of chip incense flow out," and so on; "chip incense offering."

Next, ghee, large and small ladles one time each, "limitless, ocean-like clouds of ghee flow out," and so on; "ghee offering."

Next, recite the universal offering and the three powers, ring the gong.

Next, vows, ring the gong. "Sincerely requesting, and only desiring that Agni compassionately accept this *homa* offering, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*."

Next, rinse the mouth: sprinkle directly three times, recite UN BARADA BAZARA DAN BASYU KYARADA JYAKU. Imagine washing Agni's mouth.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. “Sincerely offering perfumed water for rinsing the mouth only requesting that Agni accept this *homa*, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

Next, leave-taking: take one flower, recite the short chant of the fire world and throw it to the original location in the mandala: the northeast corner of the altar.

Next, contemplation: form Amida’s meditation *mudrā*, and imagine that this flower, arriving at its original location, becomes a lotus leaf seat.

Next, form Agni’s *mudrā*: press the empty finger against the back of the water finger which is curled down; extend the wind finger sharply three times, recite UN AGYANAU EI BASYUDA KYARADA GESSYA GESSYA BOKU.

Next, contemplation: form Amida’s meditation *mudrā*, and imagine Agni returns to his original location in the mandala from the middle of the hearth.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. “Solely requesting Agni return to his original seat.”

With the above the first section, the portion for Agni, is finished.

## SECOND SECTION, FOR THE LORD OF THE ASSEMBLY, SHŌ KANNON

First, purify the offerings: repeat three times, wash clockwise, recite the *kili kili chant*. Wash the various offerings.

Next, karma empowerment: empower the various offerings clockwise and counterclockwise three times each, recite ON BAZARA KYARAMA KEN.

Next, rinse the mouth and empower, sprinkle clockwise three times; imagine washing the mouth of the hearth, recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, empower the hearth: three times, using the three-pronged *vajra*, recite the *kili kili chant*.

Next, pile the kindling: four pieces.

Next, take a flaming piece of pine and insert it.

Next, take the fan and fan the fire; imagine the syllable KAN (*ham*) on the surface of the fan; it changes, becoming a wind *cakra*, recite ON BOKU JINBARA UN, three times.

Next, purification: sprinkle the wood in the hearth three times, sprinkle directly, recite the *kili kili* chant.

Next, empower the kindling on the hearth: using the three-pronged *vajra*, empower by reciting the *kili kili* chant three times.

Next, invite the Lord of the Assembly.

First, visualize one's own body: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā*, and visualize the syllable KIRIKU (*hrīḥ*) in the middle of the heart moon *cakra*; this changes, becoming a lotus blossom beginning to open, which becomes Āryāvalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, sitting with his legs crossed,<sup>73</sup> his beautiful body colored golden with a bright nimbus of flames, wearing bodhisattva robes and a red undergarment. His left<sup>74</sup> hand is at his navel, holding an unopened lotus flower, while his right is at his chest and is working to open the petals of the flower; on his head he has a jewelled headdress which is crowned with Amitāyus Buddha in karma *mudrā*.

Next, empower oneself: form the lotus assembly heart *mudrā*—the two hands form an inner [fist], empower by extending the right great finger four times. UN ARORIKYA BASYU KYARADA JYAKU.

Next, request the Lord of the Assembly onto the firewood in the hearth: hold one flower cluster with both hands, insert it with the flower-holding *mudrā*; recite the mantra of the lord of the assembly three times, empower, offer on top of the kindling and make the request.

Next, visualize in the middle of the hearth: form Amida's meditation *mudrā* and visualize the flower going to the center of the hearth, becoming a jewelled lotus flower bud, above this is the syllable KIRIKU (*hrīḥ*) colored red; this changes, becoming a lotus blossom beginning to open, which becomes Āryāvalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, sitting with his legs crossed,<sup>75</sup> his beautiful body colored golden with a bright nimbus of flames, wearing bodhisattva robes and a red undergarment. His left<sup>76</sup> hand is at his navel, holding an unopened lotus flower, while his right is at his chest and is working to open the petals of the flower; on his head he has a jewelled headdress which is crowned with Amitāyus Buddha in karma *mudrā*.

Next, request the lord of the assembly out of the mandala—lotus assembly heart *mudrā*: make inner [fist] and beckon three times with the right great finger. Next, make the *mudrā* of the four holy ones<sup>77</sup> and recite the mantra, UN ARORIKYA BASYU KYARADA EI KEI KI JYAKU UN BAN KOKU JYAKU.

Next, request the entourage of the lord of the assembly to come out of the mandala: form the great hook *mudrā* and recite the mantra, at the proper place form the *mudrā* and add the mantra of the four embracing deities, recite NAUMAKU SANMANDA BODANAN AKU SARABA TARA HARA CHIKATEI TATAGYATA KUSYA BŌJI SYARIYA HARI HORAKYA BASYU KYARADA EI KEI KI JYAKU UN BAN KOKU JYAKU.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā*, and imagine inviting the lord of the assembly, located in his original place in the mandala, to mysteriously unite with the lord of the assembly in the hearth, forming a single body, not two.

Next, declaration; ring the gong. "Only desiring the lord of the assembly descend to this seat and compassionately accept this marvelous *homa* offering."

Next, rinse the mouth: sprinkle directly, three times; imagine washing the mouth of the lord of the assembly, recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, declaration; ring the gong. "Sincerely presenting perfumed water for washing the mouth solely requesting the lord of the assembly accept this *homa*, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*."

Next, powdered incense, three times, recite UN ARORIKYA BASYU KYARADA JYAKU.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā*; imagine the incense entering the lord of the assembly's mouth, going to his heart's lotus flower bud, becoming excellent offerings. Limitless, ocean-like clouds of powdered incense flow from his heart, through his body and out his pores, and are offered to all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, *pratyekabuddhas*, *śravakas*, and worldly deities.

Next, declaration; ring the gong. "I now present the powdered incense offering only requesting the lord of the assembly accept this *homa*, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*."

Next, ghee: large and small ladles three times each; chant, visualization and declaration as with the powdered incense; same with the sap wood and following, except contemplate "limitless ocean-like clouds of ghee flowing out," and change declaration to "ghee offering."

Next, sap wood, three pieces: "limitless, ocean-like clouds of pieces of wood flow out," "pieces of wood for the *homa*."

Next, food offerings, three ladles: "limitless, ocean-like clouds of food offerings flow out," "excellent offerings of food."

Next, five cereals, three ladles: “limitless, ocean-like clouds of the five cereals flow out,” “excellent offering of the five cereals.”

Next, ball incense, three times: “limitless, ocean-like clouds of ball incense flow out,” “excellent offerings of ball incense.”

Next, chip incense, three times: “limitless, ocean-like clouds of chip incense flow out,” “excellent offerings of chip incense.”

Next, ghee, large and small ladles one time each: “limitless, ocean-like clouds of ghee flow out,” “excellent offerings of ghee.”

Next, recite the universal offering and the three powers, ring the gong.

Next, vows, ring the gong. “Sincerely requesting and only desiring the lord of the assembly compassionately accept this *homa* offering, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

Next, rinse the mouth, sprinkle directly, and imagine washing the mouth of the lord of the assembly, recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. “Sincerely offering perfumed water for rinsing the mouth only requesting the lord of the assembly accept this *homa*, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

Next, leave-taking: take one flower cluster, recite the mantra of the lord of the assembly three times, and throw it to its original location in the mandala, the northeast corner.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha’s meditation *mudrā*, and imagine this flower arriving at its original location in the mandala and becoming a jewelled lotus flower seat.

Next, leave-taking of the lord of the assembly, form inner [fist], extend two head [fingers] three times. UN ARORIKYA BASYU KYARADA GESSYA GESSYA BOKU.

Next, send off the entourage of the lord of the assembly: form the great hook *mudrā* and recite the mantra, adding the appropriate phrase at the end, recite UN NAUMAKU SANMANDA BODANAN AKU SARABA TARA HARA CHIKATEI TATAGYATA KUSYA BOJI SYARIYA HARI HORAKYA BASYU KYARADA GESSYA GESSYA BOKU.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha’s meditation *mudrā*, and imagine the lord of the assembly returns to his original location in the mandala from the middle of the hearth.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. “Solely requesting the lord of the assembly return to his original seat.”

With the above, the second section, the portion for the lord of the assembly, is finished.

THIRD SECTION, PORTION FOR THE  
CHIEF DEITY, AMITĀBHA

First, purify the offerings, repeat three times: wash clockwise, recite the *kili kili* chant. Wash the various offerings.

Next, karma empowerment: empower the various offerings clockwise and counterclockwise three times each, recite ON BAZARA KYARAMU KEN.

Next, rinse the mouth and empower, sprinkle clockwise three times, imagine washing the mouth of the hearth, recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, empower the hearth: three times using the three-pronged *vajra*, recite the *kili kili* chant.

Next, pile the kindling, six pieces: set six pieces as offering.

Next, take a flaming piece of pine and insert it.

Next, take the fan and fan the fire: imagine the syllable KAN (*ham*) on the surface of the fan; it changes, becoming a wind *cakra*, recite ON BOKU JINBARA UN, three times.

Next, purification: sprinkle the wood in the hearth three times, sprinkle directly, recite the *kili kili* chant.

Next, empower the kindling on the hearth: using the three-pronged *vajra*, empower by reciting the *kili kili* chant three times.

Next, invite the chief deity.

First, visualize one's own body: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā*, and visualize the syllable KIRIKU (*hriḥ*) above the heart moon *cakra*; it changes, becoming a fully open red lotus blossom having a five-pronged *vajra* as its stem and set upon a horizontal five-pronged *vajra* that emits a great clear light,<sup>78</sup> which fills the lotus blossom *dharmadhātu* entirely; in the midst of this clear light is the *nirmāṇakāya* of Amitābha; the lotus blossom changes, becoming the Tathāgata Avalokiteśvara-rāja<sup>79</sup> (Amitābha) wearing the crown of the five wisdoms<sup>80</sup> and dwelling in the meditation *mudrā*.<sup>81</sup>

Next, empower oneself: *mudrā*—form the *vajradhātu* assembly *mudrā*, middle two [fingers] forming a lotus leaf; mantra—*vajradhātu* karma assembly mantra (sagely wisdom<sup>82</sup> chant), UN ROKEI JINBARA ARANJYA KIRIKU BASHY KYARADA JYAKU.

Next, request the chief deity onto the kindling on the hearth: hold one flower cluster with the hands in the flower-holding *mudrā*, em-



power by reciting the chief deity's mantra three times into the *mudrā*. Invite by placing the flower on top of the kindling.

Next, visualization in the center of the hearth: form Amida's meditation *mudrā* and visualize the flower going to the center of the hearth, becoming a jewelled lotus flower throne, above which is the syllable KIRIKU (*hriḥ*); it changes, becoming a fully open red lotus blossom having a five-pronged *vajra* as its stem and set upon a horizontal five-pronged *vajra* that emits a great clear light which fills the lotus blossom *dharmadhātu* entirely; in the midst of this clear light is the *nirmāṇakāya* of Amitābha; the lotus blossom changes, becoming the Tathāgata Avalokiteśvara-rāja (Amitābha) wearing the crown of the five wisdoms and dwelling in the meditation *mudrā*.

Next, request the chief deity from out of the mandala-assembly: *mudrā*—lotus blossom section heart *mudrā*: making an inner fist, summon with the right great finger three times, form the four holy ones while reciting, as usual. UN ARORIKYA BASYU KYARADA EI KEI KI JYAKU UN BAN KOKU JYAKU.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā*, and imagine inviting the chief deity, located in his original location in the mandala, to mysteriously unite with the chief deity in the hearth, becoming one body, not two.

Next declaration, ring the gong. "Only desiring the chief deity descend to this seat and compassionately accept this excellent *homa* offering."

Next, rinse the mouth: sprinkle directly three times, imagine washing the mouth of the chief deity,<sup>83</sup> recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "Sincerely presenting perfumed water for washing the mouth solely requesting the chief deity accept this *homa*, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*."

Next, powdered incense: three times, recite UN ROKEI JINBARA ARANJYA KIRIKU BASYU KYARADA JYAKU.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā* and imagine the incense entering the chief deity's mouth, going to the lotus flower bud of his heart, becoming excellent offerings; limitless, ocean-like clouds of powdered incense flow from his heart, through his body, and out his pores, offered to all buddhas, bodhisattvas, *pratyekabuddhas*, *śravakas*, and worldly deities.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "I now present the powdered incense offering, only requesting that the chief deity accept this *homa*, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*."

Next, ghee, large and small ladles three times each; chant, visualization and declaration as with the powdered incense; same with sap wood and following, except contemplate "limitless, ocean-like clouds of ghee flowing out," change declaration to "ghee offering."

Next, sap wood, one hundred eight pieces: take three pieces at a time, put the ends into the ghee, turning the wood over, and offer up, chanting three times; burn thirty-six sets [of three] for a total of 108 pieces. Throw the binding string into the middle of the hearth. In the contemplation, "limitless, ocean-like clouds of pieces of wood flow out," in the declaration, change to "pieces of wood for the *homa*."

Next, food offerings, three ladles; "limitless, ocean-like clouds of food offerings flow out," "excellent offerings of food."

Next, five cereals, three ladles; "limitless, ocean-like clouds of the five cereals flow out," "excellent offerings of the five cereals."

Next, flowers, three times; "limitless, ocean-like clouds of flowers flow out," "excellent offerings of flowers."

Next, ball incense, three times; "limitless, ocean-like clouds of ball incense flow out," "excellent offerings of ball incense."

Next, chip incense, three times; "limitless, ocean-like clouds of chip incense flow out," "excellent offerings of chip incense."

Next, mixed offerings: first, take the chip incense, put it into the flowers cup; next, take the ball incense, put it into the same cup; next, take the ball incense cup and put it on top of the chip incense cup; next, take the flowers cup and put it into the food offerings cup; next, put the flowers cup on top of the ball incense and chip incense cup; next, take the five cereals cup and put it into the food offerings cup and mix thoroughly; next, separate the two cups and divide evenly; next, return each cup to its original place.

Next, ghee, large and small ladles one time each; "limitless, ocean-like clouds of ghee flow out," "excellent offering of ghee."

Next, *mudrā* and mantra of universal offering, one repetition, adding the appropriate phrase [BYASU KYARADA] as usual; the two head fingers are jewel-shaped.

Next, sap wood: take six pieces together from the bundle of twenty-one, offer together into the hearth; "limitless, ocean-like clouds of pieces of wood flow out," "excellent wood for the *homa*."

Next, medicinal herbs, seven times: take the cup and place it where the censer had been; the offering done, return the cup to its original place: “limitless, ocean-like clouds of medicinal herbs flow out,” “excellent offerings of medicinal herbs.”

Next, *pujā* offerings: use white rice flour dyed red and formed into balls the size of a *go* stone; take the cup and place it where the censer had been; holding the three-pronged *vajra*, take up the single-pronged *vajra* and empower using the Hayagrīva mantra UN AMIRITO DOHANBA UN HATTA BASYU KYARADA JYAKU, twenty-one times.

Next, offer the heart mantra of the chief deity 108 times:

*tai*[zō *kai*]: UN NAN SANSKU BASYU KYARADA JYAKU

*kon*[gō *kai*]: UN ROKEI JINBARA ARANJYA KIRIKU BASHYU  
KYARADA JYAKU

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha’s meditation *mudrā* and imagine these *pujā* offerings enter the mouth of the chief deity, going to the lotus blossom of his heart, becoming vast numbers of brightly shining *cakras*; then from each and every one of his pores these brightly shining *cakras* flow out through the entirety of empty space; next, the various buddhas and bodhisattvas of the world, having received the *pujā*, these brightly shining *cakras* return, entering one’s own and the donor’s heads; the evil consequences of greed, hatred, and ignorance are completely erased from our bodies, the calamities and unhappiness caused by evil people and evil destinies are destroyed, vitality and lifespan increase, and peace and tranquility are attained.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. “I now present *pujā* offerings only requesting that the chief deity accept this *homa*, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

The offering finished, return the cup to its original location.

Next, recite the universal offering and the three powers, ring the gong.

Next, vows; put down the three-pronged *vajra*, rub the rosary, and when finished make the pledge; ring the gong. “Sincerely request and only asking the chief deity compassionately accept this excellent *homa* offering, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

Next, take up the three-pronged *vajra*.

Next, rinse the mouth: sprinkle three times directly, and imagine washing the mouth of the chief deity, recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "Sincerely presenting perfumed water for washing the mouth solely requesting that the chief deity accept this *homa*, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*."

Next, leave-taking: holding one flower cluster, recite the mantra of the chief deity, to the northeast corner of the altar.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā* and imagine this flower arriving at its original position in the mandala, becoming a jewelled lotus flower throne.

Next, form the *mudrā* and recite mantra of the chief deity, imagine escorting the deities, recite ON ARAHASYANAU SENJIKYA GESSYA GESSYA BOKU.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā* and imagine the chief deity returns from the middle of the hearth to his original location in the mandala.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "Solely requesting that the chief deity return to his original seat."

With the above, the third section, the portion for the chief deity, is finished.

#### FOURTH SECTION, PORTION FOR THE VARIOUS DEITIES: THE THIRTY-SEVEN DEITIES

First, purification: wash the various offerings three times, wash clockwise, recite the *kili kili* chant.

Next, karma empowerment: empower the various offerings, clockwise and counterclockwise three times each, recite ON BAZARA KYARAMA KEN.

Next, rinse the mouth and empower: wash clockwise three times, and imagine washing the mouth of the hearth, recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, empower the hearth: three times, using the three-pronged *vajra*, and recite the *kili kili* chant.

Next, pile the kindling, ten pieces: on top of a square of four, set six pieces in order from the left. Next, order the offerings in place.

Next, take a flaming piece of pine and insert it.

Next, take the fan and fan the fire, imagine the syllable KAN (*ham*) on the surface of the fan, it changes becoming a wind *cakra*, recite ON BOKU JINBARA UN, three times.

Next, purification: sprinkle the wood in the hearth three times, sprinkle directly, recite the *kili kili* chant.

Next, empower the kindling on the hearth: using the three-pronged *vajra*, empower by reciting the *kili kili* chant three times.

Next, invite the various deities.

First, visualize one's own body: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā*, and visualize the five syllables BAN, UN, TARAKU, KIRIKU, AKU (*vām*, *hūm*, *trāḥ*, *hrīḥ*, *aḥ*) above the heart moon *cakra*; these change, becoming first like a *stūpa*, the five wisdoms, a jewel, a lotus, a karma-sign, these change into the five buddhas: Mahāvairocana (Dainichi), together with Akṣobhya (Ashuku), Ratnasambhava (Hossho), Amitābha (Mida), and Śākya (Shakka) with perfected features; the four *pāramitā* bodhisattvas, sixteen great, eight *pujā*, and four embracing-wisdom bodhisattvas all surround them.

Next, empower oneself: inner five-pronged *vajra mudrā*, empower the four locations, recite ON BAZARA DATO BAN UN TARAKU KIRIKU AKU SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, invite the various deities onto the kindling in the hearth: invite by offering five flower clusters onto the kindling, reciting ON KYARAMA SENJIKYA SOWAKA, three times.

Next, visualize the various deities in the hearth: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā*, and visualize these flowers going to the middle of the hearth, becoming unlimited lotus blossom seats; on top of the seats are the five syllables BAN, UN, TARAKU, KIRIKU, AKU (*vām*, *hūm*, *trāḥ*, *hrīḥ*, *aḥ*); these change, becoming first like a *stūpa*, the five wisdoms, a jewel, a lotus, a karma-sign; these change into the five buddhas: Mahāvairocana (Dainichi), together with Akṣobhya (Ashuku), Ratnasambhava (Hossho), Amitābha (Mida), and Śākya (Shakka) with perfected features; the four *pāramitā* bodhisattvas, sixteen great, eight *pujā*, and four embracing-wisdom bodhisattvas all surround them.

Next, invite the various deities from the mandala assembly: form the outer five-pronged *vajra mudrā*. At the end of the mantra for the various deities add the phrase of propitiation and the beckoning phrase, beckon three times with the right hand finger. Next, form the *mudrā* and recite the mantra of the four wisdoms, ON BAZARA

DATOBAN UN TARAKU KIRIKU AKU SENJIKYA EI KEI KI JAKU UN BAN KOKU SOWAKA.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā* and imagine inviting the various deities, located in their original places in the mandala, to mysteriously unite with the various deities in the hearth, becoming one body, not two.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "Only desiring that the various deities descend to this seat and compassionately accept this excellent *homa* offering."

Next, rinse the mouth: sprinkle directly three times, imagine washing the mouths of the various deities, recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "Sincerely offering perfumed water for washing the mouth solely requesting the various deities accept this *homa*, protect their disciple, and perfect *siddhi*."

Next, powdered incense, three times, recite ON BAZARA DATO BAN UN TARAKU KIRIKU AKU SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā* and imagine the incense enters the mouths of the various deities, going to the lotus blossoms of their hearts, becoming vessels with offerings of delicacies; limitless, ocean-like clouds of powdered incense flow from their hearts, through their bodies and out their pores, offered to all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, *pratyekabuddhas*, *śravakas*, and worldly deities.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "I now present the excellent offering of powdered incense only requesting that the various deities accept this *homa* protect their disciple, and perfect *siddhi*."

Next, ghee, large and small ladles three times each; chant, visualization, and declaration as with the powdered incense, same with sap wood and following, except contemplate "limitless, ocean-like clouds of offerings of ghee flow out," change declaration to "excellent offering of ghee."

Next, sap wood, three pieces, "limitless, ocean-like clouds of pieces of wood flow out," "pieces of wood for the *homa*."

Next, mixed offerings.

First, Mahāvairocana, three ladles. ON BAZARA DATOBAN SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Akṣobhya, one ladle. ON AKISYUBYA UN SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Ratnasambhava, one ladle. ON ARATANAU SENBANBA TARAKU SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Amitābha, one ladle. ON ROKEI JINBARA ARANJA KIRIKU SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Śākya, one ladle. ON ABOKYA SHIDDEI AKU SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, the thirty-two deities, three ladles; recite the universal offering mantra.

Next, the deity who extinguishes evil destinies, three ladles. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BODANAN DOBO SENAN ABITA RAN JISE TOBA DATON SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, for the chief deity of the temple, three ladles, add the phrase of propitiation (*senjikyā*, *śāntika*) to the recitation.

Next, for the Great Teacher Kūkai, one ladle, same as above.

Next, for the clear light mantra which when practiced extinguishes sins, one repetition, same as above.

Offering to the sacred spirits of the site, three ladles, same as above.

Next, retinue of this group: recite the universal offering mantra, at the end offer all of the remaining mixed offerings.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. “I respectfully offer these excellent mixed offerings only desiring that the various deities accept this *homa*, protect their disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

Next, ghee, large and small ladles one time each, “limitless, ocean-like clouds of ghee flow out,” “excellent offerings of ghee.”

Next, recite the universal offering and the three powers, ring the gong.

Next, vows, ring the gong. “Sincerely requesting and only desiring that the various deities compassionately accept this excellent *homa* offering, protect their disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

Next, rinse the mouth: three times, sprinkle directly, and imagine washing the mouths of the various deities, recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. “Sincerely offering perfumed water for rinsing the mouth only requesting that the various deities accept this *homa* protect their disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

Next, leave-taking: take five flower clusters and offer to the northeast corner of the altar, recite ON KYAMARA SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha’s meditation *mudrā*, and imagine these flowers arrive at their original location in the mandala, becoming jewelled lotus blossom thrones.



Next, form the outer five-pronged *vajra mudrā*, and recite the leave-taking mantra together with the mantra of the various deities, recite ON BAZARA DATO BAN UN TARAKU KIRIKU AKU SENJIKYA GESSYA GESSAY BOKU.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā* and imagine the various deities return to their original locations in the mandala from the middle of the hearth.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "Solely requesting that the various deities return to their original seats."

With the above, the fourth section, the portion for the various deities is finished.

#### FIFTH SECTION, PORTION FOR THE WORLDLY DEITIES: ACALA (FUDŌ) AND THE TWELVE DEVAS

First, purification: wash the various offerings three times, wash clockwise, recite the *kili kili* chant.

Next, karma empowerment: empower the various offerings clockwise and counterclockwise three times each, recite ON BAZARA KYARAMA KEN.

Next, rinse the mouth, and empower: wash clockwise three times, imagine washing the mouth of the hearth, recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, empower the hearth: three times using the three-pronged *vajra*, recite the *kili kili* chant.

Next, pile the kindling: set five pieces in order from the left.

Next, take a flaming piece of pine and insert it.

Next, take the fan and fan the fire; imagine the syllable KAN (*ham*) on the surface of the fan, changes becoming a wind *cakra*, recite ON BOKU JINBARA UN, three times.

Next, purification: sprinkle the wood in the hearth three times, sprinkle directly, recite the *kili kili* chant.

Next, empower the kindling on the hearth: using the three-pronged *vajra*, empower by reciting the *kili kili* chant three times.

Next, invite the worldly *devas*: take three flower clusters, break the stems off by twisting, take one more leaf and wrap around the rest, recite the one syllable mantra of Acala, and invite the worldly *devas* onto the kindling on the hearth.

Next, visualize the worldly *devas* in the hearth: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā* and visualize one's own body as the class of worldly *devas*; empowering oneself is usually omitted. Visualize these flowers arriving at the center of the hearth, becoming a flower throne for the Vidyārāja and lotus leaf thrones for the *devas*; above the flower throne is the syllable KAN (*hām*), which changes, becoming Acala Vidyārāja (Fudō Myōō) complete with four arms; further, above each of the lotus leaf thrones is the syllable UN (*hūm*), which change, becoming the twelve *devas*, the seven celestial lights, and the twenty-eight lunar mansions; the dignified bearing and appearance of each and every one is clearly evident.

Next, invite the worldly *devas* from their assembly in the mandala; at the end of the great hook *mudrā* and mantra say the phrase of propitiation, together with forming and reciting the four embracing wisdoms *mudrā* and mantra recite NAUMAKU SANMANDA BODANAN AKA SARABA TARA HARACHI KAKEI TATAGYATA KUSYA BOJISYARIYA HARI HORAKYA SENJIKYA EI KEI KI JYAKU UN BAN KOKU SOWAKA.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā* and imagine inviting the worldly *devas*, located in their original places in the mandala, to mysteriously unite with the worldly *devas* in the hearth, forming one body not two.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "Only desiring that the worldly *devas* descend to this seat and compassionately accept this excellent *homa* offering."

Next, rinse the mouth: sprinkle directly three times, imagine washing the mouths of the worldly *devas*, recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "Sincerely offering perfumed water for washing the mouth solely requesting that the worldly *devas* accept this *homa*, protect their disciple, and perfect *siddhi*."

Next, powdered incense, three times, recite NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARA DAN KAN SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā* and imagine the incense enters the mouths of the worldly *devas*, going to the lotus blossoms of their hearts, becoming vessels with offerings of delicacies, limitless, ocean-like clouds of powdered incense flow from their hearts, through their bodies and out their pores, being offered to all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, *pratyekabuddhas*, *śravakas* and worldly deities.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. “I now present the excellent offering of powdered incense only requesting that the worldly *devas* accept this *homa*, protect their disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

Next, ghee, large and small ladles three times each; chant, visualization, and declaration as with powdered incense, same with the sap wood and following, except contemplate “limitless, ocean-like clouds of ghee flow out,” change declaration to “excellent offering of ghee.”

First, Acala, three pieces with the one-syllable mantra; as above, but alter contemplation: “limitless, ocean-like clouds of pieces of wood flow out,” and so on.

Declare: “I now present pieces of wood for the *homa* only requesting that Acala accept this *homa*, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

Next, Agni, three pieces, short Agni chant, the following as above—this is to be done as in the previous Agni section. “I now present pieces of wood for the *homa* only requesting that Agni accept this *homa*, protect his disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

Next, mixed offerings.

First, Acala, three ladles, compassion chant—with the phrase of propitiation added.

Next, Īśana, one ladle. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN  
ISYANAYA SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Indra, one ladle. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN  
INODARAYA SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Agni, three ladles. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN  
AGYANAU EI SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Yama, one ladle. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN  
EIMAYA SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Rākṣasa, one ladle. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN  
JIRICHIEI SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Varuṇa, one ladle. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN  
BARODAYA SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Vāyu, one ladle. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN  
BAYABEI SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Vaiśravaṇa, one ladle. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN  
BEISHIRAMANDAYA SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Brahma, one ladle. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN  
BORAKANMANEI SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Pṛthivī, one ladle. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN  
BIRICHIBIEI SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Āditya, one ladle. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN ANICHYA SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, Candra, one ladle. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN SENDARAYA SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, the seven celestial lights, one ladle. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN GYARAKEI JINBARIYA HARA HAT JYU CHI RAMAYA SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, the twenty-eight lunar mansions, one ladle, and the *dhāraṇī*. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN DAKISYA TARA JIRINDANI EI SENJIKYA SOWAKA.

Next, for the practitioner or the donor, the four sets of constellations, one ladle each:

birth star: that star of the seven stars that applies to the year of birth,

birth celestial light: that star of the seven celestial lights that applies to the year of birth,

birth lunar mansion: that star of the twenty-eight lunar mansions that applies to the day of birth, and

birth constellation: that star of the twelve constellations that applies to the month of birth.

Next, retinue of the worldly *devas*; recite the clear light mantra, at the end offer the entirety of the remaining offerings.

Next, ghee, large and small ladles, one time each, “limitless, ocean-like clouds of ghee flow out,” “excellent offering of ghee.”

Next, recite the universal offering and the three powers, ring the gong.

Next, vows, ring the gong. “Sincerely requesting and only desiring that the worldly *devas* compassionately accept this excellent *homa* offering, protect their disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

Next, rinse the mouth: sprinkle directly three times, and imagine washing the mouths of the worldly *devas*, recite ON BARADA BAZARA DAN.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. “Sincerely offering perfumed water for rinsing the mouth only requesting that the worldly *devas* accept this *homa*, protect their disciple, and perfect *siddhi*.”

Next, leave-taking: take three flower clusters, break the stems off by twisting, take one more leaf and wrap around the rest; recite the

one syllable mantra of Acala—throw to the northwest corner of the altar.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā* and imagine these flowers arrive at their original location, becoming a flower throne and lotus blossom seats.

Next, form Acala's single-pronged *vajra mudrā*. Next, reciting the mantra, open the wind fingers of the *mudrā*, extending them out three times, recite NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN KAN SENJIKYA GESSYA GESSYA BOKU.

Next, snap the fingers of the right hand three times, recite ON BAZARA BOKISYA BOKU.

Next, contemplation: form Amitābha's meditation *mudrā* and imagine the worldly *devas* return to their original location in the mandala from the middle of the hearth.

Next, declaration, ring the gong. "Solely requesting that the worldly *devas* return to their original seats."

The above finishes the *homa*.

## NOTES

1. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “Francis Bacon,” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/francis-bacon/#3.1> (accessed December 12, 2006).
2. From “All S is D” it does not follow that “No non-S is D” (or, “All non-S is non-D”), where S is “Shin practitioner” and D is “devoted to Amida.”
3. It would be easy to assume, as several scholars seem to have done, that the presence of Amida in the Shingon tradition is a reflex to the rise of Pure Land Buddhism in the Kamakura era—the presumption being that members of the Shingon tradition were attempting to take advantage of the popularity of Amida for their own purposes. Again, the situation is more complex. It is no doubt the case that there was a certain amount of competition with the increasingly popular Pure Land traditions—not only through the promotion of Amida, but also through the promotion of other, “simple” practices such as *qjikan* (visualization of the syllable A, written in the Siddham script). However, it is also the case that Amida was an important part of Shingon practice in Japan prior to the Kamakura era, and in the tantric tradition as a whole as well.
4. This distinction between lineage and strict sectarian affiliation is much more generally applicable throughout Buddhist studies.
5. Although the term “Pure Land Buddhism” has been used to identify the entirety of the cult of Amitābha/Amitāyus, I find such usage misleading on two counts. First, there are many more pure lands than just Sukhāvātī, and identification between the term Pure Land and Sukhāvātī tends to obscure or marginalize these other pure lands. Second, it is only with Hōnen that the term pure land (*jōdo*) is used as a term identifying a sect (*shū*). To read the term backwards onto earlier forms of the Amitābha/Amitāyus cult is to construct a single, unified line of development when such a construction seems to be highly problematic. (It is comparable to Shinran’s construction of a line of patriarchs.) Hence, in this paper, I will use the term *Pure Land sects* to identify those that use the term as their own name, i.e., Jōdo-shū and Jōdo Shinshū, those sects from Hōnen on.
6. Akihisa Shigematsu, “An Overview of Early Japanese Pure Land,” in *Pure Land Buddhism*, ed. James Foard, Robert Solomon, and Richard Payne, Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series no. 3 (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1996), 287–290.
7. Jacqueline Stone, “Chanting the August Title of the Lotus Sutra: Daimoku Practices in Classical and Medieval Japan,” in *Re-Visioning “Kamakura” Buddhism*, ed. Richard K. Payne, Kuroda Studies in East Asian Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998).

8. Matthias Eder, *Geschichte der japanische Religion*, vol. 2, *Japan mit und unter dem Buddhismus*, Asian Folklore Studies Monograph, no. 7, 2 (Nagoya: Asian Folklore Studies, 1978), 90–93.
9. Particularly by the Kōya *hijiri* in their fundraising efforts as discussed *infra*. Fundraising necessitated efforts to spread particular forms of Buddhism to the general populace. Janet Goodwin, *Alms and Vagabonds: Buddhist Temples and Popular Patronage in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
10. Toshio Ōhashi, “The Pure Land School,” in *A History of Japanese Religion*, ed. Kazuo Kasahara, trans. Paul McCarthy and Gaynor Sekimori (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing, 2001), 120.
11. Marc Buijnsters, “Jichihan and the Restoration and Innovation of Buddhist Practice,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 26, nos. 1–2 (1999): 40. Parentheticals deleted.
12. *Ibid.*, 61.
13. *Ibid.*, 68.
14. See Richard K. Payne, “*Ajikan*: Ritual and Meditation in the Shingon Tradition,” in *Re-Visioning “Kamakura” Buddhism*, ed. Richard K. Payne (see note 7).
15. The character 空 indicates “emptiness” (*śūnya*, *śūnyatā*), and hence I would render this as “that the true state of things is empty.” As an interpretation, however, realization of emptiness is, of course, central to awakening in Buddhist thought. My thanks to Charles Orzech for pointing out this discrepancy.
16. Buijnsters, “Jichihan and the Restoration and Innovation of Buddhist Practice,” 68.
17. See, for example, James H. Sanford, “Breath of Life: The Esoteric Nembutsu,” in *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006).
18. Buijnsters, “Jichihan and the Restoration and Innovation of Buddhist Practice,” 70.
19. *Ibid.*, 77.
20. See Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). See also William H. McNeill, “Mythistory, or Truth, Myth, History and Historians,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 1 (February 1986): 1–10.
21. Richard K. Payne, introduction to *Shin Buddhism: Historical, Textual, and Interpretive Studies*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2007), xii.



22. This should not be considered as a criterion in all instances, as there are clearly other situations in which a category that is not part of a self-identification does serve an important intellectual function. Both “tantra” and “new religious movement” are instances that come to mind.

23. Ryūichi Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 116.

24. Commonly referred to in Japanese as the Dainichi kyō (大日經), T. 848 translated by Śubhākarasiṃha and Yixing, and T. 849 translated by Vajrabodhi.

25. J. Kongōcho gyō (金剛著經), T. 865 translated by Amoghavajra, and T. 866 translated by Vajrabodhi; also known as the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha-sūtra*, T. 882 translated by Dānapāla.

26. For a discussion of this relation as found in the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha-sūtra*, see Charles Orzech, “Maṇḍalas on the Move: Reflections from Chinese Esoteric Buddhism Circa 800 C.E.,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 19, no. 2 (1996): 223.

27. Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

28. As Davidson has pointed out, ritual identification (*adhiṣṭhāna*) cannot be considered the defining characteristic of all tantra. In addition to the qualifications he identifies, there are also Hindu tantric traditions, such as the Śaiva Siddhanta, which are dualistic and do not involve ritual identification as part of their practices. Within a polythetic understanding, however, ritual identification is one of the most important threads linking together much of tantric Buddhism.

29. There are various ideas about the origin of this dual-mandala system as found in Japanese Shingon. One is that it is the result of systematization that Kūkai did while awaiting permission to return to the court in Kyoto. Another is that it was the work of his teacher, Huikuo, who brought together the lineal teachings and practices brought to China at slightly different times by Śubhākarasiṃha and Amoghavajra. Recent archeological discoveries, however, suggest that there was a version of this symbolism already at work in China even before the work of Śubhākarasiṃha and Amoghavajra. A related question regards the much-disputed monument at Borobudur, which some scholars interpret as representing the union of the two mandalas. See Hudaya Kandahjaya, “A Study on the Origin and Significance of Borobudur” (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2004). There are other scholars, however, who deny any tantric dimension to Borobudur. Should such a connection be firmly established, then it would suggest either that the dual-mandala system was already created in Indian tantric Buddhism, or that it was created in Java and then exported to China. There is, obviously, still much research to be done on

these questions.

30. Marie-Thérèse de Mallman, *Introduction a l'Iconographie du Tāntrisme Bouddhique* (Paris: Libraire d'Amérique et d'Orient, Adrien Maisonneuve, 1986), 94.

31. Adrian Snodgrass, *The Matrix and Diamond World Mandalas in Shingon Buddhism*, Sata-Pitaka Series Vol. 354, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1988), 162, 207, and 208.

32. Following Snodgrass, who asserts that Amitāyus is the name proper for the Garbha Mandala while Amitābha is the name proper for the Vajradhātu Mandala. Ibid., 232. However, since the two are understood to be two names for the same buddha, many authors seem to use either name without distinction. This may be appropriate for the East Asian context where it is clear that the two are understood to be two names for the same buddha; however, it is my understanding that the Tibetan tradition does treat these as two separate buddhas.

33. Ibid., 208.

34. Tajima Ryūjun, *Étude sur le Mahāvairocana-Sūtra* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1936), 125.

35. Tajima notes: Isho = yid.las.byuñ.ba.

36. This may mean that at this stage the practitioner is no longer dependent upon identification with the body, speech, and mind of Dainichi, but has rather attained identity in the heart.

37. Tajima notes: Rākṣasa, Vāyu, Agni, Vaiśravaṇa, etc. (cf. Ōmura Chōkaku 林村澄覺 et al., *Mikkyō daijiten* 密教大辭典, rev. and enlarged in 6 vols. Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1970, 1717). (Originally published in 3 vols., 1931; 1 vol. photographically reduced ed. Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1983. My copy is 6 vols., Taipei: Hsin wen feng, 1979.)

38. Tajima notes: *Taishō*, vol. 18, 36 c1–16. The passage is from *Étude sur le Mahāvairocana-Sūtra*, 126. My translation from the French.

39. Tajima, *Étude*, 126.

40. See Dale Saunders, *Mudrā: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture*, Bollingen Series, no. 58 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 85–93; esp. “type C” (p. 87), and pp. 91–92.

41. Ibid., 234–235. For illustration, see, *Mikkyō daijiten* (see note 37), appendices, p. 62, *mudrā* no. 329. Discussing this *mudrā*, Tajima Ryūjun notes that “however, the descriptions in various texts allow of slight differences; sometimes the last three fingers are extended, etc.” (Tajima Ryūjun, *Les Deux Grands Maṇḍalas et la Doctrine de l'Esoterisme Shingon* [Bulletin de la Maison Franco-Japonaise, n.s., vol. 6. Tokyo: Maison Franco-Japonaise and Paris: Presses Universitaires

de France, 1959], 180). Ulrich Mammitzsch identifies this as “the *rikitan* (“ultimate power”) version of the meditation mudrā” (*Evolution of the Garbhadhātu Maṇḍala* [Śata-Piṭaka Series, vol. 363. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 1991], 190).

42. Also known as the perfected body assembly, a name of Japanese origin. Snodgrass, *Matrix and Diamond*, 555, n. 2.

43. Mahāvairocana is surrounded by four *pāramitā* bodhisattvas, while the other four buddhas are surrounded by four *prajñā* bodhisattvas (Minoru Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice* [Los Angeles and Tokyo: Buddhist Books International, 1978], 97).

44. Tajima, *Deux Maṇḍalas*, 179.

45. Snellgrove, *Matrix and Diamond*, 585.

46. T. 1167, “Maṇḍala of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas.” Charles Orzech has kindly examined the text briefly; he indicates that it is quite short and is used for general benefits, such as increasing fortune. The key deity’s Sanskrit name can be tentatively reconstructed as Ratnagarbha Candraprabha. In the course of the ritual described in the text, one sets up a mandala, makes offerings of flowers, and so on. The practitioner then visualizes the golden body of the Tathāgata complete with the thirty-two marks. Then, Avalokiteśvara with a red body is visualized, then Akaṣagarbha, Samantabhadra, Vajrapani, Mañjuśrī, Sarvanivāraṇaśambhū, and Kṣitigarbha, including directions on how they should be arrayed as well. The text ends with verses in praise of the eight. Note that it is related to 1168A and to the siddham text 1168B. Personal communication, July 3, 2007.

47. Orzech also suggests that this description matches the *Jiu pin wang sheng Amituo sanmadi ji tuoloni jing* (T. 933, attributed to Amoghavajra). See his discussion in “A Tang Esoteric Manual for Rebirth in the Pure Land: Rites for Contemplation of and Offerings to Amitāyus Tathāgata” in *Path of No Path: Contemporary Studies in Pure Land Buddhism Honoring Roger Corless*, ed. Richard K. Payne (forthcoming). Personal communication, July 3, 2007.

48. Mochizuki Shinkō, *A Doctrinal History of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism*, trans. Leo Pruden, ed. Richard K. Payne (forthcoming), ch. 24, “The Mid and Late T’ang Dynasty I” (ms. pp. 433–434).

49. Mochizuki, *A Doctrinal History*, ch. 27, “The Mid and Late T’ang Dynasty IV,” section 3, “The Pure Land Faith of Pen-ju and His Disciples” (ms. p. 483).

50. Ibid., ms. pp. 483–484.

51. Mark Unno, *Shingon Refractions: Myōe and the Mantra of Light* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004).

52. Mochizuki, *A Doctrinal History*, ch. 32, “The Southern Sung and the Chin

Dynasties,” section 3, “The Chin Dynasty” (ms. p. 593). Again, my thanks to Charles Orzech for supplying the characters for these various mantra found in the text. Personal communication, July 3, 2007.

53. Mochizuki, *A Doctrinal History*, ms. p. 593. Orzech also suggests that T. 930 is another example of this same phenomenon. Personal communication, July 3, 2007.

54. Imperial permission requested in 816, construction initiated in 819. Taikō Yamasaki, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1988), 30.

55. Yamasaki, *Shingon*, 39.

56. *Ibid.*, 42.

57. *Ibid.*, 41.

58. Shigematsu Akihisa, “An Overview of Early Japanese Pure Land,” in *The Pure Land Tradition*, ed. James Foard, Michael Solomon, and Richard K. Payne, Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, no. 3 (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1996), 293.

59. Yamasaki, *Shingon*, 41.

60. For information regarding the scriptural sources for this land, see Robert E. Morrell, *Early Kamakura Buddhism: A Minority Report* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1987), 95.

61. *Ibid.*, 95.

62. The differences between the application of these terms is not clear cut. As a simple rule of thumb, one may say that *dhāraṇī* are usually significantly longer than mantra. A functional distinction that is sometimes made is that while mantra are meditative or concentrative, *dhāraṇī* are mnemonic, i.e., for remembering doctrines, similar to creeds in Christianity. However, the way in which *dhāraṇī* are actually employed does not reflect this latter distinction.

63. Jan Gonda, “The Indian Mantra,” *Oriens* (1963): 255. See also, Alex Wayman, “The Significance of Mantra-s, From the Veda down to Buddhist Tantric Practice,” *The Adyar Library Bulletin* 39 (1975): 65–89. And, Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v., “Anu-smṛiti” and “Mantra.” For a comprehensive discussion of mantra, see Harvey P. Alper, ed., *Understanding Mantras* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

64. See Paul Harrison, “Commemoration and Identification in *Buddhānusmṛti*” in *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Janet Gyatso (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

65. William M. Bodiford, *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan*, Kuroda Institute Studies in

East Asian Buddhism, no. 8 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 192.

66. Ibid.

67. Regarding the Great Compassion Dhāraṇī, see Maria Dorothea Reis-Habito, *Die Dhāraṇī des Großen Erbarmens des Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara mit tausend Händen und Augen*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, no. 27 (Nettetal, Germany: Seyler Verlag, 1993).

68. Takubo Shūyo, *Shingon Daranizō no kaisetsu* (Explanation of the Mantra Dhāraṇī Piṭaka), rev. ed. (Tokyo: Roku Ya En, 1967), 62.

69. James L. Ford, *Jōkei and Buddhist Devotion in Early Medieval Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7.

70. Dōgen also held both the idea of attaining awakening in this life and rejected *mappō*.

71. If the bundle has been tied with plastic string, as is often the case in contemporary Japan, the string is set aside and discarded later.

72. In Sanskrit this frequently used mantra is: “oṃ kili kili vajra huṃ phaṭ.”

73. *Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary* (hereafter JEED; Tokyo: Daita Publishing Co., 1965): “kekka-fuza,” *paryankam ābhujya*; Snodgrass gives “*padmāsana*” (Adrian Snodgrass, *The Matrix and Diamond World Mandalas in Shingon Buddhism*, 2 vols. Sata-Pitaka series, no. 354. New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1988; 1:248).

74. Reading left for right, see Snodgrass, *Matrix and Diamond World Mandalas*, 1:294.

75. See note 73.

76. Reading left for right, see Snodgrass, *Matrix and Diamond World Mandalas*, 1:294.

77. “Shishō,” although *A Dictionary of Japanese Buddhist Terms* (hereafter DJBT; Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1984) gives the “four holy ones,” i.e., *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, *bodhisattvas*, and *buddhas*, for “*shishō*”; in this context this seems to refer to the “four bodhisattvas of attraction” (*shishō bosatsu*), as indicated by the four-mantra phrase, “*jyaku un ban koku*.” These are Vajrāṅkuśa Bodhisattva (Kongōkō bosatsu, “Diamond Goad-Hook”), Vajrapāśa Bodhisattva (Kongōsaku bosatsu, “Diamond Noose”), Vajrasphoṭa Bodhisattva (Kongōsa bosatsu, “Diamond Chain”), and Vajrāveśa Bodhisattva (Kongōrei Bosatsu, “Diamond Bell”). See Snodgrass, *Matrix and Diamond World Mandalas*, 2:629–633. Snodgrass explains that these are the

four aspects of Mahāvairocana’s function of drawing in and holding beings, namely, the giving of alms (*dāna*, *fuse*); loving speech (*priya-vacana*, *aigo*); beneficial practices (*arthakṛtiya*, *rigyō*); and adaptation of actions (*samānārthatā*, *dōji*). These are the expedient means (*upāya*,

*hōben*) and the practices of Great Compassion (*daihi-gyō*) for the benefit of others (*rita*), based on the Bodhisattva Vows, whereby beings are converted to the Buddhist Way and attracted towards Liberation (*gedatsu*). (2:629–630)

78. “*Komyō*.”

79. “*Kanjizai-ō-nyorai*,” which is in esoteric Buddhism the original name of Amitābha; see JEBD.

80. “*Gochi*,” represented by the five *tathāgatas*; see DJBT.

81. “*Jōin*.”

82. “*Shōken*,” which NAKAMURA Hajime (*Bukkyō go daijiten* [Tokyo: Tokyo shoseki, 1975]) gives as “*devatā*.”

83. The manual says “lord of the assembly” at this point, but that seems to be a scribal error.

## Bhairavī Cakra: Goddess Mandalas/Rituals in Contemporary Tantra's Nondualism

Helen Crovetto

Independent Scholar

### INTRODUCTION

THE PHRASE *BHAIRAVĪ CAKRA* appears in descriptions of at least two distinct contemporary tantric rites. In the first case, Bhairavī Cakra is the name given to a tantric ritual *sādhana* (spiritual practice) performed collectively, and in the second its physical manifestation is the name of a tool that may be used by an individual in graveyard or cremation ground practices. The followers of Vairāgī Vaiṣṇava guru Baba Hari Dass (b. 1922) use the group of *sādhana*s called Bhairavī Cakra. This type of ritual appears to be based on the sattvic (subtle) or yogic variety of *cakra pūjā* (circle worship) rites described in the *Mahānirvāṇa-tantra*. That text has been variously dated till as late as the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Baba Hari Dass says that the Bhairavī Cakra that his *pūjāris* (ritual or worship specialists) teach predates the kinds practiced during India's late medieval period. The Vairagī Ritual is a circular *sādhana* performed with an equal number of men and women that employs *yantras* to invoke the various forms of Devī. It does not have a sexual component.

The second utilization of Bhairavī Cakra is by Ānanda Mārgiis, whose ideology is based on the writings of the twentieth-century tantric guru Śrī Śrī Ānandamūrti (1921–1990, a.k.a. P. R. Sarkar). For them, Bhairavī Cakra is a *yantra* that has internal microcosmic aspects and two external aspects. One of the latter is a diagrammatic device that may be produced by an individual practitioner with various materials while the other is a macrocosmic and always-present energetic relationship between *puruṣa* (consciousness) and *prakṛti* (energy) that they believe forms a universal mandala. The mental, microcosmic equivalent of the mandala is Bhairavī Cakra as a matrix of extroversive and introversive forces operating within the ambit of the spiritual aspirant's mind. This



research will discuss, analyze, and compare the two rites, as well as some of their related practices.

### BHAIRAVĪ AS A DEITY

Within Hinduism, Bhairavī or Tripura-Bhairavī ranks as a goddess who is often listed among the ten *mahāvidyās*.<sup>2</sup> The *mahāvidyās* are energy aspects of transcendent knowledge usually associated with Śiva's destructive power.<sup>3</sup> They take both horrible (*ugra*) and peaceful or benevolent (*saumya*) forms. David Kinsley says that among the *mahāvidyās*, no goddess has more forms than Bhairavī.<sup>4</sup> She may appear as an attractive young woman or look threatening and wild. She is usually counted as the sixth *mahāvidyā* and is associated with fire, destruction, and the southern point of the compass ruled by Yama, the king of death.<sup>5</sup>

Harish Johari describes her bodily seat as a triangle inside the *mūlādhāra cakra* (base of the spine) and her role as that of the destroyer of nine mental impediments to union with supreme consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes Bhairavī is referred to as the one "who multiplies herself in an infinity of beings and forms."<sup>7</sup> The *Tripurā-bhairavī-tantra*, the *Śāradā-tilaka-tantra*, and the *Bṛhat Tantrasāra* describe her in predominantly benevolent, cosmic terms.<sup>8</sup> They evoke images simultaneously powerful and graceful, but discordantly seductive when mixed with items associated with violence. All three depict her as awesome, with the crimson glow of the rising sun, three beautiful eyes, a garland of skulls, blood smeared on her breasts, and wearing the moon on her head. Several portray her as smiling and adorned with jewels and rich clothing.

The ninth-century *Śāradā-tilaka* is of particular note because it is attributed to Lakṣmaṇa Deśikendra, the guru of the tenth- to eleventh-century Kashmiri Śaivite Abhinavagupta.<sup>9</sup> It repeatedly delineates an image of Bhairavī as the creatress and controller of the manifested universe.<sup>10</sup> Ānandamūrti describes Bhairavī Śakti this way in his twentieth-century *Ānanda Sūtram* and in some of his discourses. Deśikendra's literary style is decidedly more poetic and devotional in tone, but the import is identical.<sup>11</sup>

According to Śāktas, Bhairavī is the supreme conscious entity who causes the universe to come into being as well as the universal doer-entity. She is praised and blamed as responsible for everything in the devotional poetry of Bengali native Rāmprasād Sen (ca. 1718–1775).<sup>12</sup> In the *Śivacarita* she is listed as the form of Devī associated with the major

*śākta pīṭha* (energy center) at Haridvāra.<sup>13</sup> There are also references to Bhairavī or a *bhairavī* as the female practitioner within a Śaivite *cakra pūjā* ritual.<sup>14</sup> Male practitioners sometimes refer to their wives as *bhairavīs* or *śaktis*. Ānandamūrti says that female practitioners of tantra have been called *bhairavīs* ever since Śiva first taught his daughter Bhairavī the burial ground meditation called either Kāpālīka Sādhana or Night Sādhana.<sup>15</sup>

### BHAIRAVĪ AS A YANTRA/MANDALA

Bhairavī assumes an abstract, energetic form when represented by a *yantra*. Defining the words *yantra* and *mandala* is daunting because they are multivalent. A perfectly valid definition for either word may still remain only partial. Sometimes these words are used interchangeably, and more recently, but less often, the word *cakra* is also used for either term.<sup>16</sup> *Yantras* are commonly executed with material substances on flat surfaces but can also be rendered three-dimensionally. When they are visualized internally as part of spiritual practices, the instructions may require *yantras* to be imagined as solid, moving, or both.

Laura Kaufman defines mandalas as abstract diagrams of “sacred cosmic totality” that may also “depict places regarded as intrinsically numinous.”<sup>17</sup> She makes this observation with regard to Japanese architectural mandalas (Jpn. *mandaras*), but it holds true for Hindu mandalas as well. That is because once these temporary or permanent diagrams/structures are executed they delineate a space that is considered supramundane in some way. The diagram/space becomes a liminal area: either a direct portal onto transcendent consciousness or an access point into an elevated aspect of a tantric cosmology. Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis says that in Vajrayana Buddhism, “the mandala represents the realm of enlightenment, the locus for the identification of practitioner and Buddha.”<sup>18</sup> The Hindu *Brāhmaṇas* indicate that a mandala may serve as a “sacred enclosure” and sometimes a place specifically constructed for ritual purposes.<sup>19</sup>

John Woodroffe (1865–1936) describes a *yantra* as both a tool that holds one’s attention and an object of worship that represents a particular deity.<sup>20</sup> The deity may or may not be considered cosmically pervasive. The *Kaulāvalīyam* and *Kulārṇava-tantra* liken the relationship between *yantra* and deity to that between a body and its soul.<sup>21</sup> The *Kulārṇava-tantra* 6.87 reads, “As the body is for an embodied soul like oil for a

lamp, my beloved, so likewise the *yantra* is the place of all divinities.”<sup>22</sup> *Yantras* are said to become powerful and kinetic when enlivened through mantra and ritual.<sup>23</sup> But these activities may not have much influence on some types of *yantra* described by Ānandamūrti. Those *yantras* that he says have an innate or inherent presence within a human or natural structure would be activated and controlled predominantly through cosmic consciousness.

One *yantra*/mandala used by Ānanda Mārga has some stationary elements and some mobile elements. Ānanda Mārga’s organizational emblem, called the *pratīka*, has two equilateral triangles that form a hexagon, within which there is a rising sun. Inside the sun there is a *svāstika* (swastika).<sup>24</sup> Ānandamūrti said the *svāstika* should be visualized three-dimensionally and as turning in a counterclockwise direction, but not that the two triangles should form a tetrahedron, nor be mobile. During a talk on tantra in 1995 Baba Hari Dass opined that *yantras* are expanding patterns of energy that are constantly in motion.<sup>25</sup> He said that the *bindu* (point or drop of divine consciousness) turns into a triangle, whose sides “bulge out” to form the circle of a mandala. Within the mandala, formless energy patterns are made visible so that the symbol’s “gross, subtle, and causal meanings” can be “read like a book.”<sup>26</sup> He associated each *yantra* or mandala with a presiding deity and mantra.

#### BHAIRAVĪ CAKRA ACCORDING TO THE MAHĀNIRVĀṆA-TANTRA

The eighth chapter of the *Mahānirvāṇa-tantra* contains a rather succinct description of a Bhairavī Cakra ritual associated with the Kula Mārga (path).<sup>27</sup> This form of worship is less ritualistic compared to other *cakra pūjā* rites in the text. It advises the aspirant to draw a *yantra* with vermilion, red sandalwood paste, or water in the form of a square inscribed with a triangle. It does not say in which direction the apex of the triangle should face. A decorated wine jar is placed on the *yantra* and one’s *iṣṭa-deva* (personal deity) is worshiped therein. Then Ānanda-Bhairavī as a rosy-colored, smiling, and ornately dressed young woman is visualized. It is interesting to note how closely her image is associated with the dawn and thereby with the beginning of creation. This theme is reiterated in the *Tripurā-bhairavī-tantra*, the *Śāradā-tilaka-tantra*, and the *Brhat Tantrasāra* and seems to have developed a foothold in popular Indian culture.<sup>28</sup>

After Ānanda-Bhairavī is worshiped, her male counterpart Ānanda-Bhairava is visualized and revered. The pair is then imagined in cosmic or sexual union within the jar. At this point five substances or items referred to as the *pañcha makāra* (five “M”-words) are consecrated with mantra and offered to Ānanda-Bhairavī. The five substances (*tattvas*) are usually understood as meat (*māṃsa*), fish (*matsya*), wine (*madya*), parched grain (*mudrā*), and sexual ritual (*maithuna*), though the interpretation of words’ meanings varies from one tantric group to another. The practitioner eats or drinks the first four items after they have been offered. The text suggests adjustments in the *tattvas* for the Kālī Age. They include substituting *madhura-traya* (a combination of milk, sugar, and honey) for purified wine and mantra meditation on Devī’s feet for sexual ritual.<sup>29</sup> Where meat, fish, wine, and sexual ritual were used as *pañcha makāra* ingredients, Woodroffe said their purpose was as a means of controlling and curbing appetites and ultimately associating them with religious worship.<sup>30</sup>

In an essay from *Śakti and Śākta*, Woodroffe describes the possible use of sexual ritual in Bhairavī Cakra as a process that takes place between the worshiper and his wife. If the worshiper is not married or his wife is unable to participate, the worshiper may ritually marry one other woman for the purpose of the ceremony only.<sup>31</sup> Traditionally, the decision to utilize sexual ritual is said to depend on the capacity of the participants for elevated ideation. The evaluation of a practitioner’s ideation was left up to his or her guru. In Hindu tantra three categories of ideation (*bhāva*) are used in developmental comparison: *paśu* (animal), *vīra* (human/ brave), and *divyā* (divine). The true human being is said to be brave (*vīrya*) and self-controlled in all ways.<sup>32</sup> He or she strives for the expression of divinity within.

Woodroffe says that for the *divyā* aspirant, the five *tattvas* are yogic processes.<sup>33</sup> Hugh B. Urban describes Woodroffe’s interpretation of the *Mahānirvāṇa-tantra* as an attempt to defend, rationalize, and purify tantra by removing or deemphasizing some of its antinomian, worldly, and nonmystical aspects.<sup>34</sup> Woodroffe’s objective was to portray yogic processes as a superior expression of tantric ritual. He distinguished Bhairavī Cakra from other *cakra pūjā* rituals by saying that it does not involve restrictions on who can participate.<sup>35</sup> Regarding participation in Bhairavī Cakra, Baba Hari Dass expressed the same opinion.<sup>36</sup>

## BABA HARI DASS AND THE VAIRĀGĪ VAIṢṆAVA LINEAGE

Baba Hari Dass was born in the Almora District of the Kumaon region of the Himalayas.<sup>37</sup> He is a *sannyāssi* (renunciant) of the Vairāgī Vaiṣṇava lineage of north central India and guru to people in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Japan, and India. He took a vow of perpetual silence (*maunavrata*) in 1952. His lineage was founded by Ramanandin during the fifteenth century and is an offshoot of the Viśiṣṭādvaita school of qualified nondualism that was established in south India by Rāmānuja (1017–1137).<sup>38</sup> Ramanandin rejected caste distinctions and sexual discrimination, creating *sannyāsini*s (female renunciants) as well as *sannyāsins* (male renunciants).<sup>39</sup> Baba Hari Dass was initiated by a Vairāgī Vaiṣṇava *sādhu* named Raghubir Dass.

In 1971 Baba Hari Dass was invited to the United States, founded the Hanuman Fellowship, and three years after that established the Mount Madonna Center at Watsonville, California. His Indian headquarters is at Shampur Kangri village in the Haridvāra District of Uttar Pradesh. Baba Hari Dass's followers established the Shri Ram Ashram there through their guru's Sri Rama Foundation. The ashram is both a residence and a school for needy children. Other branches of the Vairāgī Vaiṣṇava Order in India are independent of Baba Hari Dass's organization.

The Vairāgī Vaiṣṇavas are an order of married and unmarried *sannyāsins*. The word *vairāgī* means a renunciant, literally one without (*vai*) passion (*rāga*). Dr. Sarasvati Buhrman, a Vairāgī Vaiṣṇava *sannyāsini* and an Ayurvedic physician, explained that those who are married are termed "householder celibates" and have no children. They limit their sexual activity to once a month in order to conserve *ojas* for higher spiritual practices. *Ojas* is recognized by both the Vairāgī Vaiṣṇavas and Ānanda Mārgiis as a subtle product of *shukra dhātu*, or lymph. Buhrman said that the topic of *ojas* and its conservation is articulated in Ayurvedic manuals and Hatha yoga texts of a tantric character, as well as within the tantric tradition itself. She identified the latest of the written sources as thirteenth- through sixteenth-century Hatha yoga texts.<sup>40</sup>

Beyond the fact that they are qualified nondualists, the beliefs and practices of the Vairāgī Vaiṣṇavas do not appear to be uniform on the Indian subcontinent or in diaspora.<sup>41</sup> There is a tradition among them of relying on personal experience and study to shape one's worldview and instructions to others.<sup>42</sup> The author was able to observe this herself. Hunter's *Statistical Account of Bengal*, which was published from 1875,

classified some Bengali Bāuls as Vairāgīs.<sup>43</sup> Given the lack of concurrence in Vairāgī beliefs and practices, this classification may have some merit in the sense that the Bāuls of Bengal are also known for their eclecticism. But it does not seem to signify that Vairāgīs, like Bengali Bāul *sanmyāsīs*, engage in sexual ritual.<sup>44</sup> At least the American branch of Vairāgī Vaiṣṇavas does not. It may mean that some Bāuls, like Vairāgī Vaiṣṇavas, lead a very controlled sexual life and that a portion of the membership of both groups does not marry.

#### MOUNT MADONNA AND BHAIRAVĪ CAKRA SĀDHANA

The 350-acre Mount Madonna Center offers a wide spectrum of seminars and each person is encouraged to follow practices according to his or her personal inclinations. Baba Hari Dass's disciples say he teaches different meditation techniques according to the needs he perceives in his students. He and his staff primarily teach classical Aṣṭāṅga yoga according to Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtras*. They also make extensive use of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Works like the *Mahānirvāṇa-tantra*, *Kulārṇava-tantra*, *Śiva Samhita*, and *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā* are employed as source books for their yoga teachers because they believe that combining tantric and yogic practices helps aspirants refine the *cakras* of the subtle body.<sup>45</sup> Baba Hari Dass is the author of at least ten books, including a commentary entitled *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (1999), *Ashtanga Yoga Primer* (1981), and *Essays 3: Selfless Service; The Spirit of Karma Yoga* (no date).

Baba Hari Dass's followers have practiced their traditional Bhairavī Cakra ceremony at Mount Madonna gatherings since 1975 or 1976. The rituals were incorporated as part of their general retreats. Janardan Dass, the Bhairavī Cakra *pūjārī*,<sup>46</sup> said that sometimes over a hundred people at a time participated in them, making it necessary to form circles of participants within other circles. In addition to the ceremonies held at Mount Madonna, authorized Vairāgī Vaiṣṇava teachers such as Sarasvati Buhrman in Boulder, Colorado have held portions of the rite. The staff at Mount Madonna began to offer seminars for the public in the 1980s.

In 1998 a *Yoga Journal* advertisement announced a four-day "Rituals of Tantra" seminar that described tantra as "an ancient system of transcending the senses by using the senses." The use of the senses in this context refers to channeling energy awakened through the senses towards one's divine object of ideation. The ad pointed out that tantra is "sometimes misunderstood in the West as a path of sensual indulgence,"

while in fact it is a path that requires considerable discipline.<sup>47</sup> The seminar would involve the use of mantra, visualization, *āsana* (yoga postures), *prāṇāyāma* (breath control techniques), dance, and music. It would also include “traditional Bhairabi Chakra Sadhana—a unique and rare practice which is done in a circle (Chakra) with equal numbers of men and women.” It stated that the seminar was designed for participants with differing levels of experience.

This ceremony may have been the last one of a series open to the public, as there are currently no plans to restart them. Any future decision on the issue rests with Mount Madonna’s retreat committee. Janardan Dass cited skewed Western perceptions of what tantra is as a cause of their suspension.<sup>48</sup> The view that tantra is a form of sexual therapy with positive spiritual implications stems from any number of New Age seminars and books that have appeared in the last thirty years.<sup>49</sup> Urban has documented how Americans’ perception of tantra as liberating sexual activity began from the early twentieth century with Pierre Bernard’s establishment of the Tantrik Order in America.<sup>50</sup>

The idea that Bhairavī Cakra in particular is associated with sexual rites obviously had some currency among nineteenth-century subcontinent Indians. A painting from Rajasthan, dated to approximately that time period, portrays the *pañcha makāra* utilizing sexual ritual. It was reproduced in *The Tantric Way*, published in 1977. The painting’s caption identified it as an illustration of “Bhairavī-chakra.”<sup>51</sup> The format of the painting is similar to an “attraction yantra” (*ākaraṣaṇayantra*).<sup>52</sup> However, only some *cakra pūjā* rites involve sexual ritual.

Traditionally, practices like Bhairavī Cakra have been kept secret to all but the initiated within a tantric group. When the Mount Madonna seminars were held for the public participants were not required to take Vairāgī initiation, but they were asked to maintain the secrecy of the practice, not to tape record it, and not to take any notes during the ceremony. The following information about the ritual comes from its *pūjāri* Janardan Dass, authorized instructor Sarasvatī Buhman, and informants who attended a segment of the rite at a September 1–3, 2001 seminar in Boulder, Colorado.

#### THE RITUAL PROCESS STARTS WITH A YANTRA

Mount Madonna’s Bhairavī Cakra ritual actually starts the night before the participants assemble, when Baba Hari Dass chooses a single



*yantra* for the ceremony from among ten Devī *yantras*. The *pūjāri* said the patterns of the *yantras* come from an unpublished manuscript of Baba Hari Dass entitled *Dāsmahāvidyas*. The names of the *mahāvidyas* listed in other texts are usually Kālī, Tārā, Tripura-Sundarī (sometimes Sodaśī), Bhuvaneśvarī, Chinnamastā, Bhairavī, Dhūmāvatī, Bagalāmukhī, Mātāṅgī, and Kamalā. Baba Hari Dass's disciples understand the *mahāvidyas* to be aspects of a singular Devī. One of them, however, asked the guru to comment on the goddess Bhairavī. Baba Hari Dass wrote that Bhairavī is the "power of death." He continued to write that "Destruction begins from the very first moment of birth. Death is ever present in everything. Bhairavi is a fearful-looking female servant of Shiva and of Durga."<sup>53</sup> Baba Hari Dass's choice of *yantra* is at least partly an astrological calculation and may include such factors as the month of the year, the lunar date, and the day of the week as well as the constellation (*nakshatra*).<sup>54</sup>

A *pūjāri* constructs the *yantra* in the open air utilizing colored sand, reaching dimensions of up to ten feet in size. According to Hélène Brunner's classification of mandalas, these would correspond to type 2 powder mandalas (*rajomaṇḍala*).<sup>55</sup> The Vairāgī Vaiṣṇavas' use of a *yantra* is meant to perform the traditional function within Hinduism of invoking the presence of a deity. After the formation of the *yantra* the goddess chosen to preside over that particular Bhairavī Cakra ceremony is installed by means of a mantra. In 1995 Baba Hari Dass identified mandala, *mudrā* (here meaning symbolic gesture), and mantra as the instruments that help an individual achieve tantra's main objective of purification.<sup>56</sup> In Jayaratha's commentary on the *Tantrāloka*, he says that *vidyās* (feminine mantras) are a fourth item that make up the foundation of Bhairava's teachings.<sup>57</sup> The Vairāgī's Bhairavī Cakra ceremony includes all four tools.

### THE CEREMONY ITSELF

The participants were instructed to consider each man in the circle as the embodiment of divine consciousness and each woman in the circle as the embodiment of divine energy. For the duration of the three-hour practice, all the interpersonal relationships of the participants were to be seen as dissolved. They were told that the aim of the practice was to be able to see the divine in all beings. I believe this practice is a simple auto-suggestion that mimics what an individual might experience while looking at the rite from a spiritually elevated perspective. Vairāgī

Vaiṣṇava instructor Buhrman said that the dissolution-of-temporal-relationships ideation assisted people in redefining their relationships in a spiritual way. She contrasted this ideation with that of many seminars advertising tantric practices. These, she said, may be characterized as couple's therapy for intimates in that they seek to reinforce and restate the relationships that people have to other individuals.

An equal number of men and women were instructed to sit in a circle, alternating male and female participants. There is no question of couples in this ceremony, or of women occupying any particular position in relationship to male partners. In fact there are only several occasions when the men and women sitting next to each other have physical contact at all. One is at the time of performing hand *mudrās*, when each participant performs a *mudrā* that brings his or her hand in contact with the hand of the person sitting alongside. The other is at several points when all people in the circle simply hold hands.

Regarding the layout of the ritual area, it is noteworthy that the *pūjārī* and his wife sit at the center of the circle. A *pūjā* (worship) table laden with pictures of many deities accompanies them. There is no sacrificial fire. The position of the sand yantra in relation to the circle of participants is unclear. The ceremony includes a series of āsanās, some of which are performed in gracefully coordinated collective movements. This creates an effect akin to that of a dance. The *pūjārī* recites many *bīja* mantras ("seed" mantras that contain vibratory syllables) while the participants concentrate at different cakras within their bodies. They perform *sabīja* (with mantra) and *nirbīja* (without mantra) *prāṇāyāma* (breath control techniques) as well as *sakumbhāka* (with breath retention) *prāṇāyāma* and types of *prāṇāyāma* without the restriction of the practitioner's nostrils.

The participants are directed to execute various hand *mudrās* intermittently. Hand *mudrās* are gestures that have a practical, yogic effect and a religiously-toned association. From the yogic standpoint the execution of hand *mudrās* ensures the channeling of energy into the spinal column and assists in the raising of *kuṇḍalinī* (a coiled, serpentine, spiritual energy in the spine). Baba Hari Dass's students perform two series of hand *mudrās* connected to their daily meditation practice. These contain twenty-four *mudrās* produced before meditation and eight completed afterwards.<sup>58</sup> Four of the *mudrās* in the pre-meditation group are specifically associated with incarnations of Viṣṇu (numbers 18–21 represent the Fish, Tortoise, Boar, and Lion).<sup>59</sup>

The religious pairing of hand *mudrās* with deities is a common feature of tantric practice. The hand *mudrās* described in the *Yoginīhṛdaya* are particular to ten aspects of Tripura-Sundarī.<sup>60</sup> Those in the *Kulārṇava-tantra* include, but are not necessarily limited to, Śiva/Bhairava, Śrī (the goddess), Viṣṇu, the Sun, the Moon, and Gaṇapati,<sup>61</sup> while in the *Tantrāloka* they are dedicated to various aspects of Śiva/Sadāśiva/Bhairava, Parā, Parā-parā, and Aparā.<sup>62</sup> Citing Abhinavagupta, Padoux states that *mudrās* are meant to bring about the practitioner's mental and bodily identification with the deity to which they correspond.<sup>63</sup> James H. Sanford says that hand *mudrās* are used to invoke, compliment, and disperse deities within some of Shingon's Japanese Buddhist rituals.<sup>64</sup> The hand *mudrās* in Baba Hari Dass's Bhairavī Cakra ritual are probably linked to the worship of deities as well. Buhrman said their ritual includes the worship of a number of deities including the *navagrahas* (planet-deities).

The recitation of mantras in this form of Bhairavī Cakra includes 108 repetitions of what they refer to as "Bhairavī mantras." This is an example of one of their *vidyās*. They offer flowers and perform various types of meditation, concluding with a mantra meditation on Devī. As the yantra was meant to be a temporary installation, it is dismantled at the end of the rite. To summarize, the ceremony is characterized by an emphasis on mantra meditation, mandala, *āsanas*, *mudrās* and *prāṇāyāma*. All of the elements that might be seen as ritualistic are described as either spiritually efficacious or devotional. There is no consumption of materials such as wine and meat, nor sexual ritual. Baba Hari Dass's followers are vegetarians and also do not substitute *madhura-traya* for wine.

Participants said that they were impressed with the ceremony because it had a striking impact on their meditation practices and created tremendous amounts of energy. At the conclusion of one ritual, several informants had a visionary experience in which they saw the entire group encircled by a mandalic configuration of two rings of rotating light. A vertical ring of light was said to arch over the circle of ritualists while a horizontal ring encircled them. They associated the former with Śaivite energy and the latter with Śakti. One informant described the participants at this ritual as deeply affected and outside ordinary consciousness.

## SPECULATIONS ON THE EVOLUTION OF SEXUAL AND NONSEXUAL TANTRIC PRACTICES

As part of my 2000 interview with her, Buhrman summarized Baba Hari Dass's views on the evolution of tantra as a system of spiritual practices. He believes that tantra was originally a system of nonsexual rituals and that these predate the sexual types of *cakra pūjā* prevalent in the Middle Ages. He explained to his disciples that a deterioration of Indian society occurred when the *varnas* (social groups) lost their equality. With the acceptance of the Vedic caste system, only men of the upper three castes (whom he identified as Brahman, Kṣatriyan, and Vaeshyan) were permitted to engage in certain religious practices. Women and Śūdra caste were excluded.

This caused practitioners of tantra to seek outward forms that the general society thought was acceptable for lower caste individuals. The tantras had female gurus and female practitioners. It was very likely that women and men of lower caste who were found to be teaching or involved in subtle spiritual practices would be persecuted. Therefore, they adopted exterior forms that did not cause concerned, high-caste individuals to suspect that their domination of the religious sphere was being challenged in any way. They concealed or disguised their true intentions due to social prohibitions. For example, they used *sandhyā bhāṣā* (twilight language), in which words have multiple interpretations. They practiced a subtle version of the *pañcha makāras*.

Baba Hari Dass said the cruder interpretations of the *pañcha makāras* came about as a result of individuals mistakenly trying to practice what they thought was being done in the name of subtle spiritual science. These individuals were imitators. They were not yet qualified for the subtlest practices, but decided to attempt practice without the guidance of people who were knowledgeable. They created a separate branch of tantra. In Baba Hari Dass's opinion it is not a branch completely without merit, but he does not teach it. He said that something like ninety percent of people who try that form of tantra fail to reach their spiritual goals. It is appropriate only for people who simultaneously have two very strong, seemingly contrasting desires. On the one hand they have strong physical desires for drugs or sex while on the other they have a strong desire for contact with cosmic consciousness.<sup>65</sup> He commented that the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās were engaged in the rajasic (mutative) or tamasic (static) practice of the *pañcha makāras* as Vīrachari (brave) ritualists.

Therefore, Buhrman said, at Mount Madonna they refer to their Bhairavī Cakra as a very old, traditional form of the ritual because it is nonsexual. Baba Hari Dass wrote that Bhairavī Cakra is used “in all different kinds of Tantric rituals,” including those of the Bengali Sahajiyās and perhaps those of Buddhists.<sup>66</sup> The Bengali Sahajiyās have a Śāktic orientation but it is unclear to what extent their philosophy and practices correspond to those of the Buddhist or Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās.<sup>67</sup> Baba Hari Dass said the Bengali Sahajiyās were a group composed of mainly householders who practiced in secret and did not proselytize their beliefs.<sup>68</sup> This fits June McDaniels’s description of medieval Śāktism as an “esoteric religion practiced by small groups of Tantric yogis.”<sup>69</sup>

Ānandamūrti asserted that Sadāśiva designed the sexual and nonsexual forms of tantra simultaneously about seven thousand years ago.<sup>70</sup> He said the cruder forms including sexual rites were meant for less-developed aspirants to help them “limit the degree of their indulgence.”<sup>71</sup> Like Baba Hari Dass, he said that they were those who were unable to understand the subtler interpretations of the *pañcha makāras* (the imitators), but as a social reformer he was more critical of them, labeling their *sādhana* “an immoral antisocial activity.”<sup>72</sup> His interpretation of Bhairavī Cakra will be discussed below.

Among scholars of Hindu and Buddhist tantra the current, prevailing opinion is that ritual practices with a sexual component preceded the yogic forms without one and that the sexual rituals were not a degeneration of mysticism. David G. White describes “sexualized ritual practice” as “the sole truly distinctive feature of South Asian Tantric traditions.”<sup>73</sup> He says that scholastic tantric works are a “secondary development, a hermeneutical transformation of an earlier body of practice into a mystical metaphysics.”<sup>74</sup> Meanwhile, systems of tantra with a sexual component, whether ancient or re-invented, show no signs of extinction.<sup>75</sup> Sanford notes that we are likely to find sexual ritual and other liminal practices as part of the tantric corpus when he observes that “Worldly and antinomian themes lurk at or just beneath the surface of virtually every tantric tradition.”<sup>76</sup>

#### BHAIRAVĪ IN ĀNANDA MĀRGA IDEOLOGY

Ānanda Mārga (The Path of Bliss) is an international socio-spiritual tantric sect that was founded in 1955 at Jamalpur, Bihar State, India. It is a new, alternative religious movement whose tenets view proselytizing

as a part of spiritual practice. Ānanda Mārga has a presence in over one hundred countries. The organization sent its *ācāryas* (spiritual teachers) to the United States in the late 1960s and registered as an American religious entity soon afterwards. The founder and guru, Ānandamūrti, did not claim to be part of any current lineage and associated himself with tantra yoga reaching back to Sadāśiva. He said that Sadāśiva was an historical figure from about seven thousand years ago who was the first to systematize tantra.<sup>77</sup> Before the advent of Sadāśiva, Ānandamūrti said that tantra existed in scattered and primitive forms within its Kashmiri and Bengali schools.<sup>78</sup> The organization's ideology emphasizes social service work along with the search for self-realization.

Ānanda Mārga's ontology is monistic and microcosmic. Their *ācāryas* teach a tantra yoga based on Aṣṭāṅga yoga. Since its inception, the organization has been reformist with a large number of *sannyāsis* as organizational workers. Ānandamūrti was the author of over two hundred books on a wide range of topics. Some of his books, originally written in Bengali, remain untranslated. He tried to visit the United States in the late 1970s but was refused a visa. This may be due to the socialist character of his socio-economic and political ideals, which are embodied in PROUT, his Progressive Utilization Theory. Ānandamūrti created a wing of Ānanda Mārga, called PROUTist Universal, to propagate those ideas in 1959. Ānanda Mārga/PROUTist Universal accepts revolutionary social theory and has a controversial position on the use of force.<sup>79</sup>

The name Bhairavī appears in the ideology of Ānanda Mārga in several instances. Ānandamūrti used it to delineate a portion of their cosmology and to describe the process of Śākta tantra. In some of his discourses on spiritual practice he spoke about Bhairavī Cakra specifically. With regard to the unfolding of the cosmos, Ānandamūrti said Bhairavī Śakti is the name given to Prakṛti at the stage in which Puruṣa is qualified by the *guṇas* (binding principles).<sup>80</sup> She was identified as the creatress of the manifested state, while Bhairava was conceived of as her witness.<sup>81</sup> This is not to indicate that Ānandamūrti and his followers accept any form of Prakṛti as having independent agency.<sup>82</sup> He called *Prakṛti Puruṣa* "Operative Principle" and his ontological stance was essentially monistic, though he did accept the distinctiveness of Prakṛti and Puruṣa as philosophical concepts.<sup>83</sup>

Within his description of Śākta tantra, Ānandamūrti utilized the name Bhairavī Śakti while elucidating the stages of Śāktācāra; the Śakti cult he said appeared after the Purāṇic doctrine was established.<sup>84</sup>

He indicated that Śāktācāra is a process in which successive stages of energy-qualified consciousness are dissolved in one another until they arrive at the supreme state. The followers of Śāktācāra attempt to merge the static principle within *tāmasik* energy into Bhavānī Śakti or Kālikā Śakti, the mutative principle from Bhavānī Śakti into Bhairavī Śakti, and the sentient energy from Bhairavī Śakti into Kaośikī Śakti or Mahāsarasvatī, the “spiritual effulgence.”<sup>85</sup> Kaośikī Śakti is called Ādyā Śakti, a combination of the three *guṇas*. Ānandamūrti defines Bhairavī Śakti as “energy in action,” and says her acoustic root is *śam*.<sup>86</sup> The historical, literary association between Bhairavī and the color red (cited above) lends weight to his identification of her with the mutative principle, or *rajas*.<sup>87</sup>

#### BHAIRAVĪ CAKRA ACCORDING TO ĀNANDA MĀRGIIS

In some of Ānandamūrti’s spiritual discourses he discussed the nature of *yantra*. He defined it in an expanded sense, as a controlled machine that is capable of a specific output.<sup>88</sup> The *Bhagavadgītā* 18.61 also describes *yantra* as a machine.<sup>89</sup> Ānandamūrti observed that because *yantras* have special forms and designs, they yield particular effects. It is a concept similar to the idea of *yantra* expressed by Vidyā Vācaspati in the *Kalyāṇa Upaniṣad*,<sup>90</sup> namely, that the forms of all manifested things are *yantras*. Ānandamūrti’s point was that the human body, due to its form, produces particular effects not obtainable from other bodies, such as those of animals.<sup>91</sup> Specifically, the human body is a *yantra* capable of producing or creating divinity.<sup>92</sup> I would like to stress that Ānandamūrti was not restricting himself to the idea that the human mind is capable of conceiving divinity or imagining divinity. His intention here was to communicate that the physical material of the human body itself, with its human-specific glandular structure and concomitant mental configuration, was capable of converting mind-stuff into divine-stuff, or consciousness.<sup>93</sup>

Ānandamūrti implied that within the human mind, the centrifugal and centripetal tendencies towards the material and spiritual spheres manifest as a mental *yantra* or microcosmic mandala. André Padoux says that the *Yoginīhṛdaya* from the Śrīvidyā tradition and Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrāloka* describe comparable embodiments of mandala as a result of a divine cosmic process.<sup>94</sup> While there is more emphasis on the concept of “descent” of consciousness in ontologies and cosmologies of and related



to Kashmir Śaivism, Ānanda Mārga's ontology has a certain degree of resonance with them, being both monistic and microcosmic. The *Śākta Darśan* says, "The disc of the body-cosmos is the best of all yantras."<sup>95</sup>

Ānandamūrti said that the better the adjustment and relationship between the centrifugal and centripetal mental tendencies, the more an individual would be able to use his or her mental capabilities.<sup>96</sup> He translated the concepts of introverted and extroverted mental tendencies into the basic philosophy of his socio-spiritual organization and used his *pratīka* (organizational emblem) to represent them. The symbolic elements of the *pratīka* are dominated by two equilateral triangles forming what resembles the Seal of Solomon. Ānanda Mārgiis call it the Star of Śiva. They use this mandala/*yantra* as part of their initiation (*dīkṣā*) rite by asking the initiate to place his or her hands within it for part of the process.<sup>97</sup> The mental manifestation of this *yantra* would be diagrammed as a hexagram alone.

Throughout much of the Hindu world, a triangle with its apex pointing upwards is thought to represent consciousness. Ānanda Mārgiis have a contrary, minority viewpoint. They say the *ūrdhva trikoṇa* (upward-pointing triangle) signifies energy, *prakṛti*, and the mind's relationship to the physical world. In social terms they say it represents service to humanity. One of the few experts in the use of *yantras* to agree with them is Harish Johari, who identifies a *yantra* with a central upward-pointing triangle as a Śākta *yantra*. The *adhah trikoṇa* (downward-pointing triangle) is described by Mārgiis as denoting the introverted search for self-realization through spiritual practices. Therefore they associate it with *Puruṣa*, rather than *Prakṛti*. There is a *yantra* called *Kāla Bhairava Cakra* that prominently features three downward-pointing triangles as well as a hexagram.<sup>98</sup> Therefore the Ānanda Mārgiis do not appear to be completely alone in their views on the symbolism of Hindu geometric iconography. Their use of triangles to represent *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa* echoes, in a simple way, Shingon's "grand mandalas": *Garbhakoṣa* (Womb Mandala) and *Vajradhātu* (Vajra Mandala).<sup>99</sup>

Some Ānanda Mārgiis utilize the hexagram of their *pratīka* as an ingredient in what they refer to as *kāpālīka* practices. The nature of these practices will be discussed below. Ānandamūrti called the stand-alone hexagram *Bhairavī Cakra*. Its name is derived from the fact that *Bhairavī Śakti* is said to determine the relationship between the physical, vibrational world and the causal matrix, or spiritual sphere.<sup>100</sup> Ānandamūrti said that *Bhairavī Cakra*, as a pattern of active energy, is

instrumental for inspiring, elevating, and guiding the mind towards supreme consciousness.<sup>101</sup> He explained that this was why some *sādhakas* sit in its physical manifestation for spiritual practices performed in the burial ground.<sup>102</sup> By sitting in the *cakra* they imbibe its ideation. Ānandamūrti said that the spiritual aspirant who enters the realm controlled by Bhairavī Śakti experiences the unity of the universe.<sup>103</sup> According to S. K. R. Rao's system of defining *yantras*,<sup>104</sup> sitting in Bhairavī Cakra would convert the *yantra* into a mandala because a ritual object would be placed upon it. In this case, the tantra yogis would be using their own bodies as ritual objects. Gudrun Bühnemann notes that *yantras* of this category, called "*yantras* for establishing a foundation" (*sthāpanayantras*), present simple geometric shapes and function as seats.<sup>105</sup>

#### KĀPĀLIKA SĀDHANA, MADHYAMIKA BUDDHISM, AND THE RITUAL USE OF THE HUMAN SKULL

Ānanda Mārga's *kāpālika sādhanas* are yogic and esoteric. The process for the meditator involves concentrating his or her individual Bhairavī Śakti at a "nuclear point" (*cakra*) in the body and using this internal seat as a point from which to pass into the Kaośikī Śakti described above.<sup>106</sup> Because the three *guṇas* are unexpressed in Kaośikī Śakti, merging into it is said to signify the dissolution of the individual mind into cosmic consciousness. Ānanda Mārga's *kāpālika sādhanas* traditionally take place around the time of the new moon (*amāvāsyā*).<sup>107</sup> While they do not always occur in cremation or burial grounds, that is their practitioner's first choice of site. One reason for this is the belief that cremation and burial grounds are locations of elevated concentrations of *prāṇa* (energy), resulting from the decomposition or destruction of human physical bodies.<sup>108</sup> Another reason has to do with the assertion that these are ideal places to engage in struggle with mental restrictions that Ānanda Mārgiis call the *pāśas* (bonds or fetters) and *ripus* (enemies). This idea will be elaborated below. Informants indicate that Ānanda Mārga's *kāpālika* practices differ from individual to individual as well as between their male and female *sannyāsis*, called *avadhūtas* and *avadhūtikās*.

Though the activities of Hindu *kāpālikas* are not usually associated with Buddhist ideals of spiritual social service, Ānandamūrti believed that there was originally, and still remains, a connection between the two. The name *kāpālika* appears to come from the Sanskrit word for skull (*kāpāla*). Since the medieval period *kāpālikas* have been associated with

spiritual practices that utilize a human skull.<sup>109</sup> Ānandamūrti said this was accurate,<sup>110</sup> but he presented an additional etymology of the word *kāpālīka*. He said that one of the meanings of the phoneme “ka” is the objectivated world.<sup>111</sup> Therefore human beings who take on the moral responsibility “of serving this objectivated world are called *kāpālīka*.”<sup>112</sup> He traced the first use of the term *kāpālīka* to the Madhyamika Buddhists and said that they used it for those *sādhakas* “who took the noble vow of serving all in the living and non-living worlds.”<sup>113</sup> This is a bodhisattva-like vow. Madhyamika Buddhism was founded in second-century India by Nāgārjuna and introduced into China by Kumārajīva (334–413).<sup>114</sup> It was known as the San-lun Tsung, or Three Treatise school of Buddhism in China, Korea, and Japan.<sup>115</sup> Ānandamūrti consistently asserted that it is “absolutely wrong” to make a distinction between Hindu tantra and Buddhist tantra because “Tantra is one and only one.”<sup>116</sup> Not surprisingly, his *avadhūtas* and *avadhūtikās* dedicate lifetime after lifetime to spiritual social service.

McDaniel says that the *avadhūtas* and *kāpālīkas* were traditionally “folk tantric sects” who tried to achieve supernatural powers through penance-related *sādhana*s.<sup>117</sup> She uses the terms *folk tantra* and *classical tantra* to distinguish between tantras that emphasized the application of supernatural knowledge and the acquisition of *siddhis* (occult powers) from those that were more academic and concentrated on identification with divinity.<sup>118</sup> Woodroffe described *avadhūtas* as those who have “caste aside” the world or separated from it so that they might constantly contemplate supreme consciousness.<sup>119</sup> Ānandamūrti believed that they were more integrated into the world. He said *avadhūtas* are those who view “everything with equanimity” and live in the world as if they are secondary manifestations of Śiva.<sup>120</sup>

Ānandamūrti cast his twentieth-century *kāpālīkas* in a classical mold. He emphasized the yogic attainment of self-realization and required these practitioners to take on social service responsibilities of a socio-economic and political, as well as spiritual, nature. The glossary of his *Discourses on Tantra, Volume 2* defines *kāpālīka sādhana* as a form of spiritual practice that “causes the aspirant to confront and overcome all the inherent fetters and enemies of the human mind.”<sup>121</sup> Ānanda Mārgiis consider the eight fetters (*aṣṭa pāśa*) to be *ghrṇa* (aversion or hatred), *lajjā* (shame), *kula* (pride of lineage or caste), *śīla* (habit), *māna* (pride of knowledge), *jugupsā* (censure), *bhaya* (fear), *śaṅkā* (doubt).<sup>122</sup> The six enemies (*ṣaṭ ripu*)

are said to be *kāma* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (avarice), *moha* (blind attachment), *mada* (pride), and *mātsarya* (jealousy).<sup>123</sup>

Ānanda Mārga's definition of *kāpālīka sādhanā* refers not only to the internal aspect or mental struggle of the practices, but also to the external aspect. Ānandamūrti said that the external aspect of the fight against fear, hatred, and shame involved cremation ground practices, but he did not express any confidence in the public to understand them.<sup>124</sup>

When those who have little knowledge of *sādhanā* see the style of this external fight, they think that the Tantrics moving in the cremation ground are a sort of unnatural creature. Actually the general public have no understanding of these Tantrics. In the direct fight against *ripus* and *pāshas* they may appear to be unnatural for the time being, but one cannot ignore the fact that in wartime every person becomes, to some extent, unnatural in his or her activities.<sup>125</sup>

Ānandamūrti's service hermeneutics regarding *kāpālīkas* are classically oriented. But those of his followers who utilize a human skull in their spiritual practices appear to be making use of techniques that come directly out of folk tantra. Here we encounter an ambivalence of his concerning the acquisition of supernatural powers. Classical tantra, whether Hindu or Buddhist, condemns the attempt to acquire *siddhis* as "wastes of time and energy, and as moral temptations."<sup>126</sup> In the late 1970s Ānandamūrti used to gather his *sannyāsis* around him and go around the room asking many individuals, "Do you want the toys or the Maker of the toys?"<sup>127</sup> Here "toys" should be understood as *siddhis*. Each *sannyāsi* was expected to reply that he or she was only interested in the Maker of the toys, as the Entity through whom one could attain self-realization. Ānandamūrti must not have had much confidence in his *sannyāsis*' ability to resist temptation because he told them that he was going to "lock up" their occult powers until such time as they might really need them for some dharmic (proper) purpose.<sup>128</sup>

Ānandamūrti's idea of the proper time to use occult powers was when a certain amount of deviousness might make the difference in defeating egregious immoralists. He cited with approval Kṛṣṇa's use of occult powers to deceive and kill a warrior named Jayadratha in the *Mahābhārata* war.<sup>129</sup> From this example, and his own statements on the matter,<sup>130</sup> we see that Ānandamūrti was not actually opposed to the acquisition of occult powers or their use, just their indiscriminate use. The self-oriented goals of folk tantra feel antinomian because specialized

powers do not appear to be available to everyone and they could possibly be used against those who do not have them. *Tāntrikas'* attempts to acquire powers will be viewed as a threat by just about everyone, even if it is claimed that such powers are only meant to be employed in social service work. The endeavor to acquire powers supports Sanford's observation, cited earlier, that antinomian themes are an integral aspect of tantric traditions.

Sanford describes how the use of human and animal skulls in magico-religious practices is a global phenomenon.<sup>131</sup> The human skull in particular has a deep impact on us by helping us to recall that our embodied state is transient. Zen master Ikkyū Sōjun (1394–1481) employed the human skull in an outrageous and delightful way to prod the people of the city of Sakai along the spiritual path towards *satori*.<sup>132</sup> Sanford says that Ikkyū's doctrine of *sokushinjōbutsu*, or "buddhahood in this very body," was inherited from Shingon, "an almost purely Indian form of tantrism."<sup>133</sup>

The Tachikawa-ryū was a movement within Shingon that was most active during the twelfth through sixteenth centuries.<sup>134</sup> Shinjō's *Juhō Yōjinshū*, written around 1270, describes the fascinating Tachikawa Skull Ritual.<sup>135</sup> Sanford reveals that the Skull Ritual was a rite whose aim it was to reanimate quiescent spirits associated with human skull bone.<sup>136</sup> Seven *p'o* souls in the skull were to be awakened or reintroduced into it by the repeated application of combined male and female sexual fluids.<sup>137</sup> Through this particular folk rite "wealth, social position, knowledge, and magical powers (*siddhi*)" were said to be obtained.<sup>138</sup> The *p'o* souls were *yin*, or feminine, in quality, and female spirits called *dākinī* were also associated with the rite.<sup>139</sup> The *p'o* souls or *dākinī* were responsible for helping the practitioner gain power.<sup>140</sup>

The Śākta *tāntrikas* of West Bengal use the skull as an image of death and transformation in a way similar to master Ikkyū. Śākta tantra folk ritualists also consider the skull to be a direct link to spirits through whom they can gain power.<sup>141</sup> A visitor to an Ānanda Mārga *avadhūta* the day after his Night Sādhana observed that the monk was still wearing the remnants of a red *sindūra* (vermilion) *tilakaṃ* (auspicious marking) between his eyebrows. So was the human skull sitting on the floor. The visitor told me that the *sindūra* on the skull immediately reminded him of blood,<sup>142</sup> more so than seeing it on the monk's forehead. He was somewhat taken aback because he claimed that the use of external worship materials is rare in Ānanda Mārga. Especially the renunciants of

the organization restrict themselves to yogic techniques that are purely internal. The use of external worship materials is considered permissible, but not indispensable, and there is a doctrinal tendency to be wary of activities that approach the category of image and idol worship.

Whether the application of vermilion (as a symbolic form of sanitized menstrual blood) was meant to enliven the skull and assist in passing certain powers from the skull to the monk remains open to question. This speculation would combine sympathetic magic and the tantric folk rationale of the reanimation of spirits that is found in the Tachikawa Skull Ritual. As Ānandamūrti was not totally opposed to the development and use of occult powers, but was more concerned with their potential for abuse, we cannot rule out that his *kāpālikas'* ritual use of a skull in their *sādhana* might be connected to the acquisition of occult powers.

There is one aspect of the use of Bhairavī Cakra as a *yantra*/mandala in *kāpālika sādhana* that has not been discussed. It appears that there are similarities between the formation of a Bhairavī Cakra hexagram and protective acts of *kīlana*, which “nail off” and sacralize a space. Some Ānanda Mārgiis are reported to utilize *kīlana* as a *raṁṣā* (protection) during other types of spiritual practices. Because burial grounds may be dangerous places to visit at night, perhaps the formation of such a *yantra*/mandala acts as a type of protection. The protective aspect would be enhanced if mantra were used in a traditional way as an integral part of the *cakra*'s construction. The manuscript that mentions Bhairavī Cakra does not state which material is used in its formation, nor does it describe the procedure for its assembly. Therefore it cannot be said with any certainty if compasses and straight edges are employed. But the facts are that this is a *sādhana* performed at night around the time of the new moon, when there is little light. It makes the use of such implements appear to be counter-intuitive. These practices must emphasize ideation and intention rather than mathematical precision. Lastly, if Bhairavī Cakra did not also have a protective aspect for *kāpālikas*, it seems the ritual would have remained exclusively on the mental level.

#### CONCLUSION: TWO VERY DIFFERENT TANTRIC SĀDHANAS WITH THE SAME NAME

There are yogis within Baba Hari Dass's Vairāgī Vaiṣṇava lineage and among Ānanda Mārga's *kāpālikas* who practice Bhairavī Cakra *sādhana*. But the practitioners from within each group are referring to two very

different rituals. The similarities are that both rituals are yogic forms of tantra, which employ mandala or *yantra* and whose philosophical underpinning is a subtle, nonsexual interpretation of the *pañcha makāras*.<sup>143</sup> The differences, however, are more numerous. Bhairavī Cakra for the Vairāgīs is a collective rite while for Ānanda Mārga's *kāpālikas* it is a solitary one.

It is possible to make a general assertion that both rituals are an invocation of Devī. This would be reasonable despite the fact that Ānanda Mārga is a Śaivite tantric sect and not all the Vairāgī Vaiṣṇavas are Śāktas. Because Ānanda Mārga's doctrines are monistic and similar in some ways to Kashmir Śaivism, it would be more accurate to call their *kāpālikas'* Bhairavī Cakra an invocation of energy as a philosophical concept. This is how Ānandamūrti characterizes both his descriptions of the various *śaktis* in *Śāktācāra*<sup>144</sup> and of *prakṛti* in his own Śaivite tantra.<sup>145</sup> Those members who practice *kāpālika* ritual involving a human skull appear to be utilizing folk tantra. Whether this is a degeneration of second-century Madhyamika Buddhist belief or represents the true roots of *kāpālika* practice awaits further research.

The Vairāgīs consider their philosophy to be monistic. Nevertheless, they allow room in it for the manifestation of Devī in many forms and appear to consider these as semi-distinct entities, somewhat like contemporary Hinduism. So while their Bhairavī Cakra ceremony is tantric, the majority of their practices are more accurately characterized simply as yogic.<sup>146</sup> The invocational objectives of the two *cakras* are similar, but the means they employ to achieve success in them are distinct.

To begin with, the Vairāgī's Bhairavī Cakra is on the one hand a physical circle of participants as well as the *yantra* used at any particular performance of the ceremony. That of the Mārgiis is the mandala/*yantra* alone. The *rajomaṇḍala* type of *yantra*, constructed by Vairāgīs from colored sand, has an artistic appeal for the participants as well as being thought of as a spiritually efficacious means of inviting Devī to preside over their rite. The mandala/*yantra* formed by the Mārgiis is strictly utilitarian. Its aspect or shape could be highly variable, so it must be ideation or correct intention that they are emphasizing.

My judgment is that the Mārgiis' mandala/*yantra* is predominantly a device whose elevating vibrational capacity is exploited in a nonvisual fashion. A single practitioner models it and views it under reduced light conditions, after which it acts as his or her "seat" for the duration of the ritual. Their mandala/*yantra* may additionally serve as a protective



*rakṣa* by demarcating a sacred space. This type of ritual practice reveals a tendency towards yogic symbolization and bodily interiorization of ideology among the Mārgiis as well as an apparent *aparigraha* (thriftiness or restraint) with regard to the use of materials.

The Vairāgī's selection of *yantra* involves astrological calculations and their Bhairavī Cakra ceremony includes a worship of the nine planets (*navagraha*). Ānanda Mārgiis do not accept a deification of the planets. They do not use astrological calculations for Bhairavī Cakra, nor any other ritual of theirs, because Ānandamūrti considered the procedures impractical.<sup>147</sup> His orientation was strictly microcosmic in that he did not think *anything* superfluous to the human body-mind complex was necessary for carrying on spiritual practices.

The *cakra* at Mount Madonna is the sum total of the ritual actions of their circle of participants: the effect of their collective *prāṇāyāma*, chanting of mantras, performance of *mudrās*, and meditations. They are consecrating a rather large physical area, when on some occasions there are hundreds of participants. The Vairāgī Vaiṣṇavas utilize the ritual circle shape and performance, in addition to their *yantras*, to create Bhairavī's Cakra and invocation. For the Ānanda Mārga *kāpālikas*, the *cakra* is a physical mandala that represents the play of universal forces within the macrocosm and microcosm. They believe its physical use, as described, can improve a *sādhaka*'s psycho-spiritual state by calibrating extroverted material and social tendencies with introverted spiritual inclinations. Simultaneously, they consider the complete manifested universe to be Bhairavī Cakra.

## NOTES

1. Georg Feuerstein, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga* (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 204 says the text dates to the eleventh century. Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 142 points out that many people suspect it of being composed in the late eighteenth century.
2. Ānandamūrti said the ten *mahāvidyās* originated about two thousand years ago. Shrii Shrii A'nandamu'rti, *Discourses on Tantra*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: A'nanda Ma'rga Publications, 1993), 230. The system of Sanskrit diacritics that Ānanda Mārga uses in its publications is one of Ānandamūrti's inventions. He chose a simplified way of writing Roman Sanskrit that uses the “'” or “´” almost exclusively. However, even the application of this system was not uniform from one of his books to another and sometimes was not uniform even within a single book. Therefore I have replicated the diacritical marks that were used on a book-to-book basis within quotes of his and for footnote material that pertains to his books (for example, “A'nandamu'rti” versus the academic standard of “Ānandamūrti”).
3. Alain Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, Bollingen Series LXXIII (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 268 and David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 172.
4. Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, 172.
5. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, 281; Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, 170–171 and Madhu Khanna, *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1979), 58.
6. Johari lists the impediments as “sickness, incompetence, doubt, delusion, sloth, nonabstention, erroneous conception, nonattainment of any yogic state, and the inability to stay in a yogic state.” Harish Johari, *Tools for Tantra* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1986), 105.
7. Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna, *The Tantric Way: Art • Science • Ritual* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 190–191.
8. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, 282 and Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, 167.
9. Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, 167.
10. *Ibid.*, 169. For another portrayal of Bhairavī as the cosmic controller see the *Kulacūḍāmaṇi Nigama* referred to by Rita DasGupta Sherma, “Sacred Immanence: Reflections of Ecofeminism in Hindu Tantra,” in *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India*, ed. Lance Nelson (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), 108–109.

11. There are a number of similarities between the philosophies of Kashmir Śaivism and Ānanda Mārga. See Helen Crovetto, "The Changing Face of Śaivite Tantrism" (BA thesis, University of South Florida, 1999), 73–74.
12. Rāmprasād Sen, *Grace and Mercy in Her Wild Hair: Selected Poems to the Mother Goddess*, trans. Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely (Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press, 1999), 55.
13. D. C. Sircar, *The Śākta Pīṭhas*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), 40.
14. June McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 117. Though *cakra pūjā* literally means "circle worship" the phrase has become commonly associated with sexual rituals.
15. Shrii Shrii Ānandamūrti, *Discourses on Tantra*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Ananda Marga Publications, 1994), 168, 170.
16. Gudrun Bühnemann, "Maṇḍala, Yantra and Cakra: Some Observations," in *Maṇḍalas and Yantras in the Hindu Traditions*, ed. Johannes Bronkhorst, Brill's Indological Library, vol. 18 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 50.
17. Laura Kaufman, "Nature, Courtly Imagery, and Sacred Meaning in the *Ippen Hijiri-e*," in *Flowing Traces: Buddhism in the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan*, ed. James H. Sanford, William R. LaFleur, and Masatoshi Nagatomi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 65.
18. Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, "Chūjōhime: The Weaving of Her Legend," in *Flowing Traces: Buddhism in the Literary and Visual Arts of Japan*, ed. James H. Sanford, William R. LaFleur, and Masatoshi Nagatomi (see note 17), 182.
19. Denise Patry Leidy and Robert A. F. Thurman, *Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 17.
20. Sir John Woodroffe, *Śakti and Śākta: Essays and Addresses*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1987), 349–350. See also the *Yoginī Tantra* in Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, 351.
21. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, 350 and Khanna, *Yantra*, 12.
22. Douglas Renfrew Brooks, "The Ocean of the Heart: Selections from the *Kulārṇava Tantra*," in *Tantra in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 356.
23. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, 351 and Khanna, *Yantra*, 19.
24. The swastika is an ancient, auspicious Hindu symbol said to bestow good luck.
25. Baba Hari Dass, Talks with Babaji, "Tantra," <http://www.mountmadonna.org/yoga/talks/twb9510.html>.
26. Ibid.

27. Arthur Avalon (John Woodroffe), *The Great Liberation: Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1963), 227–233. Ānandamūrti told his followers that they practice Kaola (Kula) *sādhana*. “You are all Kaola and I am Mahākaola,” he said. He defined a Kaola *sādhaka* as one who practices the raising of *kulakuṇḍalinī* (coiled serpentine spiritual energy in the body) and a Mahākaola as a guru who can raise the *kuṇḍalinī* of others. See Ānandamūrti, *Discourses on Tantra* 2:41, 2:53. On the division of the “Kaula” or “Kaola” and “Tāntrika” sects see David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī: “Tantric Sex” in Its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 18.
28. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, 282 and Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, 167. See an art image of Bhairavī in association with a rosy-colored dawn at <http://www.artoflegendindia.com/browse/P/10/>.
29. Avalon (Woodroffe), *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*, 230 and Woodroffe, *Śakti and Śākta*, 389–390.
30. Woodroffe, *Śakti and Śākta*, 401.
31. Ibid., 389 and 393–395.
32. Ibid., 412. The same view is expressed in Shrii Shrii Ānandamūrti, *Ānanda Vacanāmrtam Part V* (Calcutta: Ānanda Mārga Pracāraka Saṁgha, 1987), 3–4.
33. Woodroffe, *Śakti and Śākta*, 401.
34. Urban, *Tantra*, 136.
35. Avalon (Woodroffe), *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*, 227 and 232.
36. Baba Hari Dass, personal communication, May 18, 2001.
37. Rebecca J. Manring, “An Unlikely Donor: A Hindu Response,” in *Ethics and World Religions: Cross-Cultural Case Studies*, ed. Regina Wentzel Wolfe and Christine E. Gudorf (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 346.
38. Ibid., 346.
39. Ibid.
40. Sarasvati Buhrman (a disciple of Baba Hari Dass), interview by author, October 7, 2000, Boulder, Colorado, longhand notes. The Vairāgī Vaiṣṇavas principal concern seems to be the attainment of self-realization rather than the establishment of a social vehicle. They would presumably refresh their membership over the years with the entry of new spiritual seekers from outside the original founding members.
41. Manring, “An Unlikely Donor: A Hindu Response,” 346.
42. Ibid.
43. Jeanne Openshaw, *Seeking Bāuls of Bengal* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press/Foundation Books, 2004), 22.

44. R. M. Sarkar, *Bauls of Bengal: In the Quest of Man of the Heart* (New Delhi: Gian Publishing, 1990), 73–74.
45. Buhrman, interview by author, October 7, 2000.
46. Janardan Dass (disciple of Baba Hari Dass), personal communication, November 12, 2000.
47. “Rituals of Tantra” advertisement, *Yoga Journal Magazine*, September/October 1998, p. 62.
48. Janardan Dass, personal communication, November 12, 2000.
49. Urban, *Tantra*, 227–229 and 252.
50. Ibid., 203–205 and 215.
51. Mookerjee and Khanna, *The Tantric Way*, 186.
52. Bühnemann, “Maṇḍala, Yantra and Cakra: Some Observations,” 53, fig. 1.
53. Baba Hari Dass, “Tantra,” <http://www.mountmadonna.org/yoga/talks/twb9510.html>.
54. Johari, *Tools for Tantra*, 59.
55. Bühnemann, “Maṇḍala, Yantra and Cakra: Some Observations,” 19.
56. Baba Hari Dass, “Tantra,” [www.mountmadonna.org/yoga/talks/twb9510.html](http://www.mountmadonna.org/yoga/talks/twb9510.html). On impurity (*malam*) as the root of ignorance see White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 80–81.
57. André Padoux, “Maṇḍalas in Abhinavagupta’s Tantrāloka,” in *Maṇḍalas and Yantras in the Hindu Traditions*, ed. Johannes Bronkhorst (see note 16), 18:231.
58. Baba Hari Dass, *Ashtanga Yoga Primer* (Santa Cruz, CA: Sri Rama Publishing, 1981), 61.
59. Ibid., 64.
60. André Padoux, “The Śrīcakra According to the First Chapter of the Yoginīhṛdaya,” in *Maṇḍalas and Yantras in the Hindu Traditions*, ed. Johannes Bronkhorst (see note 16), 18:246–247.
61. Brooks, “The Ocean of the Heart,” 353–355.
62. Padoux, “Maṇḍalas in Abhinavagupta’s Tantrāloka,” 234–235.
63. Ibid., 231n11, 232.
64. James H. Sanford, “Literary Aspects of Japan’s Dual-Gaṇeśa Cult,” in *Ganesh: Studies of an Asian God*, ed. Robert L. Brown (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 294.
65. The argument presented by some tantric groups is that all desires are disguised longings for contact with the divine. My understanding is that the

activation of sexual, sensual, or nonsexual/sensual desire strengthens willpower (*iccha śakti*). This contributes to a one-pointedness of mind that can be utilized in spiritual pursuits. Therefore, whether the tantric groups in question are practitioners of sexual ritual or not, they can all reasonably be described as manipulators of energy, or *śakti*.

66. Baba Hari Dass, personal communication, May 18, 2001.

67. The sexual rites of the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās are described in Edward C. Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava-sahajiyā Cult of Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

68. Buhrman, interview by author, October 7, 2000.

69. McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls*, 11.

70. Ānandamūrti, *Discourses on Tantra*, 2:46–47.

71. *Ibid.*, 2:47.

72. *Ibid.*, 2:28.

73. White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 13.

74. *Ibid.*, 16. Some scholars hold the opposite view. See T. N. Mishra, *The Impact of Tantra on Religion and Art*, Tantra in Contemporary Researches, vol. 1 (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld Ltd., 1997), 39.

75. See Urban, *Tantra*, 204–205, 227–228 for a discussion of sexually-oriented forms of Western tantra. See Helen Croveto, “Embodied Knowledge and Divinity: The Hohm Community as Western-style Bāuls,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 10, no. 1 (August 2006): 69–95 for a description of a contemporary Western tantric group with some traditional Bengali Bāul practices.

76. James H. Sanford, “The Abominable Tachikawa Skull Ritual,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 46, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 2.

77. Ānandamūrti, *Discourses on Tantra*, 2:91, 2:124–125.

78. *Ibid.*, 1:193–194, 1:244.

79. Shrii Shrii Anandamurti, *Ananda Sutram* (Calcutta: A'nanda Ma'rga Praca'raka Sam'gha, 1984), 33 and P. R. Sarkar, *PROUT in a Nutshell*, vol. 6 (Calcutta: A'nanda Ma'rga Praca'raka Sam'gha, 1987), 60. P. R. Sarkar was Ānandamūrti's legal name under which he wrote social philosophy. In vol. 6 of *PROUT in a Nutshell* he said, “Like materialism, spirituality based on non-violence will be of no benefit to humanity. The words of non-violence may sound noble, and quite appealing, but on the solid ground of reality have no value whatsoever.”

80. Anandamurti, *Ananda Sutram*, 30.

81. *Ibid.*

82. Ibid., 2–3.
83. Ibid., 1.
84. A'nandamu'rṭi, *Discourses on Tantra*, 1:240.
85. Ibid., 1:240–241.
86. Ibid., 241.
87. Elizabeth U. Harding, *Kali: The Black Goddess of Dakshineswar* (York Beach, ME: Nicholas-Hays, Inc., 1993), xxx; Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, 282 and Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, 167, referring to works such as the *Tripurā-bhairavī-tantra*, the *Śāradā-tilaka-tantra*, and the *Bṛhat Tantrasāra*. Johari associates Bhairavī with the active energy (Kriya Śakti) aspect of *kuṇḍalinī*. Johari, *Tools for Tantra*, 105.
88. Śrī Śrī Ānandamūrti, unpublished longhand manuscript based on his discourses, 1978, 3.
89. Būhnmann, “Maṇḍala, Yantra and Cakra: Some Observations,” 28n39.
90. Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism*, 350–351.
91. Ānandamūrti, unpublished manuscript, 4.
92. Ibid.
93. Ānandamūrti spoke of the human mind as composed of varying proportions of *mahat* (I), *aham* (I do), and *citta* (I have done). A summary of Ānanda Mārga cosmology and eschatology relative to the human mind is available in Anandamurti, *Ananda Sūtram*, 10–12. An expanded version is contained in Shrii Shrii Ānandamūrti, *Ānanda Mārga—Philosophy in a Nutshell*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Ānanda Mārga Pracāraka Saṁgha, 1988), 22–51. On the fact that the human body itself is a significant, distinguishing factor when comparing humans to other embodied organic beings see also M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (London: Routledge and Paul Kegan, 1962) cited in Michael Jackson, *Paths Toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 119.
94. Padoux, “The Śrīcakra According to the First Chapter of the Yoginīhṛdaya,” 238 and Padoux, “Maṇḍalas in Abhinavagupta’s Tantrāloka,” 233.
95. *Śākta Darśan* (15, 1, 30) cited in Khanna, *Yantra*, 128.
96. Ānandamūrti, unpublished manuscript, 5.
97. For the purpose of initiation, most Ānanda Mārga *sannyāsis* use an image of the *pratīka* printed with ink on paper.
98. Khanna, *Yantra*, 91, plate 53.
99. James H. Sanford, “Wind, Waters, Stupas, Mandalas: Fetal Buddhahood in Shingon,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24, nos. 1–2 (Spring 1997): 9–10.



100. Ānandamūrti, unpublished manuscript, 5–6 and Anandamurti, *Ananda Sutram*, 30.
101. Ānandamūrti, unpublished manuscript, 6.
102. Ibid.
103. A'nandamu'rti, *Discourses on Tantra*, 1:4.
104. Bühnemann, “Maṇḍala, Yantra and Cakra: Some Observations,” 31–32.
105. Ibid., 33.
106. A'nandamu'rti, *Discourses on Tantra*, 1:7.
107. Ānanda Mārga informant, personal communication, June 11, 1984. McDaniel says that one of the “most important times for worship of the goddesses in West Bengal” is the night of *amāvāsyā*. McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls*, 92.
108. Ānanda Mārga informant, personal communication, June 11, 1984.
109. See David N. Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas: Two Lost Śaivite Sects*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991).
110. Ānandamūrti, *Discourses on Tantra*, 2:62. Another tantric practice utilizes a garland of human skulls (*kaunkālamāla*). See Ibid., 2:91.
111. Ānandamūrti, *Ānanda Vacanāmrtam*, 5:99.
112. A'nandamu'rti, *Discourses on Tantra*, 1:72.
113. He also stated that the significance of the term *kāpālika* became “distorted” after its original use. A'nandamu'rti, *Discourses on Tantra*, 1:107.
114. For an overview of Madhyamika philosophy see Hsueh-Li Cheng, “The Roots of Zen Buddhism,” [http://www.buddhistinformation.com/roots\\_of\\_zen\\_buddhism.htm](http://www.buddhistinformation.com/roots_of_zen_buddhism.htm).
115. Ibid.
116. A'nandamu'rti, *Discourses on Tantra*, 1:163.
117. McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls*, 87.
118. Ibid., 89, 92.
119. Woodroffe, *Mahānirvāna Tantra*, 209n1.
120. A'nandamu'rti, *Discourses on Tantra*, 1:9.
121. Ibid., 2:257–258.
122. The *pāśas* play a central role in the Tamil school of Śaiva-Siddhānta. See Hélène Brunner, “Jñāna and Kriyā: Relation between Theory and Practice in the Śaivāgamas,” in *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism: Studies in Honor of André Padoux*, ed. Teun Goudriaan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992),

11–13 and Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas on Vibration: The Spandakārikā with Four Commentaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 5.

123. Ānandamūrti, *Discourses on Tantra*, 2:63, editorial footnote (no number).

124. *Ibid.*, 2:27.

125. *Ibid.* Note that the diacritical system in this block quote follows the usage in the source.

126. McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls*, 86.

127. Ānanda Mārga informant, personal communication, June 11, 1984.

128. *Ibid.*.

129. P. R. Sarkar, *Discourses on Mahabharata*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: Ānanda Mārga Pracāraka Saṁgha, 1991), 47. According to C. Rajagopalachari's version of the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa caused darkness before the sun had set so that Jayadratha would be mistaken about the time of day and come out of hiding. See C. Rajagopalachari, *Mahabharata* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1962), 279.

130. See also P. R. Sarkar's, *Problems of the Day*, 4th ed. (Calcutta: Ananda Marga Publications, 1993), 35.

131. Sanford, "The Abominable Tachikawa Skull Ritual," 10–11.

132. The story is that Zen Master Ikkyū went knocking on people's doors on New Year's Day, waving a skull on a stick at them and wishing them long life. The Japanese public associates Master Ikkyū with skulls and skeletons. One of his best prose works is entitled *Gaikotsu* (Skeletons). See James H. Sanford, *Zen-Man Ikkyū*, Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, Studies in World Religions Number 2, ed. Jane I. Smith (Chico, CA: Scholar's Press, 1981), chap. 5 and pp. 40, 272–276.

133. Shingon was transmitted to Japan from China by its founder Kūkai (744–835) in the early 800s. Sanford, *Zen-Man Ikkyū*, 44.

134. Sanford, "The Abominable Tachikawa Skull Ritual," 2–4.

135. *Ibid.*, 4.

136. *Ibid.*, 10, 15.

137. *Ibid.*, 10, 15.

138. *Ibid.*, 5.

139. *Ibid.*, 15–16.

140. *Ibid.*, 15.

141. McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls*, 88.

142. On the use of reddish-brown cinnabar as an enlivening agent in the Tachikawa Skull Ritual, see Sanford, "The Abominable Tachikawa Skull Ritual," 12.

143. Baba Hari Dass's Vairāgī Vaiṣṇavas divide their interpretation of the *pañcha makāras* into four categories. At the subtlest level *madya* is drinking the intoxicating knowledge of God through the secretions of the higher glands. *Māṃsa* is control of speech. *Matsya* is controlling *prāṇā* through *prāṇāyāma*. *Mudrā* signifies ritual leading to the dissolution of the mind at *sahasrāra cakra*. *Maithuna* is achieved by raising *kuṇḍalinī* to effect the union of Śiva and Śakti. Ānanda Mārgiis see the *pañcha makāras* as having either crude or a number of subtle interpretations. Their subtle interpretation for the first three items is identical with that of the Vairāgī Vaiṣṇavas. *Mudrā* is taken to mean a mental position or determination to keep company with spiritual persons. Their interpretations of *maithuna* are the same. See Sarasvati Buhman, "Tantra Study Guide Notes" (unpublished work), 108 and Ānandamūrti, *Discourses on Tantra*, 2:48–51.

144. *Ibid.*, 1:240–241.

145. Anandamurti, *Ananda Sutram*, 1–3.

146. Ānandamūrti distinguished between the interpretation of yoga offered by Patañjali and that of tantra. He said, "According to Patañjali yoga is the suspension of mental propensities," while in tantra yoga signifies the union of supreme consciousness and unit or individual consciousness. See Ānandamūrti, *Discourses on Tantra*, 2:104. An expansion of this topic is available in 2:194–213.

147. Ānanda Mārga informant, personal communication, June 11, 1984.

## The Dao of the West: The Orientalist Critique and Western Interpretations of Daoism<sup>1</sup>

Julia M. Hardy

Independent Scholar

JIM SANFORD: TEACHING WITHOUT TEACHING

I TOOK MY FIRST GRADUATE course in religious studies with Jim Sanford before I had even enrolled in the graduate program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. That first course was on mysticism, memorable because I found myself performing alchemical fugues by Michael Maier<sup>2</sup> with another student and studying the symbolism on the U.S. dollar bill. At the time I was trying to figure out what hippies did once they were over thirty, and I had found myself working part-time in the department as an administrative assistant. Jim's office was across the hall from mine. It didn't take long to become intrigued by his office door, his books, and him. My background in "Eastern religions" then consisted of four years of daily Zen meditation under a student of Eido Roshi of the Zen Studies Center and one *sesshin* at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, as well as several years of *taiji quan* practice with a local Chinese teacher. The latter had introduced me to the *Daode jing* (John C. H. Wu translation)<sup>3</sup> and told me that the principles in that book were incorporated into *taiji*. None of these teachers were in the habit of talking much, being oriented more towards learning by doing than books and lectures, and that suited me. I fancied myself something of a mystic. I was probably quite mockable, from an academic's perspective, but the only time I can remember Jim ever laughing at me was when I naively declared that I did not need to learn any more foreign languages (I knew French) because anything I wanted to read was available in English translation.

Jim agreed to do a reading course with me in the second year of my master's program, and we read widely: from Jung to William James, Hesse to Kerouac, Waley to Strickmann, and much more. He steered me towards books that helped me deconstruct my New Age mysticism without taking the joy out of it, and guided me towards a more sophisticated discourse on subjects that interested me. Out of that reading course

evolved my master's thesis, which was an analysis and critique of the counterculture's inner spiritual journeys.<sup>4</sup>

I began a PhD program at neighboring Duke University, and by then I had realized that I really did need to learn some Chinese to study Chinese religion, so I started with beginning Chinese. The following year, while continuing with intermediate Chinese, I took my second formal class with Jim: his two-semester Chinese Religious and Philosophical Texts in classical Chinese. In that class I discovered the complexity of reading these texts in the original language and the new levels of understanding such a process can bring. Jim also served as an outside reader on my Duke dissertation committee, and parsed the document with care. As the MA thesis had been, the dissertation was an analysis and critique of New Age interpretations of Eastern religions, but this time the thesis, "Archaic Utopias in the Modern Imagination," focused specifically on Western interpretations of Daoism.<sup>5</sup>

It was while I was writing the dissertation that I really began to learn—not in a classroom but through conversations, book recommendations, conferences, and, most especially, weekly gatherings at a local bar with Jim, translator and scholar J. P. (Sandy) Seaton, and an ever-changing group of others from a variety of disciplines with a common interest in Asia. I did not appreciate how much I had learned in this way until my first teaching job, immediately following the dissertation defense, when I proposed a course on religion in Chinese poetry. Once the syllabus was completed, I realized that the reading list and approach I had chosen had evolved almost entirely from these largely informal but genuinely educational experiences. In the many years since then I have continued to learn in this way, and as a teacher I have especially encouraged students who are inquisitive, imaginative and gritty—so I dedicate this essay to Jim Sanford, who encouraged me.

#### IS THERE A DAO OF THE WEST?

During the discussion following a 2001 AAR panel on J. J. Clarke's prize-winning book, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought*,<sup>6</sup> a Sinologist in the audience suggested, somewhat in jest, that the term *Daoism* be reserved for "real" Chinese Daoism, while the Western version be spelled and mispronounced with an initial "T" sound as it sometimes is in the West. The same individual, along with others, protested Clarke's linking of *qigong* and *taiji* specifically to Daoism. These

critics echo the views of other Sinologists who are unhappy that Daoism is misunderstood by so many Westerners. Daoism has become a catchall term for Chinese practices that have found their way to the West, such as *fengshui*, *taiji*, and *qigong*. Concepts such as *yin* and *yang*, *qi*, and *dao* are also frequently taken to be specifically Daoist terms when they are actually part of a vocabulary common to Chinese thought in general.<sup>7</sup>

Some Sinologists, however, have described aspects of Chinese culture—*qigong*, for example—as remnants of Daoist religious practice now secularized. In 1982 Kristofer Schipper, one of the first Westerners to be initiated as a Daoist priest, wrote:

On the surface, there appears to be little left of Taoism. . . . Taoism never did have any strong organization. However, it is present in today's China in manifold and sometimes quite unexpected ways. One of the major forms of its revival is to be found in the present widespread enthusiasm for the health and longevity practices that go under the name of *ch'i-kung* (spelled *qigong* in modern Chinese transcription), exercises of the vital breath of energy. The *ch'i-kung* masters may well officially minimize any relation between their art and Taoism; however, the numerous publications—books as well as periodicals—published on the subject of *ch'i-kung* in China devote a great amount of space to Taoism, its history, and its sacred books. The same holds true for the practice of Chinese medicine and for Chinese arts and sciences in general: one only has to scratch the surface in order to find living Taoism. Thus, Taoism remains present, today as in former times, in the daily life of the people. . . .<sup>8</sup>

The first Western Sinologist to advocate limiting the use of the term *Daoism* to historical Chinese religious institutions such as *Shangqing*, *Quanzhen*, or *Lingbao* was Michel Strickmann, who said, nearly thirty years ago, “I should like to restrict the term [Daoist] to the Way of the Celestial Masters and the organizations that grew out of it.”<sup>9</sup> The view that the “philosophical Daoism” of twentieth-century scholars such as Needham, Granet, Creel, and Welch<sup>10</sup> is largely a Western construct is now accepted by most Sinologists.<sup>11</sup> Russell Kirkland, who has strongly condemned popularized Western understandings of Daoism, states, “No aspect of the fantasy Taoism created by immature, self-centered Western minds has any basis in the facts of Taoism in China.”<sup>12</sup> “Generations of Westerners” have “found the opening they needed to indulge their own egos and to make money in the commercial book market, making money by draping their own thoughts around the corpse of a text that

they cannot read.”<sup>13</sup> *The Tao of Pooh* is “fatuous fluff”; Ursula Le Guin’s translation of the *Daodejing* is “narcissistic.”<sup>14</sup>

While I agree that some Western interpretations of Daoism are poor representations of Chinese thought, I part ways with Kirkland and others in that I think very little of what some call “Pooh Bear” Daoism (after the very popular *The Tao of Pooh*<sup>15</sup>) is imperialistic, market-driven, or Orientalist claptrap. It is not damaging to China, nor is it part of a conspiracy to dominate China politically or economically. “Pooh Bear” Daoism is based on the work of scholars like Needham and his contemporaries who used their understanding of what Daoism is to create a utopian vision that countered colonialist aggression and the attitudes that fueled it, and on the ideas of centuries of predecessors who were inspired by Chinese models to effect changes in Western thought.<sup>16</sup> Like Clarke, I believe that “Daoism has played a facilitative role in prompting a rethinking of Western assumptions and a critical analysis of the formation and value of Western thought,”<sup>17</sup> and that it can continue to do so in the future.

#### DAOISM AS ANTIDOTE TO “THE WEST”

Rather than to claim Western interpreters are colonizing Chinese thought via their appropriations of Daoism, it could be argued that it is Chinese thought that is colonizing the West. Following World War II, some who opposed the triumphalist claims of Western superiority reached out to Daoism as an alternative. While Clarke presents in some detail the ways in which these Western interpretations were shaped by Western cultural needs and motivations, his vision of Daoism is also clearly shaped by those same needs and motivations. He makes no secret of this, saying, “I have long been attracted by its attitude of oneness between the human and natural worlds, and its affirmation of life, good health and vitality, and have been drawn to its sense of stillness and silence, its sense of spontaneous simplicity and its gentle anarchism.”<sup>18</sup> Statements like this leave him vulnerable to accusations of Orientalism, but Clarke counters that the critique

does not do justice to the role that orientalism has sometimes played, and plays with increasing effectiveness, as an agent of subversion and transformation within the West itself, as a method used by Western thinkers to reconstruct their own world rather than to buttress the West’s essential supremacy. Nor does it take adequate account of the



way in which in a post-colonial epoch, the balance of power and cultural influence between East and West has shifted significantly.<sup>19</sup>

As I have argued elsewhere, scholarly criticism of the inaccuracies of Western interpretations of Daoism has overshadowed the fact that they served “to undermine the notion of Western superiority by undermining the structures of thought and systems of values which have supported it, to offer in its stead respect and appreciation for the non-West, and to challenge the West to reform itself on the basis of non-Western models.”<sup>20</sup> It is “the West” with a capital W that these interpretations of Daoism opposed. Daoism was regarded by many as a “therapeutic alternative to Western thought,” a “Chinese antidote to Western problems.”<sup>21</sup>

Not only Western scholars but also Chinese scholars writing in English participated in the development of these interpretations of Daoism in the West. In *The Tao of the West* Clarke speaks positively of an earlier generation of Chinese scholars: men like Fung Yu-lan, Chan Wing-tsit, and Lin Yu-tang, whose interpretations of Chinese religion have been regarded by some Sinologists as so corrupted by Western influence as to be without merit. Lin was one of the first to suggest an Oriental antidote for Western problems. In 1942, he wrote:

If I were asked what antidote could be found in Oriental literature and philosophy to cure this contentious modern world of its inveterate belief in force and struggle for power, I would name this book. . . . [Laozi] has the knack of making Hitler and the other dreamers of world mastery appear foolish and ridiculous. . . . And furthermore, if there is one book advising against the multifarious activities and futile busy-ness of the modern man, I would again say it is Laotse's Book of Tao.<sup>22</sup>

Lin was a resident of the United States for thirty years, though he spent the last decade of his life in Hong Kong. A romantic, he expressed deep admiration for Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau. He blamed scientific materialism and the absence of a “philosophy of the rhythm of life”<sup>23</sup> for the problems of modernity, and he recommended the *Daode jing* as a source for an alternative philosophy.

Lin, Fung, Chan, and others have helped to shape Western ideas about Daoism. It is common for today's Sinologists to dismiss them as “popularizers,” but these were bi-cultural scholars. Chan (1901–1994) earned a PhD from Harvard and taught philosophy at Dartmouth and Columbia; Fung (1895–1990) returned to China after receiving his

doctorate in philosophy from Columbia University; and Lin (1895–1976) also studied at Harvard and taught at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Hawaii. The value of their contributions has been diminished by the Orientalist critique; without exempting them from criticism, it is my opinion that their role in shaping twentieth-century philosophy has been too long belittled or ignored.

#### CONCERNING ACCUSATIONS OF ORIENTALISM

Arguing that popularized Western interpretations of Daoism are mere inventions, created in service of Western needs and bearing no resemblance to “real” Daoism, Kirkland has said:

Taoism is a religion of China, and it is studied by learning classical Chinese, by reading the great works of Taoism (which remain unknown to all but a handful of scholarly specialists), and by learning how to practice Taoism from *real Taoists*—from the living men and women of China who have maintained the ideas of Taoist tradition, and might be persuaded to teach a sincere Westerner what it truly means to live a Taoist life.<sup>24</sup>

He argues that “we do terrible violence [to Daoism] if we impose upon it the intellectual and spiritual needs of Americans today.”<sup>25</sup> This, he says, is a perversion of Daoist teachings, and helps to perpetuate mistaken notions of what Daoism is and is not: “The purpose of studying other cultures is *not* to use them to solve our own problems.”<sup>26</sup> To do so is “intellectual colonialism” or “spiritual colonialism”; it “ignores the true realities of the culture being explained, and imposes an interpretive framework that suits the sensibilities of the conquering interpreter.”<sup>27</sup>

This harsh tone is probably a reaction to earlier negative comparisons of Daoist “religion” to Daoist “philosophy.” One could fill a library with centuries of books containing derisive and belittling statements about Chinese religions, particularly “religious Daoism” or “popular religions,” contrasted unfavorably with the more “rational” teachings of Confucianism or with “philosophical Daoism.” For example, in the late nineteenth century James Legge wrote, “The school of Lao-tzu . . . has made no advance but rather retrograded, and is represented by the still more degenerate Taoism of the present day.”<sup>28</sup> In the early twentieth century, Herbert Giles stated that “Taoism, once a pure philosophy, is now a corrupt religion.”<sup>29</sup> There is still a lot of misinformation about

Daoism in circulation, and the scholarship on so-called “religious Daoism” does not receive the attention it deserves. First-rate books on Chinese Daoist religion are being published by Sinologists every year; it is a field that has been expanding for many years, but is only now beginning to receive recognition.<sup>30</sup> There must be some frustration that a book like Clarke’s *The Tao of the West*, yet another popularization of Daoism by a nonspecialist, received special attention and praise from the academy of scholars of religion, and this may explain some of the reactions at the AAR panel that I mentioned earlier.

Clarke is not unaware of the Orientalist critique. There is a long passage in his book *Oriental Enlightenment* in which he takes note of the “somewhat naive and over-inflated . . . conviction that Eastern traditions could provide a ready-made solution to Western ills.”<sup>31</sup> This awareness does not lead him, however, to relinquish any attempt to interpret Daoism for the Western reader. To the argument that Westerners are exploiting or distorting Daoism, he responds:

Daoism has no single, unitary essence but enjoys a polychromatic richness that has been subject to constant renewal, reinterpretation and proliferation throughout its long history in China. . . . Traditions are not monolithic and timeless phenomena, closed off and lacking in the capacity for critical reflection, but systems in interactive play, multiple and competing narratives that transform and reinvent themselves through dialogue or struggle with rival traditions as well as through their own inner dynamics and tensions.<sup>32</sup>

As he points out, the anti-Orientalists can be as patronizing as the Orientalists:

Might it not be patronizing to look upon Daoism as a fragile object to be handled gingerly like a Ming vase, and to defend it against rough-handling by Westerners? The orientalist critique initiated by Edward Said has certainly succeeded in uncovering the hidden agendas of Western scholarly and intellectual appropriations of Asian cultural traditions, but it has been rightly criticized for tending to represent these traditions as purely passive and inert victims of Western aggression.<sup>33</sup>

The Orientalist critique that shapes Kirkland’s arguments about the misinterpretation of Chinese Daoism was first articulated by Said in his book, *Orientalism*.<sup>34</sup> Simply put, he argued that Western scholars incor-

rectly regarded modern Oriental cultures as debased and inferior versions of ancient, pure, classic forms. This premise was used to justify colonialist expansion: contemporary non-Western cultures needed the help of the West to regain their lost purity through archaeology, linguistics, and other scholarly pursuits. Orientalist rhetoric was often used to justify the political and economic exploitation of some regions, particularly the Middle East. Said's analysis has been an invaluable contribution to modern scholarship, but it has been, on occasion, misapplied.

In *The Tao of the West*, Clarke continues and expands upon some of the arguments against Said that he began in *Oriental Enlightenment*. "I find myself parting company with the more reductive versions of Said's orientalist critique," he states; "the relationship between Daoism and Western thought is too complex to be shoehorned into a simple model of Western power imposed on a passive East, or into the old binarism which constructs the East as wholly alien and other."<sup>35</sup> Said himself has rejected reductive interpretations of his theory: "The one aspect of *Orientalism*'s reception that I most regret and find myself trying hardest now to overcome is the book's alleged anti-Westernism, as it has been misleadingly and rather too sonorously called by commentators both hostile and sympathetic." What *Orientalism* is, Said reaffirmed in a 1995 *Times Literary Supplement* essay excerpted from an introduction to a re-edition of the book, is a critique of the way in which powerful political entities have used knowledge as a means of subjugating and exploiting others. It is particularly applicable to the Middle East, where the Western powers' desire for oil has motivated more than a century of domination and exploitation, but *Orientalism* is not, Said emphasizes, about how "the predatory West and Orientalism have violated Islam and the Arabs." Extremists who seek to trade one form of world domination for another, who claim the West is entirely evil and Islam entirely good, are, he states, as guilty of reductionism and essentialism as Western colonizers have been.<sup>36</sup>

Although Said's focus was Middle Eastern studies, his work can be and has been applied to Chinese studies as well. There is no doubt, for instance, that generations of Western scholars were preoccupied with classical Chinese thought, and judged later developments (such as "religious Daoism") pejoratively as evidence of civilizational decline. It is also true that attempts were made by Western powers to colonize China, with limited success, and that some Western scholars played a role in this process. China today, however, is autonomous, politically stable, and

economically viable. Former Western colonies Hong Kong and Macao have been returned to Chinese control. Taiwan has found that no Western power will risk challenging the PRC to straightforwardly advocate for its right to political independence from the mainland. In recent decades there has been far more conversation about the PRC's own colonizing efforts—in Tibet, for example, now assimilated by China—than about the impact of Western colonialism on China.

I am not arguing that the West has no impact on China today. I am saying that China is not vulnerable to the West in the way that the Middle East has been. If anything, one could argue that America in the twenty-first century is potentially vulnerable to China—politically and economically. I do not think that Hoff and Le Guin can be properly characterized as “conquering” China by virtue of their misinterpretations. There is no political force to subdue China accompanying their work, no condescending attitude about a “corrupt” contemporary form that must be replaced by classic forms. If anything, it seems to me that scholars like Kirkland who demean others—both Western and Chinese—for their misinterpretations of Chinese thought are actually practicing a kind of Orientalism and imperialism of their own by virtue of their claim as non-Chinese to represent “true” Chinese religion and their appeal to its “classic” forms.

#### DIFFERENCE AND DIALOGUE: ZHANG LONGXI

Bi-cultural literary scholar and philosopher Zhang Longxi has made a similar argument regarding his own field of study: that some scholars, in their effort to preserve and protect a true understanding of Chinese forms, have isolated themselves from the larger community and unintentionally revived a form of Orientalism. As Clarke notes, Zhang “points to the dangers of extreme cultural relativism which not only puts into question the very possibility of cross-cultural understanding, but also tends to resurrect the colonialist attitudes that it sought to transcend.”

Zhang, with an MA from Beijing University and a PhD from Harvard, is a compelling theorist of the East–West encounter. His criticisms of literary scholars Stephen Owen and Pauline Yu in the book, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China*, mirror mine of Sinologists—Kirkland and others. In each case a preoccupation

with “classic” forms serves to isolate Chinese studies and to shut down dialogue with those outside of this “cultural ghetto”:

In drawing a rigid line between China and the West . . . they may have closed the portals and pushed [the study of Chinese literature] further into the cultural ghetto. . . . The irony is that they have apparently done this out of their genuine love of Chinese literature, their real interest in literary theory, and their hope to find and grasp the distinctly Chinese nature of classical Chinese poetry.<sup>38</sup>

“Purist” scholars of Chinese Daoism can be compared to Zhang’s literary scholars who “wish to achieve some kind of purity, in thinking as well as in style, that would guarantee the authenticity or originality of something uniquely or distinctly Chinese.” This wish “can only be a romantic and utopian desire that arises from the very condition of its own impossibility.”<sup>39</sup>

I grant that the use of Daoism as an antidote to Western problems tends to place it in the category of theories to which Zhang objects: theories that “reduce China to a fantastic mirror image of Western desires, fantasies, and stereotypical notions.”<sup>40</sup> Zhang also notes, however, that Orientalist criticism has not escaped this “emphasis on East-West difference.”<sup>41</sup> He argues that postmodern, postcolonial criticism has placed too great an emphasis on difference: “It is precisely the notion of a common ground, the idea of a shared frame of reference, which is seriously contested in much of contemporary critical theory.”<sup>42</sup> Zhang is concerned about the fact that “theories of orientalism and postcolonialism . . . can be easily misappropriated to serve the purposes of cultural conservatism, nationalism, and sinocentrism.”<sup>43</sup> The images of China to which he most strenuously objects in *Mighty Opposites* are not the utopias of the “Pooh Bear” Daoists, but the utopian fantasies of those who persist in treating China as a twentieth-century Marxist paradise, even after the events of June, 1989:

It is morally dubious, I believe, for some self-appointed leftist intellectuals in the United States to blame the Chinese for their aspirations for a democratic society simply because these intellectuals would like to hold China in their imagination as the sanctuary of revolutionary and utopian dreams, the idealized Third World country that is everything opposite to the decadent capitalist West.<sup>44</sup>

He likewise has harsh words for Chinese students who use Said and other postmodern theorists to support Chinese nationalism and anti-Americanism, and thus “rise on the tideway of a xenophobic nationalism in covering up every internal problem with a bogus enemy in the West.”<sup>45</sup>

Zhang warns that the Orientalist critique can have the unintended effect of creating “cultural ghettos” within academic studies of China, and of fostering “xenophobic nationalism” among those for whom cultural criticism is far more than an intellectual exercise. To seek common ground instead would better promote communication: “Linguistic purists, like cultural purists, always emphasize the uniqueness of a language and its untranslatability into any other, but communication is and has always been made possible by negotiating a common ground between the foreign and the familiar, a ground on which we find not the identical, but the equivalent, which nevertheless makes the expansion of our knowledge and vision possible.”<sup>46</sup>

The solution to the complexity of cross-cultural understanding and interpretation is not a return to some mythical, pure, and original form, Zhang counters, but dialogue: “the genuine desire to listen to the voice of the other person or text, and the effort to reach beyond oneself to communicate with that person or text.”<sup>47</sup> Making frequent reference to Gadamer, Zhang argues in *The Tao and the Logos* that the hermeneutic process leads to the possibility of multiple correct interpretations: “With the realization that understanding is an infinite process of inquiry—a dialogue between the author, the text, and the reader in the constant exchange of questions and answers—the interpreter no longer needs to attempt to close the text with a definite answer but can keep the critical dialogue open.”<sup>48</sup> Clarke also employs Gadamer’s notion of dialogue in support of the interpretive process:

All human understanding has to be construed, not as an impersonal interaction of disembodied ideas or passive recording of information, but as a kind of *dialogue*, an ongoing encounter in which a text or tradition is addressed and which answers questions, or itself questions the interpreter. . . . [Dialogue is] a continuing exchange in which the sense of a text is sought by reiterative interplay or conversation between interpreter and interpreted, and in which meaning is a function of the interaction between the two, not a mystery that lies hidden beneath the text. . . . [W]e must avoid any supposition that by some kind of



thought transfer we can enter into and fully recover the meanings and mentalities of past ages and their symbolic products.<sup>49</sup>

Sinologist Lisa Raphals also criticizes purist analyses of Daoist texts: "Daoists are not texts, and texts do not act (or not act) with purpose. . . . Texts are not persons; we cannot predict the behavior of Daoist humans from Daoist texts."<sup>50</sup>

As Clarke notes, "All knowing is historically grounded, which means that, though I may become critically aware of this fact, I can never escape the historical conditions in which I think and write. . . . Far from seeing this as a block to communication, Gadamer regards it as a necessary condition thereof."<sup>51</sup> Western interpretations of Daoism are grounded in their "historical conditions," but so are the criticisms against them. In my opinion, an unintended effect of the harsh postcolonial critiques of Western interpretations of Daoism has been to "ghettoize" serious Sinological studies, isolating this scholarly community and discouraging interest in and understanding of their work on the part of the larger community of scholars and the lay public.

#### DAOISM AND ECOLOGY: THE BABY IN THE RIVER

A recent publication that explores the potential of Western interpretations of Daoism, without ignoring the fact that interpretation of Daoism in support of environmental issues has been roundly objected to by many Sinologists, is *Daoism and Ecology: Ways Within a Cosmic Landscape*. As the editors observe in the introduction, "If Daoism somehow has a special ecological wisdom going back to the foundations of the tradition, why has there been such a woeful record of environmental concern throughout Chinese history?"<sup>52</sup> *Daoism and Ecology* is the result of a 1998 conference at Harvard University that was a model effort to facilitate dialogue between specialists and nonspecialists, and the book continues that conversation by presenting a variety of different views as to the applicability of Daoist thought to environmental problems.

In his essay in this volume, "'Responsible Non-Action' in a Natural World: Perspectives from the *Neiye*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Daode jing*," Kirkland continues his argument against Western appropriations of Daoism. His approach is to try to demonstrate that the Chinese texts do not say what some Westerners wish them to say, but his eagerness to prove the appropriations wrong directs him towards an interpretation that is, in my

opinion, equally inaccurate. He begins with a proposition borrowed from a colleague: "An infant [is] floating on the river, apparently on its way to its death from drowning"; what should a Daoist do?<sup>53</sup> Kirkland compares the motivation to save the baby with the human desire to protect an endangered species such as the whooping crane, and suggests that in both cases, a Daoist should avoid heroic intervention. This unfortunate analogy diminishes the credibility of his argument. I agree that "from the classical Daoist perspective, it is clearly morally suspect for humans to presume that they are justified in judging what might constitute 'impending ecological danger,' or to presume that interventional action is necessary to rectify the situation."<sup>54</sup> I disagree strongly, however, that "from the classical Daoist perspective" every human event that occurs is a natural act that should be allowed to take its course. It is true that the *Zhuangzi* advocates acceptance of the natural order, even in the face of tragedy, as in the examples he cites: Zhuangzi accepts the death of his wife without grieving, and Yuzi does not complain of the deformity that disease is inflicting upon him.<sup>55</sup> The *Zhuangzi* teaches acceptance of natural events such as disease and death, but it does not advocate passive acceptance in the case of individuals who have been endangered by accident or by human intentionality, such as this example of a baby on the verge of drowning.

Kirkland's rationale for inaction does not suffice: "What if . . . the baby in the water had been the ancient Chinese equivalent of Adolf Hitler, and the saving of him . . . led to the systematic extermination of millions of innocent men, women, and children?"<sup>56</sup> To follow this logic to its conclusion, must one also refrain from acting to save Hitler's victims? Perhaps Kirkland would say yes. I agree with him that the texts indicate that the Daoist should not "play God."<sup>57</sup> I agree also that the *Zhuangzi* does not support social or environmental activism based on the notion that humans are in some way responsible for nature or that nature cannot find its own way; the earth does not need to be "saved" by humanity.<sup>58</sup> I disagree, however, that Daoism advocates passive acceptance of any and all human events. This interpretation leads inevitably to the "doing not-doing means doing nothing" interpretation that is so common among "Pooh Bear" Daoists and so often criticized by scholars. The *Zhuangzi* does not advocate fatalistic non-intervention, but, rather, an acceptance of the natural cycles of human life, and of the cycles of the life of the planet as they affect human life. Kirkland's analogy, by putting the focus on a human act of intentionality as a starting point,

fails to support his valid point about the misinterpretation of Daoism to support Western ecological movements.

The final section of his essay is entitled “The Transformative Power of the Perfected Person” and explains the rationale for self-cultivation expounded in the Daoist text, the *Neiye*: “When one transforms one’s being into a state in harmony with life’s true realities (that is, Dao), that state has a beneficent effect upon the world around one and facilitates the reversion of all things to a naturally healthy and harmonious condition.”<sup>59</sup> Kirkland has written about the *Neiye* elsewhere as well, stating that it commends techniques of “biospiritual cultivation” by which one can align one’s “biospiritual nexus” with the unseen forces of the world in order to attract “spirit” and receive it into one’s quietened “heart/mind.”<sup>60</sup> These are concepts that have the potential to be appreciated, and perhaps understood and practiced in the West, but unfortunately, as in his *Daoism and Ecology* essay, Kirkland devotes more space to discussing what the *Neiye* is not, in comparison to the popular “philosophical Daoist” texts, than to what it is. Detailed descriptions of biospiritual practices, and of the ritual and communal activities that Kirkland emphasizes are so important to Daoist religion, could serve as valuable resources for Westerners seeking to understand “real” Daoism, but only if they are made accessible to them. To direct scholarly condescension towards popular interpretations—however far they may be from “real” Daoism—inhibits dialogue and hampers communication between scholars and an interested and intelligent lay public.

#### INVENTING TRADITION

Another contributor to the *Daoism and Ecology* volume, Sinologist and scholar of Chinese religion Jeffrey F. Meyer, reports that the interpretive process was “variously described by participants in the conference on Daoism and ecology” as “‘the hermeneutics of retrieval,’ ‘confrontational hermeneutics,’ or, more mischievously, as ‘creative misinterpretation.’”<sup>61</sup> Meyer defends the reinterpretation of Daoism and other religions in a search for solutions to environmental problems. Citing Eric Hobsbawm’s notion of “inventing tradition,”<sup>62</sup> he advocates for this kind of “creative misinterpretation,” stating, “By a process of selective remembering and forgetting, all these resources [of the world’s major religions] may be reclaimed and used to reshape the environmental ethic.”<sup>63</sup>

Meyer provides examples of “inventing tradition” that argue persuasively for the viability of this technique. The phrase “all men are created equal,” for instance, had one meaning when written by Thomas Jefferson, an owner of slaves who assumed that restricting the right to vote to white male property owners was reasonable and fair. When Lincoln used this phrase to justify the abolition of slavery, he extended the meaning of the phrase beyond its original author’s intention; and when Martin Luther King Jr. used the phrase in his “I have a dream” speech, he reinterpreted it yet again. In the same manner, people at one particular time and place may choose to emphasize one aspect of scripture, and at another time and place, another. Meyer indicates, for example, that the biblical admonition of Genesis 1:28 from God to humankind to “Increase, multiply, fill the earth and bring it into subjection” is no longer appropriate for today’s environmental consciousness, but one “may instead choose to emphasize the command to care for the garden, given in Genesis 2:15.”<sup>64</sup> In his essay, which is entitled “Salvation in the Garden,” Meyer then proceeds to “invent” a profound way in which Chinese religiosity involving gardens and mountains can be utilized to inspire “an appropriate model for future environmentalism.”<sup>65</sup>

Others who wrote for *Daoism and Ecology* are “inventing” tradition as well, as is Clarke in *The Tao of the West*. According to Clarke, the “symbiosis” between West and East could foster “the concern not just for a personal way of salvation but for the future of the planet, a counter to excessive consumption, materialism, environmental degradation, and, in a word, a new way of thinking about our relationship with the natural world. This implies a non-exploitative relationship with the earth and with non-human creatures, and the development of technologies which go with rather than against nature.”<sup>66</sup> To those who would question the legitimacy of this process, I would say that Daoism, like the whooping crane, does not need to be “saved.” Reinterpretation and reinvention are not unique to Daoism. Religions that cross national, linguistic, or cultural boundaries are inevitably changed, and those who change them are changed by them as well.

Long ago when Buddhism was being assimilated in China, concerted efforts were made to correct some of the ways in which it had been misinterpreted in popular culture; the fact remains that Chinese Buddhism is very different from Indian Buddhism, and Japanese Buddhism is different from both. The process of criticism and correction is a necessary and vital part of the process of transmitting traditions from one culture

to another, but it will not prevent change altogether. As Clarke puts it in the concluding pages of *The Tao of the West*,

We need to accept that Daoism has gained a new, and inevitably different, life of its own in the modern world. It is a life in which Daoism will no doubt interact creatively with non-Chinese traditions of thought in ways similar to those which have characterised its earlier productive relationships with the other ancient traditions of China, India, and Japan, and which will progressively involve scholars, writers and practitioners of all kinds from both Asia and the West.<sup>67</sup>

In the last decade scholars of Daoism have initiated several efforts to facilitate dialogue within and outside of the field of Sinology. The website <http://www.daoiststudies.org>, begun in 2000, provides an organizational framework and gives easy access to a variety of information: names of scholars and researchers, notices of events and publications, reviews of scholarly books, and “an ongoing collaborative web project containing an index of the *Ming Zhengtong daoze* [an extensive collection of Chinese Daoist texts available in only a few university libraries] with access to PDF facsimiles of the text and annotations made by members of the Daoist Studies community.”<sup>68</sup> There have been three international conferences on Daoism in the Contemporary World: the first in Boston in 2003; the next in Chengdu, PRC, in 2004; and the last in 2006 in Germany, all of which have included Daoist practitioners as participants. A fourth international conference in Hong Kong in November, 2007, will include a Daoist *jiao* ceremony. The Daoist Studies Consultation of the American Academy of Religion, begun in 2005, is making scholarship on Daoism more accessible to scholars of other religions and facilitating its incorporation into the discourse of the discipline of religious studies.

Interpretations of Daoism in the West in the twenty-first century are more informed; interpreters are more aware of the issues raised by the Orientalist critique and of the realities of Daoism in China. While acknowledging the potential for confusion and misinterpretation in cross-cultural communication, Zhang endorses the effort “to explore the possibilities of understanding cultures other than one’s own, of reaching the reality of other cultures through the necessary mediation of one’s own language and one’s own moment in time.”<sup>69</sup> He argues that translation is a form of dialogue. The results may be inadequate, interpretations may be incorrect, but translation is an opening to communication: “What we get in translation is not the original, certainly not the myth of a pure

linguistic essence; likewise in cross-cultural translation of ideas and values, what we get is not the myth of an unadulterated essence. What translation allows us to gain, however, is invaluable linguistically and culturally, that is, understanding, knowledge, and communication, for which every effort of ours is worthwhile and richly rewarding."<sup>70</sup> A book like Clarke's *The Tao of the West*, written by a nonspecialist and aimed at the boundary between scholarship and popular interpretation, is a vital part of the translation process.

Contrary to what some "Pooh Bear" Daoists might think, Daoism will never solve all of the world's problems, and I am not suggesting that it can. It has not prevented the ecological disasters of modern China, and there is a certain irony in appealing to it as an inspiration for Western environmentalist movements. The "philosophical Daoism" of twentieth-century Western interpreters was able to provide an alternative to the mentality of Western triumphalism, but it has not overcome the dominance of that attitude, and no interpretation has proved adequate to solve all the challenges of a post-9/11 world. In its original forms in China it was unable to overcome centuries of authoritarian government, though it did provide some political balance on the level of the community and it was able to nurture artistic and life-affirming philosophies and practices among some members of the ruling classes. Still, I think both China and the West can benefit from Daoism in new forms "invented" by new interpreters in a new century.

## NOTES

1. Portions of this article are from Julia M. Hardy, *Daoism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming) and appear with the permission of the publisher.
2. Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens* (Oppenheim: Johann Theodor de Bry, 1617).
3. John C. H. Wu, trans., *Tao Teh Ching* (New York: St. John's University Press, 1961).
4. Julia M. Hardy, "Inner Pilgrimage" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1983).
5. Julia M. Hardy, "Archaic Utopias in the Modern Imagination" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1990).
6. J. J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought* (London: Routledge, 2000), 202–203. *The Tao of the West* was awarded the American Academy of Religion Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion in the category of Constructive-Reflective Studies and was honored with a special panel at the 2001 Annual Meeting. The panelists' papers and Clarke's response appear in *Religious Studies Review* 28, no. 4 (2002).
7. See Da Liu, *The Tao and Chinese Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 4–8. See also Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, trans. Karen C. Duval (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993; originally published as *Le corps taoïste*, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1982), chaps. 1 and 2.
8. Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, 19. "Today's China" in the quoted text refers to, presumably, Taiwan, where Schipper studied and received his initiation in the 1960s. The situation is further complicated in the PRC, where religion was suppressed for much of the twentieth century. In the last few decades, studies of Chinese Daoism have taken place in both Taiwan and on the mainland, and Daoist religion has experienced a minor revival in the PRC.
9. Michel Strickmann, "On the Alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching," in *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion*, ed. Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 165.
10. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2, *History of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956). Marcel Granet, *La pensée chinoise* (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1934). H. G. Creel, *What Is Taoism? and Other Studies in Chinese Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). Holmes Welch, *The Parting of the Way: Lao Tzu and the Taoist Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).
11. The comparative analysis of Chinese and Western philosophies, based at times on Daoist texts, continues within the discipline of philosophy. While not



unaware of it, philosophers are on the whole less burdened by this issue of Western invention than are scholars of religion.

12. Russell Kirkland, "The Taoism of the Western Imagination and the Taoism of China: De-colonializing the Exotic Teachings of the East" (lecture, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, October 20, 1997), <http://kirkland.myweb.uga.edu/rk/pdf/pubs/pres/TENN97.pdf>, 6.

13. *Ibid.*, 10.

14. *Ibid.*, 2.

15. Benjamin Hoff, *The Tao of Pooh* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982).

16. Hardy, "Archaic Utopias," and Julia M. Hardy, "Influential Western Interpretations of the *Tao-te-ching*," in *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching*, ed. Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 165–188.

17. Clarke, *Tao of the West*, 8.

18. *Ibid.*, x.

19. *Ibid.*, 200.

20. Hardy, *Archaic Utopias*, 51.

21. See Hardy, "Influential Western Interpretations of the *Tao-te-ching*," 171–174 and 181–185.

22. Lin Yu-tang, *The Wisdom of China and India* (New York: Modern Library, 1942), 579.

23. *Ibid.*, 579.

24. Kirkland, "The Taoism of the Western Imagination and the Taoism of China," 15.

25. *Ibid.*, 13.

26. Russell Kirkland, "'Responsible Non-Action' in a Natural World," in *Daoism and Ecology: Ways Within a Cosmic Landscape*, ed. N. J. Girardot, James Miller, and Liu Xiaogan (Cambridge: Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, 2001), 302.

27. Kirkland, "The Taoism of the Western Imagination and the Taoism of China," 14–15.

28. James Legge, *The Texts of Taoism (Part I): The Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzu, The Writings of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962; originally published in *The Sacred Books of the East*, Oxford University Press, 1891), 29–30.

29. Herbert A. Giles, *Religions of Ancient China* (London: Archibald Constable, 1905), 68.

30. Recent introductory texts include Livia Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Three Pines Press, 2001), Livia Kohn and Harold D. Roth, eds., *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage, and Ritual* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), James Miller, *Daoism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003), and Russell Kirkland, *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2004). There are far too many scholars doing specialized studies of rituals, deities, art, and more to list here. Daoiststudies.org has a list of 475 scholars and teachers: <http://www.daoiststudies.org/scholars.php>. I must, however, mention the excellent work in Europe by Catherine Despeux, Fabrizio Pregadio (now at Stanford), and the late Isabelle Robinet, as well as the burgeoning field of Daoist studies in China.
31. J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 177–178.
32. Clarke, *The Tao of the West*, 202–203.
33. J. J. Clarke, “Having It Both Ways: A Reply to My Critics,” *Religious Studies Review* 28, no. 4 (2002): 338.
34. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
35. Clarke, *The Tao of the West*, 8.
36. Edward Said, “East Isn’t East: The Impending End of the Age of Orientalism,” in *The Times Literary Supplement*, February 3, 1995, 3–4.
37. Clarke, *The Tao of the West*, 11, referring to Zhang Longxi, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8–9 and 14.
38. Zhang, *Mighty Opposites*, 136.
39. *Ibid.*, 145.
40. *Ibid.*, 14.
41. *Ibid.*, 9.
42. *Ibid.*, 8.
43. *Ibid.*, 195.
44. *Ibid.*, 16.
45. *Ibid.*, 17.
46. *Ibid.*, 116.
47. *Ibid.*, 5.
48. Zhang Longxi, *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), 158.
49. Clarke, *The Tao of the West*, 10.

50. Lisa Raphals, "Metic Intelligence or Responsible Non-Action? Further Reflections on the *Zhuangzi*, *Daode jing*, and *Neiye*," in *Daoism and Ecology* (see note 26), 311.
51. Clarke, *The Tao of the West*, 10.
52. Girardot, Miller, and Liu, *Daoism and Ecology*, xlii.
53. Kirkland, "Responsible Non-Action," 287.
54. *Ibid.*, 289.
55. *Ibid.*, 290.
56. *Ibid.*, 291.
57. *Ibid.*, 285.
58. *Ibid.*, 288–289.
59. *Ibid.*, 299.
60. Russell Kirkland, "Varieties of Taoism in Ancient China: A Preliminary Comparison of Themes in the *Nei Yeh* and Other Taoist Classics," *Taoist Resources* 7, no. 2 (1997): 73–86, <http://kirkland.myweb.uga.edu/rk/pdf/pubs/VARIETIES.pdf>. Text quoted is from pp. 5 and 6 of the online version.
61. Jeffrey F. Meyer, "Salvation in the Garden: Daoism and Ecology," in *Daoism and Ecology* (see note 26), 220.
62. Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–14.
63. Meyer, "Salvation in the Garden," 221.
64. *Ibid.*, 221.
65. *Ibid.*, 223.
66. Clarke, *The Tao of the West*, 210.
67. *Ibid.*, 203.
68. For more information on both the conferences and the consultation, see <http://www.daoiststudies.org>. Special mention should go to James Miller who runs the Web site, Louis Komjathy who organized the AAR consultation, and Livia Kohn who organized the first conference on Daoism and the Contemporary World. These three have made many other contributions and are among many others who have also contributed to these enterprises and to the field of Daoist studies in general, while also encouraging and supporting dialogue between scholars and the larger community. Kohn, who has authored dozens of scholarly works on Daoism, has now retired from teaching and has established a retreat center in Albuquerque.
69. Zhang, *Mighty Opposites*, 1.
70. *Ibid.*, 116.



## BDK ENGLISH TRIPITAKA SERIES: A Progress Report

In 2006, we brought forth the publication of a major Zen text that was made available for the first time in English. *The Baizhang Zen Monastic Regulations* was the latest volume to be published in the BDK English Tripiṭaka Series, bringing our total number of published works to sixty-five texts in thirty-five volumes. The following volumes have thus far been published:

- The Summary of the Great Vehicle [Taishō 1593] (1992)
- The Biographical Scripture of King Aśoka [Taishō 2043] (1993)
- The Lotus Sutra [Taishō 262] (1994)
- The Sutra on Upāsaka Precepts [Taishō 1488] (1994)
- The Essentials of the Eight Traditions [extra-canonical] / The Candle of the Latter Dharma [extra-canonical] (1994)
- The Storehouse of Sundry Valuables [Taishō 203] (1994)
- A Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master of the Great Cī'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty [Taishō 2053] (1995)
- The Three Pure Land Sutras [Taishō 360, 365 & 366] (1995)
- The Essentials of the Vinaya Tradition [Taishō 2348] / The Collected Teachings of the Tendai Lotus School [Taishō 2366] (1995)
- Tannishō: Passages Deploing Deviations of Faith [Taishō 2661] / Rennyō Shōnin Ofumi [Taishō 2668] (1996)
- The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions [Taishō 2087] (1996)
- Senchaku Hongan Nembutsu Shū (A Collection of Passages on the Nembutsu Chosen in the Original Vow) [Taishō 2608] (1997)
- The Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sutra [Taishō 418] / The Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sutra [Taishō 642] (1998)
- The Blue Cliff Record [Taishō 2003] (1999)
- Three Chan Classics [Taishō 1985, 2005, & 2010] (1999)

- Three Texts on Consciousness Only [Taishō 1585, 1586, & 1590] (1999)
- The Scriptural Text: Verses of the Doctrine, with Parables [Taishō 211] (2000)
- Buddhist Monastic Traditions of Southern Asia [Taishō 2125] (2000)
- The Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning [Taishō 676] (2000)
- Kaimokushō or Liberation from Blindness [Taishō 2689] (2000)
- The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch [Taishō 2008] (2000)
- A Comprehensive Commentary on the Heart Sutra [Taishō 1710] (2001)
- Two Esoteric Sutras [Taishō 865 & 893] (2002)
- Lives of Great Monks and Nuns [Taishō 2046, 2047, 2049, 1063, & 2085] (2002)
- Interpretation of the Buddha Land [Taishō 1530] (2002)
- The Three Pure Land Sutras (Revised Second Edition) [Taishō 360, 365, & 366] (2003)
- Two Nichiren Texts [Taishō 2688 & 2692] (2003)
- The Summary of the Great Vehicle (Revised Second Edition) [Taishō 1593] (2003)
- Kyōgyōshinshō: On Teaching, Practice, Faith, and Enlightenment [Taishō 2646] (2003)
- Shingon Texts [Taishō 2427, 2428, 2429, 2526, 2415, & 2527] (2003)
- The Treatise on the Elucidation of the Knowable [Taishō 1645] / The Cycle of the Formation of the Schismatic Doctrines [Taishō 2031] (2004)
- The Sutra of Queen Śrīmālā of the Lion's Roar [Taishō 353] / The Vimalakīrti Sutra [Taishō 475] (2004)
- Apocryphal Scriptures [Taishō 389, 685, 784, 842, & 2887] (2005)
- Zen Texts [Taishō 2012-A, 2543, 2580, & 2586] (2005)
- The Awakening of Faith [Taishō 1666] (2005)

The Vairocanābhisambodhi Sutra [Taishō 848] (2005)

The Baizhang Zen Monastic Regulations [Taishō 2025] (2006)

These volumes can be purchased at the BCA Buddhist Bookstore in Berkeley, CA or directly from the Numata Center for Buddhist Translation & Research.

The Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research as well as the Editorial Committee of the BDK English Tripiṭaka Project looks forward to continuing to publish volumes of the English Tripiṭaka Series. Through this work we hope to help fulfill the dream of founder Reverend Dr. Yehan Numata to make the teaching of the Buddha available to the English-speaking world.

**Numata Center for Buddhist Translation & Research**  
**2026 Warring Street, Berkeley, California 94704 USA**  
**Tel: (510) 843-4128 • Fax (510) 845-3409**  
**Email: [sales@numatacenter.com](mailto:sales@numatacenter.com)**  
**[www.numatacenter.com](http://www.numatacenter.com)**





## **The *Pacific World*—Its History**

Throughout my life, I have sincerely believed that Buddhism is a religion of peace and compassion, a teaching which will bring spiritual tranquillity to the individual, and contribute to the promotion of harmony and peace in society. My efforts to spread the Buddha's teachings began in 1925, while I was a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley. This beginning took the form of publishing the *Pacific World*, on a bi-monthly basis in 1925 and 1926, and then on a monthly basis in 1927 and 1928. Articles in the early issues concerned not only Buddhism, but also other cultural subjects such as art, poetry, and education, and then by 1928, the articles became primarily Buddhistic. Included in the mailing list of the early issues were such addressees as the Cabinet members of the U.S. Government, Chambers of Commerce, political leaders, libraries, publishing houses, labor unions, and foreign cultural institutions.

After four years, we had to cease publication, primarily due to lack of funds. It was then that I vowed to become independently wealthy so that socially beneficial projects could be undertaken without financial dependence on others. After founding the privately held company, Mitutoyo Corporation, I was able to continue my lifelong commitment to disseminate the teachings of Buddha through various means.

As one of the vehicles, the *Pacific World* was again reactivated, this time in 1982, as the annual journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies. For the opportunity to be able to contribute to the propagation of Buddhism and the betterment of humankind, I am eternally grateful. I also wish to thank the staff of the Institute of Buddhist Studies for helping me to advance my dream to spread the spirit of compassion among the peoples of the world through the publication of the *Pacific World*.

Yehan Numata  
Founder, Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai

## **In Remembrance**

In May of 1994, my father, Yehan Numata, aged 97 years, returned to the Pure Land after earnestly serving Buddhism throughout his lifetime. I pay homage to the fact that the *Pacific World* is again being printed and published, for in my father's youth, it was the passion to which he was wholeheartedly devoted.

I, too, share my father's dream of world peace and happiness for all peoples. It is my heartfelt desire that the *Pacific World* helps to promote spiritual culture throughout all humanity, and that the publication of the *Pacific World* be continued.

Toshihide Numata  
Chairman, Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai