Techniques in Vajrayāna Buddhism

Proceedings of the Third Vajrayāna Conference

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Centre for Bhutan & GNH Studies

Techniques in Vajrayāna Buddhism: Proceedings of the Third Vajrayāna Conference

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Preface

This publication presents the selected papers from the Third International Conference on Vajrayāna Buddhism which was held from 19 to 20 April 2019. The papers cover a range of topics within the broad theme of "Techniques in Vajrayāna Buddhism". We are extremely grateful to the authors for their invaluable contributions.

This year's conference was attended by more than 300 participants. About 150 foreign participants from 21 countries took part in the event besides the local attendees. The conference started with a welcome dinner hosted by the Honourable Prime Minister, His Excellency Lyonchhen Dr. Lotay Tshering.

The organisers would like to submit our deepest gratitude to His Majesty the King for blessing the occasion on the second day of the conference. The conference concluded with a day excursion to the historic Punakha Dzong on 21 April.

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Seizing the Extraordinary Opportunities of the Profound Path

Khentrul Rinpoché Jamphel Lodrö & Joe Flumerfelt

At the heart of each sentient being is a driving desire to experience genuine, unchanging peace and harmony. However, in these degenerate times, due to the afflictions being extremely strong and difficult to tame, and because people lack awareness of the root causes of their problems, they end up surrounded by suffering and conflict. Common strategies are ultimately incapable of fulfilling our heart's desire. For this reason, now more than ever, we must rely on uncommon systems of practice which provide powerful and direct methods for transforming the nature of how we experience the world. Within this context, we will discuss the unique features of the Vajrayāna which make it increasingly relevant for this world at this particular moment in time, as well as the unique opportunities that are available to us right now if we learn how to take full advantage of our present conditions. By understanding the goal which informs the structure of the tantric approach, we will provide insight into the nature of the path and what it means to be truly "skilful" in practice. In order to demonstrate the full potential of the Vajrayāna system, we will draw from our extensive knowledge of the yogic practices of the Kalachakra completion stage, known as "The Profound Path of Vajra Yoga". By presenting the key stages within this path, the definitive meaning of all Vajrayāna practice will be clearly understood and a complete view of the Buddha's intention will be established. It is through this completeness that yogic adepts are able to

truly manifest the most skilful of methods. In conclusion, we will look at how Bhutan is uniquely positioned to seize the opportunities provided by these extraordinary methods for the benefit of not only their own citizens but for everyone in this world.

Introduction

In order to fully understand the way that skilful means are used within the context of Vajrayāna Buddhism, it is extremely important to initially step back and look at the motivation or purpose behind this extraordinary system of practice. When we develop clarity regarding its guiding principles, then it will be significantly easier to understand how each specific method fits into the larger landscape.

We begin by asking ourselves why such a system of practice is needed in the first place? What function does it ultimately serve? If we examine the world today, we find that sentient beings are largely driven by the same desires that they have always had. We all desire to be free from suffering and to find genuine, lasting happiness. These desires manifest in our lives in many ways from the seemingly mundane choices we make in our daily routines up to the transformative decisions we make that give shape to our lives.

In general, we can encapsulate all of our hopes and dreams within this search for perfect peace and harmony. Here, "peace" refers to a state of mind that is free from suffering. Its ultimate nature is bliss. This is paired with "harmony" which refers to the degree of integration or scope of that peace. Right now, our experience of peace is fleeting. It comes and goes in accordance with changing conditions and it lacks any real strength. It is like an echo in the far off distance. The scope of such peace is extremely limited.

If we ask why, then we need look no further than our own bias. This is the mind which limits and divides the world into "this" and "that", "us" and "them", "me" and "mine." As long as these forms of bias exists then the blissful nature of our minds will be unable to manifest fully. When the bliss is limited, then we do whatever we can to experience it and to avoid not experiencing it. This disconnect with bliss fuels our dissatisfaction and brings us into conflict with those around us – those who, like us, are also chasing after bliss in their lives.

Unfortunately, because we do not understand the underlying mechanisms of our desire, we do not fully understand how to actually

achieve our ultimate aim. It's like we are in a tiny boat, stuck on the surface of the ocean, battered around by waves with no hope of rescue. When stuck in the thick of things we do not realise that this endless stream of hardships that we experience is not without cause.

In general, we can say that our suffering is the result of merely focusing on the symptoms and neglecting the root of our problems. We have forgotten to look beyond the surface and get to the source. That source is the nature of reality itself, what we refer to as buddha-nature. When we are ignorant of this nature, then we fail to see how our actions limit its capacity to manifest. This is the root. Therefore, if we truly wish to experience greater peace and harmony in our lives, then the best way to do so is to develop knowledge and ultimately direct experience of this fundamental nature.

A person who is able to experience the infinite qualities of their buddha-nature is known as a "Buddha." Such a person has cleared away all forms of limitation and therefore has attained ultimate freedom. For such a person, there is no suffering, there is only peace. That peace is pervasive, knowing all enlightened qualities just as they are. This is the omniscient mind, the ultimate form of harmony in which all contradictions cease and all possibilities are included. Abiding in such a state is what it means to attain "enlightenment."

Furthermore, while this state obviously fulfills our desire for lasting peace and harmony, that is not the main reason why we would want to attain it. In order to arrive at that stage, this goal must be joined with the heart of great compassion. That compassion is fueled by the wisdom which understands the universal responsibility that we have for all forms of sentient life. This wisdom is rooted in a recognition of our interconnected nature. When we truly understand that we are not isolated entities, then we come to realise that we owe every moment of our happiness to the kindness of others. Therefore, it is for their sake that we strive to achieve enlightenment. For only by achieving the omniscient mind of a Buddha will we have the capacity to manifest in whatever form will be most beneficial for limitless sentient beings.

Skilful Means

On the basis of this extraordinary mind of bodhichitta, we then need to consider our strategy for actually accomplishing our goal. The way that we approach our practice of the path will have direct impact on how

quickly we are able to manifest the desired result. For every second that we waste, sentient beings must endure suffering. This is unacceptable. Therefore, we must rely on the most efficient methods we have available in order to achieve the best results in the least amount of time possible. This is the very definition of "skilful means."

The quality of skilfulness arises in relation to two aspects. First, there is the aspect of clarity which is able to clearly see the unique characteristics which are present in a given moment. If we are unable to recognise when an opportunity has arisen, then it will be impossible to take advantage of it.

Secondly, we have the methods themselves which are passed down to us through the unbroken continuity of an authentic wisdom tradition. From the perspective of Himalayan Buddhism, we can speak of eight great practice traditions which are defined as the lineages of (1) the Ancient Translations (Tib. *Nyingma*), (2) The Word as Instructions (Tib. *Kadam*), (3) The Path and Its Result (Tib. *Lamdré*), (4) The Oral Instructions of Marpa (Tib. *Marpa Kagyu*), (5) The Oral Instructions of the Shangpa (Tib. *Shangpa Kagyu*), (6) The Six Vajra Yogas (Tib. *Jordruk*), (7) Pacification and Severance (Tib. *Zhijé Chöd*), and (8) Approach and Accomplishment (Tib. *Nyendrup*). When the methods which are transmitted through these lineages are correctly matched to specific conditions, then each has the capacity to rapidly propel one down the path of enlightenment like a rocket roaring into space.

While a detailed analysis of each of these methods is beyond the scope of this paper, there is benefit in discussing a few general patterns which will inform how skilfully we are able to use them. The first thing that we need to understand is that each of these systems is not equivalent. They all have unique practices which make them suitable for specific types of minds. You can think of them as different forms of medicine that will work to dispel different forms of sickness.

Secondly, just as a patient may need different medicines at different moments in their lives, so too may practitioners find themselves drawing on different methods from different traditions in different contexts. This should not be seen as an abandonment of one's own tradition, but simply a recognition of the skilful means that the Buddha provided us with in order to work with the vast spectrum of human experience. While we may feel most at home within the approach of a single tradition, we should not be fearful of learning how other traditions approach problems. This will assist us to overcome provisional blocks and to progress deeper on our path.

For these reasons, it is always worthwhile to be aware of your present state of mind and where you stand in relation to your goal. In general, we can speak of spiritual practitioners as falling into two groups: (1) those who are prepared to push the boundaries of what is normal and go beyond the common sense of worldly conventions; and (2) those who are not prepared to do so. These are not fixed categories. They simply highlight that some people are more spiritually mature than others and are thus able to work with different aspects of their nature.

Depending on which group one finds oneself, we can then speak of two paths: (1) the non-conceptual path of yogic practitioners and (2) the conceptual path of worldly practitioners. The former is focused on transcending the worldly, whereas the latter is focused on working within the worldly in order to transcend it in the future.

Overcoming Conceptuality

That which divides these two paths is their relationship to conceptuality. This principle sits at the very heart of all Vajrayāna practice and is therefore extremely important to understand. A "concept" can be defined as a mind of grasping which is produced by a dualistic consciousness. When we refer to conceptual phenomena, we are referring to not only the thoughts generated by our *coarse mental consciousness* (Tib. *yid*), but also the subtler conceptual structures which condition each moment of our experience. These structures are often referred to as our collection of karmic propensities and make up what is known as the *foundational consciousness* (Tib. *kunzhi namshe*). In this way, the larger notion of conceptuality encompasses not only the incidental manifestations of our experience, but also the accumulated aggregates which project that experience.

As long as such conceptuality is active, then dualistic consciousness will arise and subsequently, cyclic existence will be experienced. Therefore, it is conceptuality that obscures our buddha-nature and prevents it from manifesting fully. However, merely stopping the flow of thoughts does not completely stop the effects of conceptuality. As long as the energetic basis of dualistic perception is still active then the world will continue to manifest from the perspective of dualistic conceptions. This means that in order to actually transcend samsara, we must take into account the relationship between the

physical and non-physical bases of conceptuality. These two, body and mind are co-emergent. Where there is one, there is the other.

This understanding leads us to four categories of methods which can be used by practitioners at different stages of their path. First we have two types of conceptual methods which are divided by whether or not they are purely mental in nature or if they are integrated with knowledge of the subtle energetic system. Then we have two types of non-conceptual methods which are also divided by whether or not they are connected with the subtle energetic system.

Examples of conceptual meditations which are not connected to the subtle body, include all forms of analytical meditation which use reasoning and thoughts to trigger specific experiences such as love, compassion, faith, devotion and so forth. This also includes the various generation stage practices where we visualise enlightened maṇḍalas filled with deities who perform enlightened activities.

Within the category of conceptual meditations which are connected to the subtle body, we have various subtle yogas which often use the visualisation of seed syllables placed in different points of the subtle body such as in the common form of meditating on *inner fire* (Tib. *tummo*) or the practice of *transference* (Tib. *phowa*) where a sphere of light is visualised travelling through a tube-like central channel and emerging through the crown of one's head.

For the non-conceptual meditations which are not connected with the subtle body, there are the various systems of pith instructions which are used to point out the nature of the mind. Here, practitioners train in cutting coarse conceptuality in order to then gain insight into the mind's nature. This form of meditation is what is commonly referred to when speaking about Mahamudra, Dzogchen, Zhijé, Chöd and so forth. It also includes the pith instructions of the Perfection of Wisdom which were transmitted through the Bodhisattva Maitreya and are known as the Great Madhyamaka.

The final category is that of non-conceptual meditation which is joined with the subtle body. Here, through the additional use of various physical postures and gazes, the energetic support for dualistic consciousness is dissolved, allowing the practitioner to overcome the subtlest form of conceptuality and thus allowing for the experience of primordial wisdom to manifest. This form of practice is referred to as Vajra Yoga and is the only form of meditation which fully transcends both coarse and subtle forms of conceptuality.

The Vajra Yogas were taught by the Buddha in all of the unsurpassed tantras as the final phase of practice and that which actually gives rise to the omniscient mind of enlightenment. While each tantra presents different aspects of this final path, it is most clearly and completely presented in the *Primordial Buddha* which was given to the emanation of Vajrapani, the Shambhalan King Suchandra, then abridged as the *Glorious Kalachakra* by the emanation of Manjushri, Kalki Yashas and explained in the *Great Commentary of Stainless Light* by the emanation of Avalokiteshvara, Kalki Pundarika.

Distinguishing the Actual Completion Stage

When we develop clarity regarding these four categories of methods, then it is possible to make distinctions between what is and what is not a valid basis for the term "completion stage." While all systems of Vajrayāna practice universally recognise that the completion stage is the final cause of enlightenment, different traditions use this term to refer to different collections of practices. In accordance with the unrivalled Rimé Master, Jetsun Taranatha, there is a significant difference between what is often claimed to be the completion stage and what is the actual completion stage.

For Taranatha, the dividing line was the type of mind which was being used to perform a particular practice. Of the four types of methods, the two conceptual categories would be considered coarse and subtle generation stages respectively. Since they are performed using different degrees of conceptual consciousness, they are both incapable of actually giving rise to the experience of non-conceptual primordial wisdom.

This leaves us with the final two categories of non-conceptual methods. While the first category is capable of establishing a pristine awareness that is free from coarse conceptuality, such an awareness is still operating within the confines of a very subtle dualistic consciousness. This is because the winds have not yet been made to dissolve into the very subtle central channel of primordial wisdom. Note here, that the Kalachakra Tantra distinguishes between the coarse central channel which can be accessed through concepts and the subtle central channel which cannot. For this reason, these systems should be referred to as the "nominal completion stage." While they are indeed

an approximate cause for entering into the actual completion stage, they are missing a critical component for producing enlightenment.

Only the Profound Path of Vajra Yoga qualifies as "the actual completion stage", for only the varja yogas are performed within the context of the subtle energetic winds entering into the channel of primordial wisdom. As the winds of karma are made to dissolve, the aspects of buddha-nature begin to manifest as empty-forms. These ultimate appearances are not dependent on concepts and therefore are the direct perception of the nature of reality as it is.

When the experience of empty-forms is stabilised, then all perception is unified within primordial wisdom. From this point forward, all forms of perception arise on the basis of that wisdom and therefore it is possible to manipulate one's energetic system without reverting to conceptual consciousness. This capacity to work with the subtle body in a non-conceptual way allows one to completely purify the channels, winds and drops and thus unlock the blissful nature of the body.

However, while great bliss completely transcends all experiences of worldly pleasure, it is not stable. It ebbs and flows in accordance with the changing conditions of our physical aggregates. Therefore, in order to achieve the ultimate perfection of wisdom which abides in the union of the Mahamudra of Empty-Form and the Pristine Awareness of Immutable Bliss, great bliss must be refined. All traces of movement must be removed. Only then will the mind rest in the sublime emptiness which is endowed with all supreme aspects. Through the absorption of such a mind, the karmic aggregates are then completely abandoned and the state of buddhahood is attained.

Elevating the Mind through Concepts

For most people, this non-conceptual path of yogic practitioners is extremely difficult to engage with. It requires that the practitioner be prepared to completely abandon all connection with the samsaric world. The world arises from dualistic consciousness, so to transcend that we have to let it go completely. If we do not, then even though we may achieve many amazing signs of realisation, it does not necessarily mean that we have established the authentic causes for enlightenment. Consciousness cannot directly give rise to enlightenment. Only primordial wisdom can do that.

What then are we to do? If the higher paths of yogic practice are out of reach for many, does that mean that enlightenment is impossible to achieve? No. Definitely not. This simply means that we need to use our time more skilfully in order to gather the causes to one day be ready to practice the yogic path. It is for this reason that we have the conceptual path of worldly beings. How quickly we establish the necessary conditions will depend on how skilfully we approach these preliminary practices.

No matter whether you are just starting on the path or if you have been at it for many lifetimes, the essence of all conceptual practice is to elevate one's experience. We are seeking to transform the way that we interpret our experience so that we can infuse it with meaning, purpose and wisdom. Our goal is to go beyond how we ordinarily see the world, and begin to see it in an aspect which accords with how reality actually exists.

For example, when we think of renunciation, the essence is to let go of everything which most people normally hold as dear. Ordinary common sense says that things like fame, power, wealth, and comfort are what is most important. Our societies glorify these qualities and people orient their entire lives around acquiring them. Renunciation elevates our view. It helps us recognise that these things are not true sources of happiness and therefore helps us realise that it would be more skilful to orient our minds towards the practice of Dharma which actually has the capacity to lead us to genuine happiness.

Also, we can think of bodhichitta, this extraordinary mind that strives to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. This practice is rooted in two universal qualities – love and compassion. Everyone recognises these qualities are important, however, traditional common sense limits the scope of how they can manifest. We are taught to care for our loved ones, to protect those who are near to us. However, this sort of love and compassion is biased and therefore, limited. Practicing bodhichitta elevates our mind by dissolving that bias and removing the artificial barriers which impede the essential flow of love and compassion. In this way, our scope takes on the limitless aspect of the Buddha's enlightened mind.

While practices to establish renunciation, love, compassion and so forth can be found in many wisdom traditions, in the context of the Vajrayāna, it is the uncommon practice of guru devotion that is seen as the vital key for entering into the yogic path. At the root of this practice is the notion of pure perception. The training of pure perception consists

of focusing one's mind on the appearance of virtuous qualities as the manifestation of our buddha-nature. We are training to see the signs of our innate purity.

Even though the intention is to be able to see all aspects of one's experience as purity, this is extremely difficult and somewhat impractical. Therefore, the Buddha taught to focus first on one's relationship with a spiritual master in order to establish a basis of realisation. Once pure perception is established with the guru, then that realisation can be extended to everything else.

Why would he recommend approaching the path in this way? It is because this is an extraordinarily skilful means to progress quickly along the path. Of all the sentient beings that we will encounter in our lives, the guru is by far the most important, for it is the guru who presents the path to us and guides us in how to follow it. Such a person is the focal point for everything. As such, by devoting one's body, speech and mind to the guru, one is able to elevate all aspects of one's life and ultimately transcend suffering. Since all practices are encapsulated within the practice of devotion, it is the singular gateway through which realisation flows.

On the contrary, if one is not able to devote oneself to the guru, it means that one is still not able to give up the mind of self-cherishing. As long as that mind is active, then the door to higher yogic practices will be closed. Since the coarse conceptual mind will not dissolve, there is no opportunity for primordial wisdom to arise. If primordial wisdom does not arise, then there is no opportunity to achieve enlightenment. This is why all of the great mahasiddhas of the past, those of the present and those who will one day come have all stressed the necessity to practice devotion to the guru. Without it, one can dedicate one's entire life to meditation but will not take one step closer to buddhahood.

The Best Conditions for Practice

If we are extremely fortunate, we will meet with an authentic teacher who will help us to gather the necessary conditions for entering into the Profound Path of Vajra Yoga. Through the pith instructions of such a teacher and an unwavering perseverance to putting those instructions into practice, it is possible to achieve enlightenment within a single human lifetime. For those who are extremely ripe, this process may require only a few years, whereas for others it may take a few decades.

For some, enlightenment will be achieved during the process of death where the dualistic consciousness naturally dissolves back into the ground of primordial wisdom.

However, if our obscurations are too thick and we are unable to experience our primordial nature, then we will necessarily be propelled to take rebirth in accordance with our karmic propensities. If we are being brutally honest with ourselves, the vast majority of people will fall into this category. In these degenerate times, it is exceedingly rare for people to even achieve single-pointed concentration. What need is there to say with regards to abiding in the ultimate union of empty-form and immutable bliss.

For this reason, practitioners must learn to be skilful in how to gather the causes for conducive conditions in the future. In fact, the only reason why one is unable to achieve enlightenment in this lifetime is because specific conditions are missing. This then begs the question, what conditions are most conducive to achieving enlightenment?

Of all the possibilities in which a sentient being can be reborn, the most conducive conditions are present within the various pure lands. These perfect environments are free from non-virtuous defilements and therefore support the natural expression of virtue. However, not all pure lands are the same. Some are more subtle than others, making them more or less effective for the practice of Dharma.

Pure lands such as Sukhavati, Abhirati, Akanishta and so forth, are what are known as buddha realms. This means that they are the natural manifestation of the enlightened mind of the buddhas. While many human practitioners dedicate themselves to achieving rebirth in these places, how this is possible should be closely investigated. As these environments exist at a level of extreme subtlety, it is unclear from the teachings how a coarse human mind that has not achieved stability in higher absorptions would ever be able to experience such a place. While this does not mean it is impossible, it does not seem to accord with the fundamental teachings and reasonings presented in the scriptures.

The Unique Opportunities of Shambhala

A pure land such as Shambhala however is an entirely different situation. Unlike the various buddha realms, Shambhala is the result of the shared karma between tenth level bodhisattvas and the sentient beings of this world system. It is a karmic realm manifested by pure

sentient beings for the benefit of other sentient beings. As such, the laws of karma can be applied directly to taking rebirth there. This makes it considerably easier and more practical to actually accomplish.

Furthermore, Shambhala is particularly skilful due to the amount of information which is provided within the Kalachakra Tantra for how to manifest this sublime realm of experience. In accordance with those teachings, we can speak of three levels of Shambhala: (1) the External Shambhala, (2) the Internal Shambhala and (3) the Enlightened Shambhala. While the Enlightened Shambhala is inseparable from all other buddha realms, the first two levels of the outer and inner are unique to Shambhala and offer additional opportunities for practitioners to take advantage of.

Internal Shambhala refers to a subtle earthly realm. An earthly realm simply means that all six elements are present. This allows for a human body comprised of the six constituents to manifest. Such a body is a prerequisite in order to achieve enlightenment in a single lifetime through the skilful means of Vajra Yoga. More subtle forms of pure realms are simply too subtle to produce a human body and therefore they take much longer to achieve the result of buddhahood. Since Shambhala provides the perfect conditions for practicing the Vajrayāna, those who are reborn there are guaranteed to achieve enlightenment in no more than 100 human years down to as little a single human year.

However, there is also the possibility of the External Shambhala which refers to manifesting a society of perfect peace and harmony. It is most commonly referred to as an Age of Perfection, or a Golden Age in which everyone practices authentic Dharma and abandons non-virtue. Such a time is clearly prophesied in the Kalachakra Tantra, but it is up to us – the people of this world – to make it manifest. Right now, we have the authentic teachings of Shambhala available to us. We also have authentic teachers from the lineage of Shambhala who can guide us in how to put the teachings into practice. All that is needed is for us to make the manifestation of Shambhala a priority in our lives. To do that, we require a revolution of sorts in which the direct experience of buddha-nature is placed at the very heart of our society.

Conclusion

Should one ask where such a revolution might occur, there is only one place that jumps out above all others. While there are many countries that have strong traditions of Buddhism, due to various political and cultural obstacles present in those places, they lack the conditions to truly embrace the unbiased view of Shambhala. Bhutan however finds itself in a unique position due to its long history of dedication and support to Vajrayāna practice. This modern-day oasis of Vajrayāna Dharma has the potential to take a leadership role by demonstrating the transformative power of buddha-nature.

The catalyst for Shambhala to manifest in this world is the cultivation of awareness of the Kalachakra teachings in order to clear away confusion and help practitioners enter the Profound Path of Vajra Yoga. Through the study and practice of Kalachakra, the many diverse methods which were taught by the Buddha are gathered together and shown to be without contradiction. Like a rosetta stone, the Kalachakra unlocks the definitive meaning of these great traditions. If this knowledge can be skilfully harnessed by the Bhutanese and others, then it will be possible to demonstrate the potential for global peace and harmony.

The key to tapping into the power of skilful means is education. We must cultivate our capacity to clearly distinguish between methods and understand exactly how they work. While there are virtually limitless methods fitting limitless minds, they are all rooted in a single nature – buddha-nature. Therefore, any system of education that we develop must first start with a fundamental understanding of this most subtle of phenomena. From this ground, it will then be possible to work with the many manifestations of buddha-nature without losing sight of their ultimate context. Since buddha-nature and the patterns of its manifestation are the primary subject matter of the Kalachakra Tantra, it is fundamental that these teachings take a central role moving forward. Not only must we establish an in-depth understanding of the sciences of Kalachakra, but we must also apply this knowledge in accordance with the practice tradition in order to demonstrate its principles and actualise our greatest potential.

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The Vajra Body in Tantric Buddhist Practice: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Ian A. Baker

> Unless you know the hidden nature of the body, none of the 84,000 methods [of Vajrayāna Buddhism] will yield any fruit.
>
> Sampuṭa Tantra

In the context of methods and techniques in Vajrayāna Buddhism, the subject of this year's conference, this paper reviews traditional perspectives on the role of the 'vajra body' (*vajrakāya;* Tib. *dorje lu*) in the actualisation of Buddhahood, or consciousness awakened to its innate propensity for self-transcendence. In keeping with Vajrayāna's historical precedent of creative assimilation across diverse fields of knowledge, this paper also touches on areas of contemporary scientific research that have resulted in a deeper understanding of the informational and energetic substrate of the human body, and which could potentially contribute to a broader paradigm of Tantric Buddhist theory and practice in future generations.

Vajrayāna, the Tantric form of Mahayāna Buddhism that developed in India and surrounding areas between the sixth and twelfth centuries, traditionally progresses through a 'creation stage' (*utpattikrama*; Tib. *kyerim*) and a 'completion stage' (*sampannakrama*; Tib. *dzogrim*).[1] During the creation stage, practitioners overcome

[1] Vajrayāna, literally 'adamantine vehicle', marks a transition from Mahayāna scholasticism to the enactment of Buddhist ideas in individual life. The term

limiting self-perceptions by envisioning themselves as luminous deities that signify the indivisible union of compassionately inspired methodology (*upāya;* Tib. *thab*) and enlightened insight (*prajñā*; Tib. *sherab*). In the completion stage, co-emergent bliss and emptiness (*détong yéshe*) is actively cultivated through practices based on psychophysical flows of energy and substances within practitioners' bodies.[2] Vajrayāna Buddhist texts of the Yoginī class[3] describe these rarefied structures and processes of human psychophysiology as channels (*nāḍī*), winds (*prāṇa*), and vital essences (*bindu*).[4] In Tibetan, these subtle substrates of body, speech, and mind are known as *tsa, lung,* and *tiglé*. Meditation at this luminous interface of matter, energy, and awareness is traditionally associated with the second and third

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signifies the spiritual pursuit of 'indestructible' truth by realising the enlightenment experience of the historical Buddha. In Vajrayāna, theoretical propositions such as 'emptiness' (*śūnyatā*) and 'perfect wisdom' (*prajñāpāramitā*) are actively furthered through the dynamic unity of compassion (*karuṇā*) and skilful means (*upāya*).

[2] According to the eighth to tenth-century Hevajra Tantra, a practitioner should continually cultivate identity with tantric deities. The text further specifies that, after a short period of solitary practice, an initiate should develop this identification with a suitable consort so as to experience progressive states of self-transcendent bliss: bliss (*ānanda*), supreme bliss (*paramānanda*), the bliss of cessation (*viramānanda*), and innate bliss (*sahajānanda*). The order of the last two bliss states is reversed later in the text, giving rise to rival interpretations.

[3] Vajrayāna progressed historically from 'father tantras' to 'yoginī tantras' (Tib. *magyü*, an abbreviation of *neljormagyü*) that internalised many aspects of Kaula Śaivism, including practices based on the yogic body. One of the least researched Yoginī Tantras lineages is the 'Service and Attainment of the Three Esoteric Realities' (*dorjé sumgyi nyendrup*) which specialises in the internal yogas of subtle energy channels and vital energies. The lineage originates from teachings attributed to Vajrayoginī, as received by the Tibetan adept Orgyen Rinchen Pel (1230 – 1309) during his extensive travels in northwest India. See Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetans* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 237.

[4] Within the context of the vajra body, *bindu*, or in Tibetan *thiglé,* refers to the male and female vital essences that are respectively held to originate at conception from the father's sperm and the mother's ovum. Through tantric practice, they infuse the central channel (*avadhūti*) from their polarised seats at the crown *cakra* of great bliss at the top of the head and the junction of the three principle energy channels below the navel. They are represented iconographically as white and red spheres and may reflect aspects of the human endocrine system, such as mood-elevating endorphins.

tantric empowerments (*abhisekha*, Tib. *wang*) and focuses on completion stage practices that coalesce in abiding recognition of the mind and body's self-transcendent enlightened nature, beyond time and space (*buddhadhātu*).[5] This resultant state, which is ultimately independent of supporting methods and techniques, is pointed out in the culminating fourth tantric empowerment as Mahāmudrā or Great Perfection (Dzogchen).

Unlike Theravāda Buddhist doctrines that present male and female bodies as sources of suffering and limitation, Vajrayāna celebrates the human body as an indispensible vehicle of enlightenment.[6] As the eighth-century Indian mahāsiddhā Saraha phrased it: 'I have visited in my travels many temples, monasteries, and shrines, but none are as blissful as my own body.'[7] The twelfth-century female Buddhist saint Jhāna-dākini Siddharājñi stated the matter even more clearly: 'Do not seek an outer refuge; the body itself is a divine maṇḍala. Do not look elsewhere for the deity; the mind itself unborn and un-perishing is the ultimate Buddha and teacher.'[8]

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[5] The four initiation rites central to late Indian Tantric Buddhism are further correlated with the four progressive states of gnostic bliss described above. In the 'Path of Liberation' (*drol lam*), also known as Essence Mahāmudrā or Great Perfection (Dzogchen), the mind's self-existing enlightened nature is revealed directly, without dependence on secondary methods or techniques. This realisation is traditionally connected with the culminating fourth tantric empowerment in which the essence of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions is pointed out as bliss, clarity, and non-conceptuality.

[6] The Hevajra Tantra, for example, states in its opening chapter that *he* means great compassion and *vajra* wisdom, and then elaborates on thirty-two *nāḍī* that pervade the body. The three most important channels are designated as *lalanā*, *rasanā*, and the central *avadhūtī*. Four *cakra* wheels are also specified, corresponding with the emanation, enjoyment, and absolute bodies of Buddhahood (*nirmāṇakāya, saṃbhogakāya, dharmakāya*) as well as the *cakra* of great bliss (*mahāsukha*) by which Buddhahood is realised. The opening chapter of the Hevajra Tantra closes with the first description in Tantric Buddhist literature of the yogic practice of 'inner heat' (*caṇḍālī*; Tib. *tummo*), as based on the Hevajra Tantra's innovative account of the psychophysical function of *nāḍīs* and *cakras.*

[7] See Kurtis R. Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin: Tibetan Traditions of the Buddhist Poet-Saint Saraha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[8] For background on the life and teachings of the wisdom dākinī Siddharājñi, see Bhishuni Lozang Trinlae, *Kun-mkhyen Pad-ma dKar-opo's Amitāyus Tradition of Vajrayāna Buddhist Transformative Care* (Vienna: Lit Verlag, 2017).

Figure 1. A 13th-century meditation manual reveals the embodied cosmos of the vajra body and its network of channels, winds, and subtle essences.

These are just two examples of how Vajrayāna's attitude towards the human body differs profoundly from the renunciatory ideal of early Buddhist doctrines. As the enlightenment songs (*dohā*) of the mahāsiddhās and the pre-commentarial Buddhist Tantras (*mūla-tantra*) make abundantly clear, psychosomatic bliss associated with the completion stage of Vajrayāna's path of skilful means naturally dispels

the emotional unease and dualistic grasping of objectifying desire, a root cause of much existential human suffering.[9] It was this realisation that reputedly prompted the 'Great Brahmin' Saraha to leave the monastic confines of Nalanda and to cohabit with a female arrow-smith, declaring that 'only now am I truly a monk!', in reference to his having fully entered, through the skilful means of Karmamudrā, the illuminating stream of non-dual enlightened awareness.[10]

These references to Tantric Buddhism's foundational scriptures and didactic biographies are merely to emphasise the body's central role in Vajrayāna practice. Nonetheless, the human body conceived in Vajrayāna is less the ephemeral assemblage of flesh, blood, and bones with which we characteristically identify–and which is inarguably a perennial source of frustration and discontent–but an incorruptible imaginal body of intangible energy channels (*nāḍī*), energetic currents (*prāṇa*), and vital essences (*bindu*) that arises experientially through the skilful means of completion stage Vajrayāna practices. As Marpa Chökyi Lodrö, the teacher of Milarepa, memorably declared in the eleventh century: 'Having mastered the path of channels and energy currents, the Buddha was in the palm of my hands.'[11]

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[9] Erotic symbolism and practice in Tantric Buddhism points to the resolution of *dukkha*, or suffering, through the active cultivation of *sukkha*, or bliss. As the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra states: 'For a woman, the man is a deity. For a man, the woman is a deity. They should honor each other by uniting the vajra and lotus . . . No other god should be worshipped.' (10.9-10). The Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra clarifies that this 'secret practice' involving the enacted union of method and wisdom fulfills the Six Perfections (13.28) and potentiates 'full awakening' (13.31-32). The Six Perfections, or Pāramitās, are generosity, morality, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom.

[10] In the teachings of Saraha and other Indian mahāsiddhās, Karmamudrā, or sexual arousal through visualised or actual union with a consort, was central to the embodiment of Mahamudrā, the spontaneous, liberating experience of bliss, clarity, and non-conceptuality leading to direct realisation of the luminous, unborn and unceasing nature of the mind.

[11] See Chögyam Trungpa. *The Life of Marpa the Translator* (Shambhala Publications, 1982).

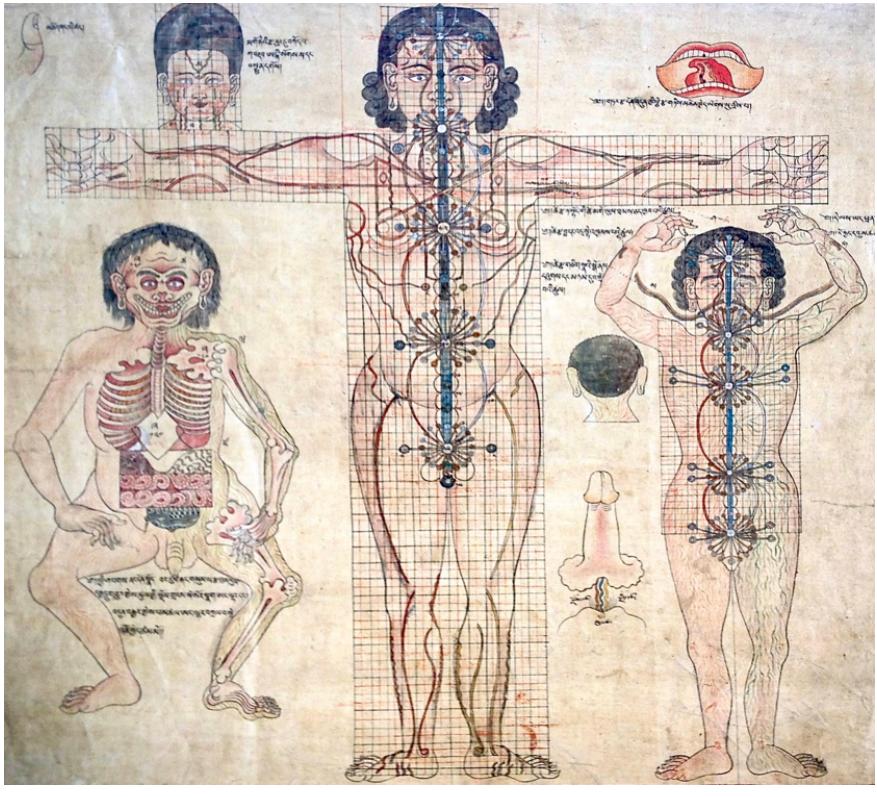

Figure 2. A Tibetan medical chart depicts five interconnected energy centers (cakras) along the body's central axis, correlating anatomically with the genitals, the solar plexus, the heart, the throat, and the brain. Wellcome Collection.

Embodying Enlightenment

Just as atoms and molecules comprising physical matter alter through energetic interventions, so too does the composite reality of the human body. The skilful means of Vajrayāna's completion stage engage the bodymind's substrate of subtle energy so as to reveal progressively transpersonal levels of consciousness and awareness. Through cultivation and redirection of flows of energy within the adamantine vajra body through respiratory practices and physical yoga (*tsalung trulkhor*), adepts alter their neurochemistry (*thiglé*) and directly experience the 'illusory', and therefore ultimately mutable, nature of

habitual self-perceptions, thus diminishing impediments to enlightened awareness.

Transforming the bodymind through psychophysical techniques so as to actualise one's indwelling buddha nature is the essence of Vajrayāna practices based on the 'vajra body'. As Khandro Yeshé Tsogyal famously proclaimed after her enlightenment through the skilful means of bliss-inducing 'inner heat' (*tummo*): 'Enlightenment arises from within the body or it does not arise at all. Unless the body is realised as the perfect crucible for liberation, freedom from conditioned existence remains only an imaginary dream.' [12] Saraha similarly cautioned in his *Royal Song* that, 'Scholars endlessly expound the scriptures, knowing nothing of the Buddha concealed within their bodies', while the Buddha himself states in the *Majjhima Nikāya Sutra* that 'If the body is not mastered, the mind cannot be mastered. If the body is mastered; mind is mastered.' (Sutra 36).

The essential practice of realising Buddhahood through the agency of the vajra body was summarised by mahāsiddhā Tilopā in his 'Oral Instructions on the Six Yogas': 'The yogic body's network of coarse and subtle energy channels intersecting at the *cakras* should be brought under control. Training begins with physical exercises. The inner winds are to be drawn inward, expanded, retained and dissolved. There are two side channels [*lalanā* and *rasanā*], the central *avadhūti*, and four *cakras*.[13] Flames rise from *candālī* at the navel.[14] A stream of nectar drips down from the syllable *hām* at the crown, invoking the four joys.'[15]

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[12] See Gyalwa Changchub and Namkhai Nyingpo, *Lady of the Lotus-Born: The Life and Enlightenment of Yeshe Tsogyal* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999).

[13] Tilopā follows the Hevajra Tantra in referring to four *cakras*, or energy centers, along the body's central axis. These are described in the Hevajra Tantra as a sixty-four petal lotus at the 'center of creation' in the genital region; an eight petal lotus at the 'center of essential nature' at the heart; a sixteen petal lotus at the 'center of enjoyment' at the throat; and a thirty-two petal lotus at the 'center of great bliss' at the crown of the head. These energy centers within the human body correspond, reciprocally, with the lumbar plexus, the cardiac plexus, the laryngeal and pharyngeal plexus, and the cerebral plexus.

[14] The Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra further clarifies this process: 'By the union of the wisdom and the means [lotus and vajra] *candālī* burns like a lamp, causing intense bliss' to suffuse both mind and body. (9.19).

[15] Glenn Mullin, *Readings on the Six Yogas of Naropa*. (Snow Lion Publications, 1997). The 'four joys' (*catvārimuditā*) are synonymous with the 'four blisses'

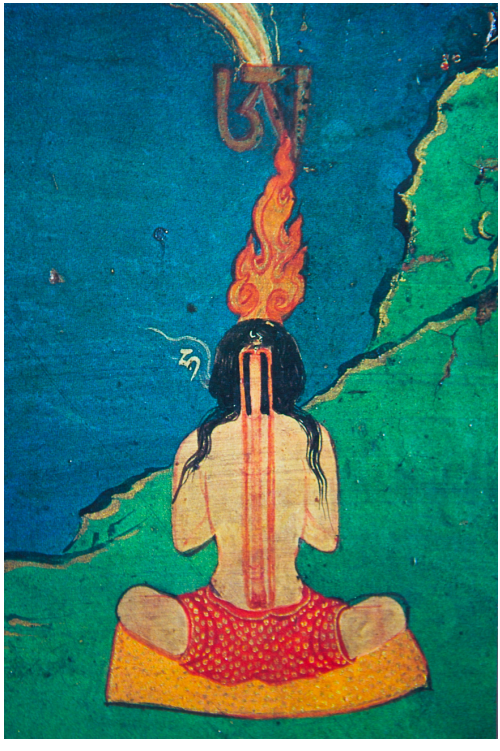

Figure 3. A tantric yogin meditates on the three principle energy channels of the yogic body, using visualisation, breath control, and subtle muscular contractions to generate internal heat and draw energy upward through the central channel. Lukhang Mural, Lhasa, Tibet. Photograph by Ian Baker.

The Anatomy of Bliss

While creation stage Vajrayāna practices involve visualising tantric deities so as to transfigure conventional perceptions of self and reality, completion stage practices associated with the vajra body magnify

(*caturānanda*) described above in footnote 2. As the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra elaborates, 'The *lalanā* channel, with the nature of wisdom, is located on the left, and the *rasanā*, with the nature of means, is located on the right. In the center, between the *lalanā* and *rasanā*, is the *avadhūti*. When the wind-energy in the *avadhūti* is of the same essence as *bodhicitta* [sexual fluid and the bliss of enlightenment], it will descend [through the body] from the fontanel of the skull.' (9.17).

neuropsychophysical processes in order to reveal transpersonal dimensions of mind and body. In yogic practice, the body's innermost structure is described as a network of 72,000 substantive and intangible pathways referred to in Sanskrit as *nāḍi*, or in Tibetan as *tsa*. This para-physiological circulatory system encompasses the flow of blood and pre-lymphatic fluids as well as subtle energy 'winds' known as *prāṇa*, or in Tibetan *lung*, that, when consciously engaged, function as vehicles of amplified awareness.[16] Tibetan tradition likens the integration of consciousness with these subtle energy currents to a rider mastering an otherwise unruly 'wind horse', and thus realising the innate mind of non-referential joy, represented as the *mahāsukhakāya*, or 'body of great bliss', an experiential extension of the embodied trinity of *dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmanakāya*.[17]

In Vajrayāna tradition, meditation instruction on the body's internal maṇḍala of energy channels, winds, and subtle essences is, as described above, traditionally conferred in conjunction with the second of four successive empowerments (*abhiṣeka*) that culminate in realisation of the innate enlightenment of human embodiment.[18] As described in the Hevajra Tantra, the body is a 'shimmering jewel' endowed with ambrosial nectars. Mahāsiddha Virūpa's influential *Vajra Lines* further designates the body as a Tantric text that, when fully comprehended, removes impediments to the realisation of great bliss (*mahāsukha*), a synonym for enlightened existence.

The subtle channels that form the energetic substructure of the vajra body intersect at *cakras*, or 'wheels' along the body's central meridian, which extends downwards as well as upwards from the navel,

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[16] For crosscultural perspectives on the subtle body, see Geoffrey Samuel and Jay Johnston, *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West* (Routledge, 2013).

[17] See note 6 above in reference to the 'three bodies' of enlightenment (*nirmāṇakāya, saṃbhogakāya, dharmakāya*), which can be reductively understood as matter, energy, and consciousness. Within the vajra body, the *nirmāṇakāya*, or 'body of emanation', is located at the navel center. The *saṃbhogakāya*, or 'body of enjoyment', is located at the throat center, while the *dharmakāya*, 'the body of truth', is located at the heart.

[18] The sequence of empowerments in the Buddhist Yoginī Tantras parallels the process of initiation in Kaula Śaivism, most saliently in regard to the 'fluid gnosis' associated with the second and third empowerments. Similarly, Bhairava and Kuleśvari in the Kaula tradition share core iconographical features with the yidam couple Hevajra and Nairātmā Devi, including their encompassing retinues of eight yoginīs.

or 'cakra of emanation'. *Cakras* vary in number between traditions. The Hevajra root-tantra designates four such centers.[19] The slightly later Cakrasaṃvara Tantra denotes five *cakras*, adding the '*cakra* that sustains bliss' in the genital region. The subsequent Kālacakra Tantra enumerates six *cakras*, including the '*cakra* of immortality' at the forehead. The Sakya Lamdré, or 'Path and Fruit' connected to the Hevajra Tantra, delineates eighteen *cakras*, including twelve at the body's principle joints. Other Tantric traditions describe the whirls of energy at the interstices of the body as *ḍākas* and *ḍākinīs*, the animating energies of enlightened consciousness. *Cakras* are also fundamental within Hindu traditions of kuṇḍalinī yoga, which channels psychic energy through a system of seven energy plexuses along the body's central axis.[20]

Within Buddhist Tantra, five principle *cakras* are denoted at the head, throat, heart, navel, and genitals – areas that are easily recognised as interfaces of physiology and psychological states. These energy plexuses are typically represented as 'lotuses' with varying numbers of petals signifying radiating energy channels called *nāḍis*.[21] Each *cakra* is further associated with a vibrational seed-syllable and often with a tantric deity within an encompassing *maṇḍala* circle. As symbols of subtle psychophysical processes connected with the flow of energy (*prāṇa*) and consciousness through the human body, *cakras* support the attainment of Buddhahood through realisation of embodied existence as a unity of emptiness, bliss, and compassion – the subjectively experienced essence of body, speech, and mind.

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[19] See footnote number 13. The Hevajra Tantra further correlates these centers with four states of consciousness: wakefulness, sleep, dream, and a 'fourth' transcendent state.

[20] The ninth-to-tenth-century *Kaulajñānanirnaya,* attributed to the mahāsiddha Matsyendranāth and the core teaching of Kaula Śaivism, is the first Hindu tantric source to use the word *cakra* in reference to seven color-coded energy centers along the body's central axis, from the 'secret place' at the genitals to the crown of the head, and associating them with feminine energies. The first text to use the word kuṇḍalinī in reference to coiled feminine energy at the base of the central channel is the ca. eighth-century Tantrasadbhāva Tantra.

[21] The *nāḍis*, in turn, are conduits for five types of *prāṇa*, or vital 'winds', centered around the heart. The circa sixth-century B.C.E. Chāndogya Upanisad provided an early model of *nāḍi*-based anatomy and maintains that there are one hundred and one channels that emanate from the heart, one of which extends to the crown of the head: 'going up by it, one goes to immortality.' (8.6.6.).

Figure 4. Maṇḍalas of tantric deities emanate from a yogin's heart cakra in this detail from a wall painting in the Devikota temple in Tibet's hidden-land of Pemako. Photograph by Ian Baker.

Maps for Meditation

The subtle anatomy of the adamantine vajra body is the basis in Vajrayāna Buddhism for realising Buddhahood. The standard model of the vajra body comprises a central channel–variously referred to as *madhyanāḍī, susumnā*, and *avadhūti*–flanked by two lateral channels, the white *lalanā* (Tib. *kyangma*) and the red *rasanā* (Tib. *roma*). The majority of Vajrayāna's completion stage techniques involve drawing the 'winds' from the two side channels and dissolving them into the central *avadhūti* channel which, without any identifiable boundary, represents an anatomical analogue of non-duality and emptiness (*śūnyatā*) within the human body.[22]

The existential realisation of 'bliss and emptiness' (*détong yeshé*) and radiant compassion that arises through the skilful means of drawing the body's psychosomatic winds into the central channel is further developed through completion stage practices centred on the focal points of internal energy along the body's central axis. These correlate with six psychophysical processes that were codified in the eleventh-century as the 'Six Yogas of Naropā' and the 'Six Yogas of Niguma', the female mahāsiddhā who, depending on varying sources, was either Naropā's sister or spiritual consort.[23] The so-called Six Yogas represent expedient extracts from the completion stage practices of the most prominent Buddhist *tantras* of eleventh-century India, and they progress sequentially along the vertical axis of the vajra body.[24] But where did the imaginal psychophysiology of the vajra body first arise

[22] The *avadhūti*, or 'all-vibrating' central channel (Tib. *kundarma, tsa uma*) extends from the base of the spine to the crown of the head and is held to consist of the six elements of earth, water, fire, air, space, and imaginal objects. The six corresponding inner elements are flesh, blood, warmth, breath, vacuities, and all-ground consciousness. The six secret elements of the vajra body as a whole consist of *nāḍis* (signifying the earth element), the syllable *hāng* at the crown of the head (representing the liquid water element), the *ah*-stroke at the navel *cakra* (signifying the fire element), the 'life' *prāṇa* (as the moving wind element), the *avadhūti* as the void space element, and the all-ground wisdom as the cognisant wisdom element.

[23] In contrast with the Six Yogas of Naropā, the Six Yogas of Niguma emphasise apparition and dream states. See Sarah Harding, *Niguma: Lady of Illusion* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2010).

[24] See Ian A. Baker, *Tibetan Yoga: Principles and Practices* (Thames and Hudson, 2019) for an overview of the Six Yoga system of Vajrayāna Buddhism.

as a basis for transforming human experience and realising Buddhahood?

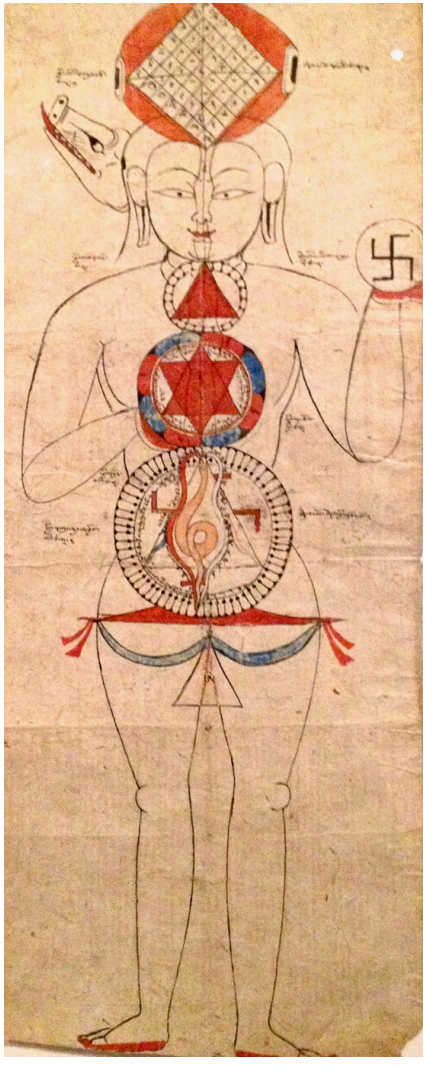

Figure 5. A Tantric meditation chart based on the tantric deity Vajravārāhī. The eleventh century diagram conflates Buddhist, Śaivite, and Bonpo symbolism in its depiction of energy centers along the body's central axis. The body's three principle energy channels are illustrated as uncoiling red, white, and golden serpents. Pritzker Family Collection.

Evolution of the Vajra Body

Although early Buddhist *tantras*, such as the sixth-century 'Secret Assembly' (*Guhyasamāja*), describe energy flows within the practitioner's body, the Hevajra Tantra, variously dated from the eighth to the tenth century, is the first *tantra* to enumerate a specific number of channels (thirty-two) as well as four 'circles' or 'wheels' of subtle energy along the body's central axis.[25] The contemporaneous or slightly later Cakrasaṃ-vara Tantra refers explicitly to five *cakras*, or focal points of awareness along the body's central axis.[26]

Although practices relating to a 'vajra body' of channels, winds, and essences did not emerge in Tibet until the eleventh century, antecedent traditions in India include the Brahmayāmala Tantra, a Tantric Śaivite treatise that refers to six 'lotuses' along the body's central meridian as gates for installing Tantric deities.[27] The eighth-century Netra Tantra, also a Śaivite text, speaks similarly of 'wheels',

[25] Hevajra Tantra 2.4.51-55. The contemporaneous Caryāgīti also describes four 'wheels' at the level of the navel, heart, throat, and head. These centers are further identified with four geographical sites (*pīthas*), corresponding with points of contact between the Indian subcontinent and inner Asia: Kāmākhyā in Assam, Uḍḍiyāṇa in the Swat Valley, and Pūrnagiri and Jālandhara. These same sites are referred to in the Nāth Siddha tradition. See David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 224.

[26] The transmission of Vajrayāna in Tibet during the time of Padmasambhava, in the eighth century, did not include completion stage practices based on channels, winds, and essences (*tsalung thiglé*), as these only emerged within the Nyingma tradition as a consequence of 'treasure texts' (*terma*) that were revealed from the eleventh century onward, after practices of channels, winds, and essences (*nāḍī, prāṇa, bindu*) had already been introduced in Tibet through the Kagyu and Sakya lineages, originating respectively with the tenth-century Indian mahāsiddhās Tilopā and Virūpa.

[27] See Shaman Hatley, 'The Brahmayāmala Tantra' (dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2007). The eighth-century Bhagavata Purana also enumerates six sites along the body's central axis, ending at the cranial vault from where the yogin 'surges upward into the beyond (*param*)'. This model may originate in the ca. 100 C.E. Caraka Samhitā, which lists points in the body associated with vital breath (*prāṇayatana*). See David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 225.

or *cakras,* that are to be pierced with the 'spear of awareness'.[28] But it is the ninth-to-tenth-century Kaulajñānanirnaya Tantra and the tenth-to-eleventh-century Kubjikā Māta Tantra, associated with the Kaula tradition of Tantric Śaivism, that first describe the six *cakras* that we are most familiar with today–from the perineum to the space between the eyebrows–with a seventh *cakra*, the thousand-spoke *saharasrāra cakra* at the crown of the head added subsequently.[29]

Although historiographic evidence suggests that the fundamental constituents of the yogic body–channels and winds–emerged within the context of Tantric Śaivism, the eleventh-century Amṛtasiddhi Tantra, 'Realisation of Immortal Nectar', arose at the interface of Śaivism and Vajrayāna, and is the first Indic text to specify dynamic yogic postures for clearing energetic blockages in the body's central axis (*madhyanāḍī*).[30] Disseminated in Tibet from the twelfth-century, the *Amṛtasiddhi* advanced earlier Vajrayāna accounts of yogic practice by introducing the transformative power of 'solar fire' in the pelvic cavity, de-anthropomorphizing the deified, blissful heat of *caṇḍālī* (Tib. *tummo*) invoked in the earlier Hevajra Tantra. As the *Amṛtasiddhi* states, the radiant 'sphere of the sun at the base of the central channel ... consumes the lunar secretion' at the apex of the body's medial axis, thus leading to a divinised state in which the 'yogin is made of

[28] The Netra Tantra refers specifically to breath control and the raising of the feminine force (*sakti*) for piercing knots in the central channel and internally producing nectar of immortality (Netra Tantra 7.47-49).

[29] The standard names of the six cakras of later Haṭha Yoga tradition are enumerated for the first time in the Kubjikā Māta Tantra. The text further correlates them with six yoginīs. See Mark G. Dyckowski, 'Kubjikā the Erotic Goddess' (*Indological Taurinesia* 21-22, 1995-96), 123-40. The Kubjikā Māta Tantra further points out that, though located within the body, the *cakras* expand infinitely beyond it, thus representing an 'embodied universe' that is projected onto the microcosm of the human body. See David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 227.

[30] See James Mallinson, *The Amṛtasiddhi: Haṭhayoga's tantric Buddhist source text* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). The contemporaneous Kubjikā Māta Tantra, attributed to Bhairava, also discusses physical yoga techniques, including the cock pose (*kukuttāsana*) that causes the piercing of knots in the central channel and thus contributes to the attainment of *siddhis* (Kubjikāmāta, 23.115-25).

everything, composed of all elements, always dwelling in omniscience ... Delighted, he liberates the world.'[31]

Central to this process of self-transformation involving metaphors of sun, moon, and fire are psychophysical techniques that cause the body's innermost vital essences, or *bindu*, to infuse the axial core of the vajra body and thereby induce a radiant state of timeless awareness. It's important to point out that, although practices connected to channels, winds, and subtle essences became increasingly 'secret' within Tibetan monastic communities and society, this was not originally the case.[32] One of the earliest datable accounts of external yogic exercises in Tibetan Buddhism is the 'Thirty-two Actions of the Path and Result', composed by Phagmo Drupa Dorje Gyalpo (1110 - 1170) who maintained that the practices are suitable for both beginners and advanced practitioners alike and should be taught without restriction.[33] A similarly open ethos is evident in the contemporaneous 'Realisation of Immortal Nectar' (*Amṛtasiddhi*) as well as the 'Turquoise Heart Essence' (Yuthok Nyingthik) teachings transmitted by Yuthok Yönten Gönpo (1126–1202).

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[31] For a detailed introduction to the *Amṛtasiddhi* corpus and the source of this quotation, see Kurtis Schaeffer, 'The Attainment of Immortality: from Nāthas in India to Buddhists in Tibet'. (*Journal of Indian Philosophy, 30* (6), 2002). For an account of the Haṭha Yoga techniques central to the *Amṛtasiddhi* see James Mallinson, *The Amṛtasiddhi: Haṭhayoga's tantric Buddhist source text* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). In the *Amṛtasiddhi*, the practitioner imaginatively transforms into the Hindu deity Śiva who is often presented within Vajrayāna as having been converted into a Buddha by the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi. Within the Trika Śaivism of Kashmir, Śiva is synonymous with "pure consciousness" and non-dual awareness.

[32] See Ian A. Baker, *Tibetan Yoga: Principles and Practices* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2019).

[33] See Ian A. Baker, *Tibetan Yoga: Principles and Practices* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2019). See also Kurtis R. Schaeffer, 'The Attainment of Immortality: from Nāthas in India to Buddhists in Tibet'. (*Journal of Indian Philosophy, 30*(6), 2002), 515 – 533).

Figure 6. Lama Tshewang Sitar performs a 'yogic drop' (beb) in the Gaden Lhakhang in Ura, Bhutan. Such drops are integral to the practice of Tsalung Trulkhor for concentrating psychophysical energy in the body's central channel. Photograph by Ian Baker.

Vajra Body Yoga

In practice, yogic methods connected with the vajra body involve consciously engaging autonomic functions of human physiology so as to optimize the flow of energy and awareness within the body's internal network of psychic channels, or *nāḍī,* and thereby removing subtle physiological, psychological, and energetic blockages, called *granthi*, along the body's central meridian.[34] When practiced correctly, yogic breathing exercises connected with the body's channels and winds (*tsalung*) recalibrate consciousness by mobilising the psychoenergetic resources of the upper and lower *cakras* and unifying consciousness at the heart centre, the nexus of the body's estimated seventy-five trillion cells.[35] In the illuminated heart, illusions of separation vanish and, what the Buddha called *avidya*, not knowing, transforms into radiant realisation of the dynamic interconnectivity that unifies and empowers all life.

Early Tantric Buddhist texts describe the activated energies of the lower *cakras* as rising like solar flares through the body's central channel and 'melting' the luminous, lunar secretions (*bindu*) in the brain, which, in turn, stream down like nectar (*amṛta*) and give rise to increasingly subtle states of consciousness, and ultimately to the realisation of the nondual expanse of emptiness and luminosity, the 'clear light' (*prabhāsvaratā;* Tib. *ösel*) held to be the mind and body's innermost radiant nature.

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[34] As the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra states, 'By arresting the *prāṇa*, the mind will be arrested, for their movements are reciprocal.' (22.27). The Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra further indicates that the central *avadhūti* channel conducts *prāṇa* during states of innate joy (*sahajānanda*).

[35] The two lateral channels of the vajra body are correlated with various pairs of opposites, including female and male and sun and moon. Contemporary polarities associated with the *lananā* and *rasanā* include the left and right hemispheres of the brain and the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems. Drawing the energies of the two sides channels into the central *avadhūti* channel signifies a state of nonduality, characterised as a dynamic integration of stillness and heightened attention and visceral wisdom. As the Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa Tantra states, the *avadhūti* 'conducts *prāṇa* in moments of joy' (22.6) ... When the wind in the *avadhūti* has become of the same [blissful] nature as seminal emissions, it will flow downward from the fontanel of the skull.' (9.17).

Tantric Buddhist yoga conceptualises the interface of consciousness and physiology in terms of *bindu* (Tib. *tiglé*), subtle mood-modifying substances and circular light apparitions. Within Tantric practice, *bindu* customarily refers to the energetic potency of male and female sexual secretions. As the interface between consciousness and matter within the human body, *bindu* may also relate to information-bearing neuropeptide molecules, including endorphins, concentrated on lateral sides of the spinal cord and associated with subjective states of physiological and psychological wellbeing. As physiological correlates of emotion, peptide substrate in the human body has also been associated with the health promoting effects of consciously controlled breathing patterns, the foundation of Vajrayāna completion stage practices involving channels, winds, and subtle essences.[36] Such speculations at the juncture of time-honored tradition and contemporary medicine and science suggest ways in which Vajrayāna, as a modernist movement within Buddhism based on unifying wisdom and skilful means, may potentially begin to reinvent itself in the context of 21st century transnational realities and technological advancement.

[36] *Tsalung trulkhor's* synchronization of awareness, breath, and proprioceptive movement interfaces with the body's enteric, or visceral nervous system, positively effecting vagal tone, hormonal expression, and wellbeing. Possible correlations exist between the subtle anatomy described in Tantric Buddhism and the human microvascular system, as well as reflexive processes within the myofascia, the connective tissue that interfaces with muscles, ligaments, and bones. The internal tingling of prāṇa associated with *tsalung* and related practices, for example, has been observed to relate to mechanisms of the relaxation response in which activation of the parasympathetic nervous system system dilates blood vessels and markedly increases blood flow.

Figure 7. A painting of Vajrayoginī shows smaller yoginīs emanating from her cakras. The ornaments of human bone signify the charnel grounds that were favoured sites of tantric practice.

The Future of the Vajra Body

As this paper has discussed, the vajra body developed within diverse Indic traditions as a model for meditative ascent through an energetic anatomy reflective of a larger elemental cosmos.[37] Comparative study

[37] For example, as *kuṇḍalinī* rises through the body's medial channel, earth implodes into water at the level of the navel, water into fire at the solar plexus,

reveals that the yogic body was continually evolving, and that no consensus existed at any one time as to the specific attributes of the vajra body as the locus of inner Vajrayāna practice.[38] It is also evident that the hierarchical energy plexuses aligned along the vertical axis of the yogic body represent, in part, an internalisation of female Yoginīs who once held a more prominent role in external tantric rites.[39]

Beyond their mythopoetic attributes, the vajra body's central channel and two side channels appear to refer to the structure and processing of energy within the human body, while the 'vital essences' (*bindu*; Tib. *thiglé*) refer to a regenerative, perhaps endocrinal, substrate through which a state of consciousness arises characterised by bliss, clarity, and insight into the 'empty', dependently arising nature of all phenomena. From this perspective, channels (*nāḍī*) represent the self-organizing principle of the human body, while the energy currents (*prāṇa*) signify maintenance, and the *bindu*, or *thiglé*, the body's innate capacity to regenerate. At another register, the three principle energy channels of the yogic body parallel the hypothalamic–pituitary–gonadal (HPG) axis of the human endocrine system.[40] Traditional descriptions, however, tend to be more poetic. The fourteenth-century

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fire into air at the level of the heart, and air into space at the level of the throat. The body as a whole thus comprises a microcosm of universal processes.

[38] See Geoffrey Samuel and Jay Johnston, *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West* (Routledge, 2013). David Gordon White further elucidates how the hierarchical *cakras* of the yogic body represent a gradual internalisation of external formations (*cakras*) of powerful female entities. See David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 222.

[39] See David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini* (University of Chicago Press, 2003) for specific examples of Vajrayāna Buddhism's internalisation of Śaivite Kaula rituals, including 'upward progress' (*utkrāntī*) through the *cakras*, guided by *yoginīs,* and corresponding downward movement conferring bliss. The *cakras* through which *kuṇḍalinī* pierces, for example, are likened to cremation grounds, whereby yoginīs return to an anatomical analogue of their original habitat.

[40] The central *avadhūti* channel, literally the 'vibrating messenger', extends into the hippocampus region in the brain that is associated with learning and memory and modulates emotion. The hippocampus thrives on heightened levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin, which has been shown to increase through yogic practice. Serotonin is linked with subjective states of euphoria and wellbeing which, in turn, increase the production of stem cells in the brain as well as BDNF, a growth hormone that has been shown to shift the brain from its default program of defensiveness and aggression.

Kashmiri adept Lalla, for example, stated the matter succinctly: 'Gathering the reins of the equine mind and mastering the breath, the moon in my head melted, flowing throughout my body. Nothingness merging with nothingness.'

While the creation stage practices of Vajrayāna Buddhism actively engage imagination, intellect, and emotion in liberating reified perceptions of reality, subtler yogic practices of the completion stage extend the process through an envisioned metaphysical anatomy activated through mental focus, respiratory control, and the dynamic physical disciplines of *tsalung trulkhor*, the 'magical wheel of channels and winds' that reveal the body as an unimpeded flow of luminous awareness.[41]

While the six yogas of the completion stage based on the yogic, or vajra body entrain psycho-physiological processes towards realisation of an illuminated condition of body, speech, and mind, recent advances in the scientific study of human anatomy have revealed previously unknown structures and processes within the microanatomy of the human body that may influence the ways in which practices based on the vajra body are conceived in future generations. Briefly stated, these advances include the recently discovered interstitium, the highly dynamic fluid-filled space between cell walls and internal structures of the human body;[42] the microvascular system, involving minute arteries originating at the heart that convey blood to specific organs; neuropeptides, the small protein-like molecules that parallel the spine and through which neurons communicate and influence the activity of the brain;[43] the enteric nervous system and its proliferation of neurons beyond the brain; and mindbody disciplines that measurably promote the production of brain-derived neurotropic factor (BDNF), an enzyme

[41] See Ian A. Baker, *Tibetan Yoga: Principles and Practices* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2019).

[42] See Petros C. Benias, Neil D. Theise et al, 'Structure and Distribution of an Unrecognised Interstitium in Human Tissues' (*Scientific Reports* 8(1), 2018). Chinese medicine recognises the interstitium's interface with the vagus nerve, which is called San Jiao, or the Triple Burner, in recognition of its role in regulating the endocrine system. The meridian also flows through the periphery of the abdominal wall, thus accounting for the remedial effects of abdominal breathing exercises that interface with the parasympathetic nervous system.

[43] For early research on this subject, see Candice Pert, *Molecules of Emotion: The Science behind Mind-Body Medicine* (Scribner, 1999).

that repairs the brain and supports the body's ability to produce neural stem cells.

Other areas of contemporary scientific research with potential impact on conceptions of the vajra body include the mitochondria, the *nāḍī*-like organelles involved in cellular metabolism and implicated in human longevity.[44] The adenosine triphosphate (ATP), or *prāṇa*-reminiscent cellular energy that mitochondria convert from oxygen and nutrients may, along with endogenous neurochemicals such as dopamine and serotonin, relate to the body's proliferation of 'mind-altering' red and white *bindu* (Tib. *thiglé*) in the context of Tantric Buddhist yoga. The practice of *tsalung trulkhor*, for example, has been shown to stimulate core processes within the body's myofascia, or connective tissue.[45] Breath-controlled movements associated with similar practices have been shown to activate the release of mesenchymal stem cells (MSC) associated with cellular regeneration and increased longevity as well as increased production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein essential for creating and maintaining healthy neurons.

[44] Mitochondria have DNA that is separate from human DNA. Unlike the double helix structure of human DNA, the DNA of mitochondria resembles a microscopic string of pearls. Whereas human have 24,000 genes, mitochondria have only 38, yet they are crucial to human longevity. Mitochondrial DNA is passed down through the genes of the mother, making it a feminine life force passed down through generations.

[45] See Alejandro Chaoul, 'Magical movement (*'phrul 'khor*) in the Bon Tradition and Possible Applications as a CIM Therapy' (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), 285-304.

Figure 8. A practitioner of inner heat (tummo) wears a meditation belt (gomtrag) to stabilize his posture while performing breathing exercises for drawing vital energy and awareness into his central channel. Ogyen Choling Manor, Bumthang, Bhutan. Photograph by Ian Baker.

Conclusion

Areas of contemporary research, ranging from epigenetics and bioplasticity to artificial intelligence, present productive challenges to Vajrayāna Buddhism's overriding dedication to ending ignorance and

suffering and maximizing the human potential for wisdom and compassion. Tantra's fundamental insight that the body is the abode of all truth has enormous implications as Vajrayāna Buddhism adapts to 21st century life and culture. Vajrayāna's creation stage yoga concludes with recognition of the innate enlightenment of the bodymind, conceiving of its dynamic unity as the ultimate deity. Subsequent completion stage practices begin with realisation of the human body as an essentially boundless dimension of consciousness, and proceeds through inspired experimentation with its fundamental constituents of channels, winds, and subtle essences.

The 'great bliss' that is experientially revealed through meditative and yogic practices based on the vajra body reveals the ultimate nondual nature of mind and reality. As described in early tantric texts such as the Hevajra Tantra, this illuminated state pervades all beings. And though it is not of the body, it can only be experienced in the body. Vajrayāna exegesis proceeds further in the thirteenth century through the observations of the great Tibetan adept Gyalwa Yangönpa (1213-1287). In his treatise *Hidden Description of the Vajra Body*, Yongönpa indicates the human body itself as the 'method that clarifies all the teachings'.[46] Beyond the then prevailing accounts of the body's innermost esoteric nature, Yongönpa refers to the conventionally experienced body, speech, and mind as gateways for realising the three bodies (*trikāya*) of absolute reality as the innermost essence of one's lived experience as a human being. He further notes that 'If you do not understand the fundamental nature of the body, you will not understand the essential point of meditation'.[47] His insights speak to us today in the context of ever advancing knowledge of quantum dynamics and the structure and substance of the universe itself.

Expanding knowledge of the human body has revealed its inherent 'selflessness' in ways that neither early Buddhism nor Vajrayāna ever imagined. As importantly, contemporary research has extended insight into the body's processing of information and the ultimately nonlocal nature of consciousness, extending the range of 'skilful means'.[48] Vajrayāna's special provenance has always been its ability to reveal

[46] Gyalwa Yangönpa, Secret Map of the Body: Visions of the Human Energy Structure. (Shang Shung Publications, 2017).

[47] Ibid.

[48] See David J. Chalmers, 'Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness' (Journal of Consciousness Studies 2: 200-19, 1995).

new dimensions of consciousness by experientially engaging the energetic and imaginal substrate of the human body, the subtle dimension between matter and mind.[49] It is in this expanding field of research and awareness where 'skilful means', whether traditional or newly conceived, can advance Vajrayāna's dedication to universal enlightenment and altruistic freedom. No one said better than the great eighth-century princess-turned-yoginī, Khandro Yeshé Tsogyal, a female archetype of enlightened awareness: 'To voyage through the sky with this material body, meditate on the subtle channels and inner winds, and gain mastery over your energies and thoughts. Ultimate accomplishment is nothing other than this!'[50]

Whether a powerful metaphor or a call to transcend the laws of classical physics, Yeshé Tsogyal's words remind us that the better we know ourselves and our minds and bodies, the more we can help to change the world in positive ways.

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[49] In Mundus Imaginalis, Henry Corbin describes creative or active imagination as 'a faculty of perception, a noetic value, as fully real as the faculties of sensory perception or intellectual intuition. '

[50] See Gyalwa Changchub and Namkhai Nyingpo, Lady of the Lotus-Born: The Life and Enlightenment of Yeshe Tsogyal (Boston: Shambhala, 1999). Analogously, Gampopa, the foremost disciple of the Tibetan adept Milarepa, is said to have experienced his body as being as vast as the sky. From the top of his head to the tips of his toes, his whole body, including all of his limbs, was populated by sentient beings. See Garma C.C. Chang, The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa (Boulder: Shambhala, 1962), 479.

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The Four Signs of Mahāmudrā Meditation – The Prevailing Topic in Karma Phrin las pa's Dohā Commentary[51]

Klaus-Dieter Mathes

In his commentary on Saraha's Peoples' Dohās (dMangs do hā), Karma Phrin las pa (1456-1539) repeatedly comments on various verses in terms of secret pith instructions, the so-called four signs or symbols (Tib. brda) in ḍākinī language.[52] They are mindfulness (dran pa), beyond mindfulness (dran med), non-arising (skye med), and transcending the intellect (blo 'das), and stand for a four-step Mahāmudrā meditation. The four signs are already found in the Heart Sūtra commentary (Toh. 3820) of Maitrīpa's (986-1063) heart disciple

[51] Improvements to my English by Michele Martin (Buddhist Digital Resource Center) are gratefully acknowledged.

[52] See Karma Phrin las pa: "bTsun mo do ha'i ṭī ka 'bring po" 120$_{13-14}$: "E ma! The secret ḍākinī language is the basis of mahāmudrā, whose nature is non-duality." (e ma mkha' gsang ba'i skad | | gnyis med rang bzhin phyag rgya chen po'i gnas |)

The commentary on these lines (op. cit. 120$_{20-22}$) is as follows: "Ḍākas and yoginīs magically fly through the sky and their secret language, spoken in a language of 'signs' (brda), such as "mindfulness," and "beyond mindfulness," is difficult to understand by ordinary persons. Therefore it is amazing." (dpa' bo dang rnal 'byor ma rnams ni nam mkha' la rdzu 'phrul gyi bgrod pas 'gro bas nam mkha' 'gro de rnams kyi gsang ba'i skad ni dran pa dran med sogs brda'i skad du gsungs pa phal gyis rtogs dka' bas na ngo mtshar che ba'o)

Vajrapāṇi (1017-?).[53] While mindfulness of the illusion-like character of what directly manifests to the sense faculties constitutes the teaching for ordinary beings, the three remaining signs, or "practices" (*dharma*s), as Vajrapāṇi calls them, are based on the profound nature of phenomena, which is beyond the reach of ordinary beings:

> The *dharma* taught to ordinary people is the *samādhi* of realizing everything as illusion, which through mindfulness takes manifold appearances as objects – [a practice] based on being mindful of phenomena's indivisible union [with mind][54] as ascertained through the direct cognition provided by one's sense faculties. Now those [practices] based on the profound nature of phenomena, which is not the experiential object of ordinary people, are [the remaining three *dharma*s of] "beyond mindfulness," "non-arising," and "transcending the intellect." They are the three *samādhi*s of emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness, and the direct perception of the mental faculty, the direct perception of self-awareness, and yogic direct perception. Through them together with the non-foundation of empti[ness], non-foundation of equanimity, and non-foundation of interruption [we present instruction relating to] the threefold insight (*prajñā*) beyond the three conditions [of cognition]. Śāriputra, in this way all phenomena are [seen to be] emptiness.[55]

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[53] Roerich 1988: 843.

[54] See Karma Phrin las pa, who explains the first dharma of mindfulness in his dMangs do ha'i rnam bshad 31_{17} as follows: "Through the special instructions on "mindfulness" manifold appearances are known to be mind [only]..." (dran pa'i man ngag gis snang ba sna tshogs pa sems su shes pas...)

[55] BhPHṬAP (D 288b$_6$-289a$_2$; P 312a$_{2-6}$): snang ba sna tshogs dran pas yul du byas pa'i sgyu ma lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin dbang po'i mngon sum gyis gtan la phab pa'i chos thams cad zung du 'jug pa'i dran pa la brten pa so so'i skye bo'i chos bstan zin to | | da ni zab mo'i chos nyid la brten pa so so'i skye bo'i spyod yul ma yin pa dran pa med pa dang | skye ba med pa dang | blo'i spyod yul las 'das pa de ni stong pa nyid dang | mtshan ma med pa dang | smon pa med pa'i ting nge 'dzin gsum po ni yid kyi mngon sum dang | rang rig pa'i mngon sum dang | rnal 'byor gyi mngon sum gyis stong pa'i rab tu mi gnas pa dang | btang snyoms rab tu mi gnas pa dang | rgyun chad rab tu mi gnas pa dang gsum gyis rkyen gsum dang bral ba'i shes rab rnam gsum gyi gdams ngag ni | shā ri'i bu de lta bas na chos thams cad stong pa nyid de | My translation differs from the one of Lopez (1996:206-207) only in terminology.

Once the first practice, which in *ḍākinī* language is symbolically called "mindfulness" is left behind, mind itself can be realised as being empty. This enables an immediate access to the true nature of phenomena that enables the kind of instantaneous approach, for which the Mahāmudrā lineage of Saraha and the Maitrīpa circle is well-known. In his introductory explanation of the Heart Sūtra's four syllables *e vaṃ ma yā*, Vajrapāṇi thus distinguishes, just as in his **Guruparaṃparākrama-Upadeśa*,[56] an instantaneous from a gradual approach:

> The four dharmas (i.e., the four signs or practices) pertaining to the identical essence of the nature of mind and the nature of phenomena are "mindfulness," "beyond mindfulness," "non-arising," and "transcending the intellect." They are heard at one and the same time in two ways – profound and manifest. The profound is beyond studying, reflecting, and meditation. It is an expression that denotes instantaneous abiding in an equipoise that is not essentially different from the dharmadhātu of all the Buddhas of the three times and sentient beings of the three realms.[57]

In his *Zhi byed* Middle Transmission, namely in the **Mahāmudrātattvanākṣaropadeśa* (Toh. 2325), which is included in last of the Nine Lamps (*sGron ma skor dgu*),[58] Dam pa Sangs rgyas[59] attributes the last three of the four signs to Saraha:

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[56] Mathes 2007:548-49.

[57] BhPHṬAP (D 286b$_{7}$-287a$_{2}$; P 309b$_{5-8}$): sems nyid dang chos nyid kyi ngo bo gcig la dran pa dang | dran pa med pa dang | skye ba med pa dang | blo las 'das pa chos bzhi po dus gcig pa las zab pa dang | snang ba'i tshul rnam pa gnyis kyis thos so | de yang zab pa ni thos pa dang bsam pa dang bsgom pa las 'das pa ste | dus gsum du rnam par bzhugs pa'i sangs rgyas rnams dang | khams gsum gyi sems can ma lus pa'i chos kyi dbyings kyi ngo bo tha mi dad pa'i skad cig ma gcig la mnyam pa nyid la gnas pa'i tshig bla dags so |. My translation differs from the one of Lopez (1996:202-203) only in terminology.

[58] See Bu ston chos 'byung 305$_{5-10}$.

[59] In the colophon, Kamalaśīla is mentioned as author, but Dam pa sangs rgyas also goes under this name (Bu ston chos 'byung 305$_{5}$). See also Hopkins (1983: 536-37), who reports the legend that Pha dam pa Sangs rgyas lived for over five hundred years and was Bodhidharma, also known as Kamalaśīla (but not Śāntarakṣita's student Kamalaśīla). In his Blue Annals, 'Gos Lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal (Roerich 1988: 871) reports that the sādhana of Yamāntaka and the three cycles of Zhi byed sgrol ma (to which our text belongs) were preached by Dam pa

> With the three *kāya*s in equanimity, there are, for Saraha,
> [The three signs of] beyond mindfulness, non-arising, and
> transcending the intellect.[60]

In other words, the first of the four signs, mindfulness, is missing here. This means that Saraha either teaches a revolutionary direct Mahāmudrā path (even for beginners), or tacitly presupposes mindfulness as an initial step. A further possibility is that Saraha's teaching is meant for advanced practitioners only, who do not concentrate anymore on what directly appears to the sense faculties.[61] The initial modifier "with the three *kāya*s in equanimity" suggests this interpretation. In his **Sarvayogatattvāloka* (Toh. 2453), Dam pa sangs rgyas quotes a verse attributed to the yoginī Sukhasiddhi, who describes a similarly advanced path starting from "beyond mindfulness":

> The path to nirvāṇa, on which the objects of the six types of consciousness
> Are not enjoyed, and which is beyond mindfulness
> Is the dharmadhātu without concepts.
> Being free from mental consciousness, it is mahāmudrā.[62]

It should be noted that this approach differs from Vajrapāṇi's system, in which "beyond mindfulness" refers to the direct perception of the sixth consciousness and so it is not free of the six types of consciousness.

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to the Kashmirian Jñānaguhya. They were then taught by Dam pa and Jñānaguhya to Ong po Lo tsā ba. The latter taught them to Lo btsun chung, who translated the *Mahāmudrātattvanākṣaropadeśa into Tibetan.

[60] MTAĀU (D 266b$_{6-7}$; P 283b$_{5}$): sku gsum mnyam gzhag mda' bsnun na || dran med skye med blo las 'das ||

[61] As for Saraha's dohās, Karma bKra shis chos 'phel, a dPal spung monk and disciple of Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813-1899), classifies them as essence mahāmudrā, as they teach a short and direct path (Mathes 2011:102).

[62] SYTĀ (D 101a$_{3-4}$; P 127b$_{3-4}$): | tshogs drug yul du ma spyad pa'i | | dran med mya ngan 'das pa'i lam | | rnam par mi rtog chos kyi dbyings || yid dang bral bas phyag rgya che || zhes gsung ngo |

A preliminary survey of the *locus classicus* of the four signs, i.e., Advaya Avadhūtīpa's (11th-13th cent.?)[63] **Dohākoṣasārārthagītāṭīkā*, also shows a rather reserved attitude towards mind-fulness, which is clear from the following passages:

> As a result of mindfulness, one wanders in *saṃsāra*. As a result of not wavering from a state beyond mindfulness, one finds *nirvāṇa*.[64]

At the time when one is [still] ignorant – neither knowing, nor realizing, nor perceiving – the genuine guru's teaching in terms of the signs and means is as follows: Abandoning mindfulness is generosity, experiencing the state beyond mindfulness is discipline, [enduring] non-arising is acceptance, and the meditative concentration of inseparable, uninterrupted diligence is insight transcending the intellect.[65]

It is particularly noteworthy that one even abandons mindfulness in an act of generosity when still ignorant and not knowing. This excludes the possibility of restricting "beyond mindfulness" and the rest to an advanced level of the path. In the **Dohākoṣasārārthagītāṭīkā* we also find an explanation of the first three of the four signs with regard to appearances that is found again in different variations in Karma Phrin las pa's commentary:

> To encounter [any] appearance is "mindfulness." To encounter [its] emptiness is "beyond mindfulness."' To encounter "non-arising" is non-arisen reality.[66]

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[63] Schaeffer 2005:20. Further research is needed in order to determine whether this is Maitrīpa (986-1063), who also goes under the names of Advayavajra and Avadhūtīpa.

[64] DKSGṬ (D 82a6; P 113b$_5$): dran pa las[a] 'khor bar 'khor la | dran pa med pa las ma g.yos mya ngan las 'das pa'o |

[a] D la

[65] DKSGṬ (D 92b$_{1-2}$; P 124a$_{5-6}$): ma rig pa dang | ma shes pa dang | ma rtogs pa mi dmigs pa'i dus su | bla ma dam pas brda dang thabs kyis bstan pa[a] de ni | dran pa spangs pa sbyin pa dang | dran med myong tshul khrims | skye med bzod pa | dbyer med brtson 'grus rgyun mi 'chad pa bsam gtan blo las 'das pa shes rab |

[a] P pa'i

[66] DKSGṬ (D 92b$_4$; P 124b$_1$): snang ba thug phrad dran pa'o | stong pa thug phrad ni dran med do | skye med thug phrad ni de nyid ma skyes pa'o |

To sum up this introduction, there are indications that the four-step Mahāmudrā meditation of the four signs has its origin in India, the **Mahāmudrātattvanākṣaropadeśa* attributing the final three signs even to Saraha. Together with initial mindfulness, Saraha's three signs become an ideal commentarial structure, which plays into the hands of Karma Phrin las pa's hermeneutical project of systematically reading a gradual Mahāmudrā path into Saraha's *dohā*s. In his *dohā* commentary, Karma Phrin las pa sometimes distinguishes outer, inner, and secret explanations, and the four signs are, with one exception, mentioned in terms of the last of these categories.

Of particular interest is Karma Phrin las pa's secret interpretation of Saraha's *dohā* on *gaṇacakra*, which is verse 24 in the *dMangs do hā*:

> Eating, drinking, enjoying intercourse,
> And always filling the *cakra*s, again and again –
> Through such a teaching, one attains the other world (i.e., *mahāmudrā*).
> [The master] stamps on the heads of those in the ignorant world and moves on.

The outer explanation elaborates the *gaṇacakra* feast in a way that reveals tantric details, which are normally kept secret:

> As for the outer explanation, having received empowerment, one eats the meat and drinks the alcohol of the *gaṇa[cakra]* substances. Then, after having blessed her secret space, one unites with a qualified *karmamudrā*, who is endowed with three authentic perceptions. Through this intercourse, the four joys are recognised and sustained, namely as they arise in progressive and reverse order – all this is in accordance with the pith instructions of the lama. During this process one fills the four *cakra*s [with the drops moving down] from above and then [returning] from below. Through such a practice one transcends the world and becomes a transmundane Buddha. [The master] stamps on the heads of worldly people who are, without empowerment, ignorant about spiritual maturation, and without guidance, ignorant about pith instructions. Stamping down on the ignorant, he moves on to the level of a Buddha through the means of removing delusion.[67]

[67] Karma Phrin las pa : "dMangs do ha" 30_{22}-31_{9}: phyi ltar du bshad na | dbang bskur ba thob nas tshogs rdzas kyi sha la sogs pa za zhing chang sogs 'thung la |

The inner explanation of the same verse is as follows:

> As for the inner explanation, once the yoga of the secret Mantra [Path] has been taken up, one eats and drinks the pure, essential [forms of meat] and the five nectars, and meditates on channels and winds, bodhicitta and union. Through that, the wisdom of the four joys arises in one's continuum. When it becomes a stable experience in oneself, one continuously cultivates it again and again, which fills the cakras with the pure elements,[68] the wisdom of great bliss. …[69]

Paradoxically, the exoteric (or "sūtric") yet "secret" commentary in terms of the four signs now replaces the esoteric tantric teachings of the outer and inner explanation:

> As for the secret explanation, through the pith instructions on "mindfulness" one recognises the manifold appearances as mind and eats them. Through the pith instructions on "beyond mindfulness", one recognises this very mind as empty and drinks it. Through the pith instructions on "non-arising" both appearance and mind meet in the single taste [of everything] and are [thus realised as] being united in indivisible union. Through the pith instructions on "transcending the intellect" one embraces self-awareness as co-emergent joy. Through the pith instruction on practicing ineffable reality, one fills continuously [one's] mental continuum with wisdom

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phyag rgya mtshan ldan dang 'du shes gsum ldan kyis mkha' gsang byin gyis brlabs nas snyoms par zhugs te | dbang po gnyis sprod cing bsrub pa sogs kyis dga' bzhi rim bzhin lugs 'byung lugs bzlog tu skye ba de nyid bla ma'i man ngag gis ngos bzung zhing skyong ba la sogs pa'i dus rtag tu yang dang yang du rtsa'i 'khor lo bzhi po la yas 'bebs shing 'gengs pa dang | mas gshegs su gsol zhing 'gengs pa'i nyams len gyi chos 'di lta bus 'jig rten 'di las pha rol 'jig rten las 'das pa'i sangs rgyas 'grub par 'gyur te | dbang ma thob pas smin byed la rmongs pa dang | khrid ma thob pas gdams ngag la rmongs pa'i 'jig rten pa rnams kyi mgo bor rdog pa bzhag nas rmongs pa de mnan de ma rmongs pa'i thabs kyis sangs rgyas kyi sar song ngo |

[68] i.e., the red and white drops.

[69] Op. cit. 31$_{10\text{-}14}$: nang ltar du bshad na | gsang sngags kyi rnal 'byor la zhugs nas dwangs snying bdud rtsi lnga la sogs pa za zhing 'thung la | rtsa rlung dang | byang sems gnyis sprod cing bsgoms pas dga' ba bzhi'i ye shes rang rgyud la shar ba rang gnas su brtan zhing nyams su myong ba de nyid dus rtag tu yang nas yang du bsgoms pas rtsa'i 'khor lo rnams khams kyi dwangs ma bde ba chen po'i ye shes kyis 'gengs pa'i …

> again and again in an effort that is unceasing as a [turning] wheel.[70] By practicing such a teaching, one passes beyond this world.[71]

In other words, eating and drinking the *gaṇacakra* substances equates with mindfulness and beyond mindfulness, which means that being mindful one eats the manifold appearances by recognizing them as not being different from mind. "Beyond mindfulness" then refers to drinking the mind by realizing its emptiness. "Non-arising" is then related to intercourse, understood in the sense of the indivisible union of appearances and mind. This must be taken against the background that appearances and mind are identical in terms of their non-arising or emptiness. In the formal tantric practice of the outer and inner explanations, the *cakra*s are filled through controlling the winds in the energy channels. This helps to recognise and sustain the four joys. The pith instructions called "transcending the intellect" help to embrace self-awareness as co-emergent joy, which is the most supreme of the four joys.

Karma Phrin las further elaborates the four *gaṇacakra* elements of eating, drinking, intercourse, and filling the *cakra*s in a further explanation of verse 24:

> As for the explanation in terms of true reality, the Mahāmudrā yogin takes as his food the appearances, which emerge in unobstructed vibrant radiance. He takes as his drink emptiness – their dissolving into the non-arising fundamental state. Both appearance and emptiness are united in indivisible union. Putting this into practice, the effortless joy of reflexive self-awareness becomes directly manifest. If one practices in such a sequence continuously again and again, filling the *cakra*s of knowable objects – all phenomenal

[70] It should be noted that the *cakra*s of the *vajra* body become here the metaphor of a wheel (*cakra*) to express continuous practice.

[71] Op. cit. 31$_{17\text{-}22}$: *gsang ba ltar bshad na | dran pa'i man ngag gis snang ba sna tshogs pa sems su shes pas za zhing | dran med kyi man ngag gis sems nyid stong par shes pas 'thung la | skye med kyi man ngag gis snang sems de gnyis ro gcig tu sprod cing zung 'jug tu sbyar nas | blo 'das kyi man ngag gis rang rig lhan cig skyes pa'i dga' bar 'chang zhing | brjod du med pa'i don nyams su len pa la dus rtag tu yang yang brtson pa rgyun mi 'chad pa 'khor lo lta bu'i man ngag gis shes rgyud ye shes kyis 'gengs par byed na | nyams len gyi chos 'di lta bus 'jig rten rol zhes sogs sam |*

> existence – with co-emergent wisdom, one reaches the other world through this Dharma of inseparable union. ….[72]

This departure from the physical elements of *gaṇacakra* to a mere mental level of eating appearances and drinking the mind (i.e., realizing its emptiness) in accordance with the second explanation, finds its parallel in the tantric Nāgārjuna's *Caturmudrānvaya* and the works of Maitrīpa (986-1063), such as the *Sekanirdeśa* and *Caturmudropadeśa*. These texts teach the sequence of four seals (*karmamudrā, dharmamudrā, mahāmudrā,* and *samayamudrā*), which lies at the center of the completion stage practice in the Yoginītantras. [73] *Karmamudrā* practice involves an initial recognition of four joys (joy, supreme joy, co-emergent joy, and joy beyond joy) at four distinct moments (manifold activity, maturation, freedom from defining characteristics, and relaxation) on a physical level in a way similar to what happens during a *gaṇacakra* feast. The four joys are then experienced again on the level of *dharmamudrā*, which is based on speech,[74] and the respective instructions are similar to the ones of the four pith instructions in Karma Phrin las pa's *Dohā* commentary, as can

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[72] Op. cit. $32_{1\text{-}6}$: *de kho na nyid du 'chad na | phyag rgya chen po'i rnal 'byor pa des ni gdangs 'gag med la shar ba'i snang ba zad su za zhing | gzhis skye med la thim pa'i stong pa skom du 'thung la | snang stong gnyis po dbyer med zung 'jug sprod cing nyams su blangs pas gzhol med kyi dga' ba rang rig mngon du 'gyur zhing | de lta bu'i rim pas dus rtag tu yang dang yang du nyams su len zhing shes bya'i 'khor lo snang srid thams cad lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes kyis 'gengs na zung 'zug gi chos 'di lta bus 'jig rten pha rol zhes sogs sam |*

[73] In these texts, *mahāmudrā* is the technical term for the goal of Buddhahood, while *dharmamudrā* is the ultimate, which is meditated upon while on the path. This path can be effectively initiated with the help of a *karmamudrā*, which involves intercourse with an actual consort in order to identify the goal through an artificially created image of co-emergent joy. The *samayamudrā* is by its nature the manifestation of the tantric *sambhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya.* See Mathes 2008 (2009): 89 & 117.

[74] See Rāmapāla's *Sekanirdeśapañjikā* (SNP $191_{10\text{-}11}$): "Now that the *karmamudrā*, which has the nature of the four joys and is based on physicality has been propounded, he teaches the *dharmamudrā*, which has the nature of the four joys and is based on speech." (*caturānandasvabhāvā kāyikī karmamudroktaiva | vācasīṃ dharmamudrāṃ caturānandasvabhāvām āha |*). For a fine translation of the entire text, see Isaacson & Sferra 2014 (2015): 255-333. My own translation is only for the sake of consistent terminology.

be gathered from Maitrīpa's explanation of the four joys on the level of *dharmamudrā* in the *Caturmudropadeśa*:

> (1) The concept of manifold [appearances] arises.[75]
> (2) The concept of manifold [appearances] ceases, and one abides in [their] co-emergent nature (lit. "form").[76]
> (3) [One realises that] the manifold [appearances] and the co-emergent [nature] are not two [different things].
> (4) One does not entertain concepts of either the manifold [appearances] or the co-emergent [nature].

These four are [respectively] joy, supreme joy, co-emergent joy, and the [joy of] no-joy on the level of the *dharmamudrā*.[77]

The physically induced joy during the moment of manifold activity such as embracing and kissing [78] thus corresponds to manifold appearances. Their disappearance and one's abiding in the co-emergent nature leads to supreme joy, which has first been experienced during the physical level of maturation, when bodhicitta had reached the tip of the vajra.[79] The co-emergent joy – which is experienced on the level of

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[75] For a similar description of the first moment, see Rāmapāla's *Sekanirdeśapañjikā* (SNP $191_{14\text{-}15}$): "From a *karmamudrā* as cause, the character of the world, which is [now] realised on the basis of speech, [namely] through the pith instructions of a genuine guru, [becomes clear]. Because of its manifold appearances [the first moment is called] manifold." (*karmamudrāto nimittāt sadgurūpadeśena vacasā pratīyamānā jagadātmatā citrollekhatvād vicitraṃ* |).

[76] SNP $191_{15\text{-}16}$: "And precisely this [character] is also the [moment of] maturation, for it is through a [form of] meditation approaching penetrating insight that the manifold appearances disappear." (*saiva ca bhāvanayā nivedhābhimukhyā citrollekhāpagamād vipākaḥ* |).

[77] CMU (B $12b_{2\text{-}4}$, D$214a_{3\text{-}4}$, P $233b_{3\text{-}5}$) : sna tshogs kyi rtog pa 'byung ba dang | sna tshogs kyi rtog pa 'gags shing lhan cig skyes pa'i gzugs su gnas pa dang | sna tshogs dang lhan cig skyes pa ([a]gnyis su[a]) med pa dang | sna tshogs dang lhan cig skyes pa gnyis ka'i rtog pa mi dmigs pa dang bzhi ni chos kyi phyag rgya'i dga' ba dang | mchog dga' dang | lhan cig skyes dga' dang | dga' bral lo |.

[a] BD *nyid du*

For a fine translation of the entire text, see Isaacson & Sferra 2014 (2015) : 391-98. My own translation is only for the sake of consitent terminology.

[78] See Hevajratantra II.3.7ab (HT 156_1): "[The moment of the] manifold is called variety." (vicitraṃ vividhaṃ khyātam āliṅgacumbanādikam |)

[79] See Mathes 2008 (2009): 89.

physical karmamudrā during the peak of intercourse at the moment of freedom from defining characteristics[80] – becomes on the *dharma-mudrā* level, the realization that the manifold forms are not different from the co-emergent nature. The moment of relaxation becomes a state, which is free from the concepts of either the manifold or the co-emergent.

As Karma Phrin las pa provides further explanations of the four activities during *gaṇacakra*, the four signs are also indirectly linked to the four seals (*mudrā*s) and the four yogas:

> Likewise, in terms of the four seals, 'eating' is the *dharmamudrā*, 'drinking' the *karmamudrā*, intercourse the *samayamudrā*, and co-emergent wisdom *mahāmudrā.* As for the four yogas, during [the yoga of] one-pointedness, appearances are taken as food. During the yoga of freedom from mental fabrication, [their] emptiness is taken as drink. During [the yoga of] one taste, the two (appearance and emptiness) meet. During [the yoga of] non-meditation there is [co-emergent] joy.[81]

Interestingly, intercourse is here not linked with *karmamudrā*, but *samayamudrā*, [82] which is consistent with the *samayamudrā* explanation in Karma Phrin las pa's *dMangs do hā* commentary, verse 86 (see below). As for the four signs and the four Mahāmudrā yogas, it makes perfect sense to equate mindfulness to the yoga of one-pointedness, and the yoga of freedom from mental fabrication to the second sign (beyond mindfulness). In addition, the third sign (non-arising) can be easily brought in line with the yoga of one taste, non-arising or emptiness being the unique taste of everything. Finally, both "transcending the intellect" and yoga of non-meditation are perfect descriptions of the ultimate goal.

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[80] For a detailed description of the third moment on the level of *karmamudrā*, see Mathes 2016:314-16.

[81] Karma Phrin las pa "dMangs do ha'i rnam bshad" $32_{6\text{-}10}$: de bzhin du phyag rgya bzhi dang sbyar na | za ba chos kyi phyag rgya | 'thung ba las kyi phyag rgya | gnyis sprod dam tshig gi phyag rgya | lhan cig skyes dga' phyag rgya chen po dang rnal 'byor bzhi dang sbyar na | rtse gcig gi skabs su snang ba zas su za | spros bral du stong pa skom du 'thung | ro gcig tu gnyis sprod | sgom med du dga' ba dang |

[82] Just as in Tripiṭakamāla's Nayatrayapradīpa (oral information from Péter Szántó).

The next secret explanation in terms the four signs is in the commentary on *dMangs do hā*, verse 29:

> Where the sense faculties have subsided
> And where the own-being of a self has been destroyed
> This my friend is the body of co-emergent bliss.
> For clarity go and ask the venerable Guru!"[83]

Karma Phrin las pa explains:

> As for the secret explanation, [the four signs] are related as follows: the consciousnesses of the "sense faculties" are mindfulness. "Subsided" is "beyond mindfulness." "And [the mistaken notion of] the own-being [of a self] disappears" is "non-arising." "Co-emergent" is "transcending the intellect." With regard to such a presentation of the aspect of means, one needs to conjoin this temporarily with the threefold experience of bliss, clarity and non-conceptuality. Ultimately, however, it is crucial to abandon [such subtle] attachment. Therefore, [this verse] is for the sake of abandoning one's attachment to means and experience.[84]

This secret explanation follows the same line of thought. While mindfulness relates to sense faculties apprehending the appearances of the world, their dissolution coincides with the second sign "beyond mindfulness." In standard Madhyamaka fashion, "non-arising" is again related to emptiness, or rather the disappearance of the wrong notion of a self; and "transcending the intellect" is again the co-emergent – the goal in Saraha's Dohā system. The text also affirms that the experiences of bliss, clarity and non-conceptuality are passing.

A short but concise explanation with elements of the four signs is also found in the commentary on *dMangs do hā*, verse 34ab:

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[83] Op. cit. $36_{16\text{-}17}$: dbang po gang du nub gyur cing | | rang gi ngo bor nyams par 'gyur || grogs dag de ni lhan cig skyes pa'i lus | | bla ma'i zhal las gsal bar dris ||. The Göttingen manuscript of the root text reads: | ind ī jattha bilīa gaü | ṇaṭṭhaü appasah ā ba | so hale sahaj ā nandataṇu | phuḍa pucchaha gurup ā ba ||

[84] Karma Phrin las pa: "dMangs do ha'i rnam bshad" $38_{8\text{-}11}$: gsang ba ltar na | dbang po shes (em., text: zhes) pa dran pa dang | nub pa dran med dang | ngo bo nyams pa skye med dang | lhan cig skyes pa blo 'das dang sbyar te bshad par bya'o | | de ltar thabs kyi cha bstan pa de la gnas skabs su bde gsal mi rtog pa'i nyams gsum gyis zin dgos la | mthar thug tu zhen pa spong ba gnad du che bas thabs dang nyams myong la zhen pa spong ba'i phyir du'o ||

> Looking and looking at the nature of primordially pure space,
> The seeing of it ceases.[85]

Karma Phrin las pa reports:

> Lama Bal po [Asu] (11th cent.)[86] says in this respect: "Looking with mindfulness at non-arising, one sees it as transcending the intellect."[87]

A more detailed elaboration of the four signs is found in the secret commentary on a *dohā* about the dissolution of the elements that is absent in the Indian material:[88]

> When wind, fire, and earth are stopped –
> And when the nectar flows, the wind enters the mind.
> As the four connections [of the winds with the elements] enter the single place,[89]
> All of space cannot contain supreme great bliss.[90]

The secret commentary in Karma Phrin las pa's *dMangs do hā* commentary is as follows:

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[85] Op. cit. 41$_{7-8}$: gdod nas dag pa nam mkha'i rang bzhin la | | bltas shing bltas shing mthong ba 'gag par 'gyur ||. The Apabhraṃśa root text in the Dohākoṣapañjikā (DKP 96$_{5\ \&\ 7}$): "If space is pure right from the beginning, you look and look [eventually] and the perception [of it] ceases." (paḍhame jaï āāsavisuddho | iti | cāhante cāhante diṭṭhi[a] ṇiruddho |) π

[a] E$_{Sh}$ diṭhṭhi N diddhi

[86] Aka sKye med bde chen. See Schaeffer 2005: 19 & 71-72.

[87] Op. cit. 41$_{17-18}$: 'dir bla ma bal pos ni dran pas skyes med la bltas pas blo 'das su mthong ba 'gag par gsungs la |

[88] See Shahidullah 1928:140.

[89] In his word for word commentary (op. cit. 49$_{12-14}$), Karma Phrin las pa explains the line with the four yogas as follows: "When calm abiding has reached perfection, at the time when the four winds connected (yoga) to the elements dissolve into each other and enter the central [channel], …" (zhi gnas mthar son pa'i dus nam zhig gi tshe 'byung ba dang sbyor ba'i rlung bzhi po gcig la gcig thim nas gnas gcig po dbu ma la ni zhugs pa na …)

[90] Karma Phrin las pa: "dMangs do ha'i rnam bshad" 49$_{4-7}$: rlung dang me dang dbang chen 'gags na | | bdud rtsi rgyu ba'i dus su rlung ni sems la 'jug | nam zhig sbyor bzhi gnas gcig la ni zhugs pa | | bde chen mchog ni nam mkha'i khams su mi shong ngo |

> As for the secret explanation in the sign language of the *ḍākinī*s, through the power of special calm abiding, the outward moving winds of thoughts are interrupted and forced to enter the mind inside. When finally looking for the mind one does not find it and this is the pith instruction on "mindfulness." Not to become mentally engaged is the pith instruction on "beyond mindfulness." The fact that the mind has not arisen throughout beginningless time is the pith instruction on "non-arising." Being beyond example and meaning is the pith instruction on "transcending the intellect." When based on these four [pith instructions], thoughts – [symbolically] taught in terms of wind, fire, and earth – are stopped, at this time when the nectar of non-conceptual wisdom flows, the karmic winds and thoughts enter and dissolve into the nature of mind, this natural sphere. Therefore, when the four yogas,[91] starting with the pith instruction on mindfulness, [cause the adept] to enter the unique sphere of effortless Mahāmudrā, one attains supreme great bliss, which cannot be contained in the [entire] space element of the *dharmakāya*.[92]

It is noteworthy that the four signs are not only related here to the transformative process of mental disengagement, but also more directly to the dissolution of the elements.

A further elaborate use of the four signs is found in the commentary on *dMangs do hā,* verse 75:

> If a thought about an agreeable [position, such as mind-only]
> Strikes one's fancy and one cherishes it,
> Then even this thorn, which is only the husk of a sesame seed

[91] i.e., the four connections (sbyor ba) in the root text above.

[92] Op. cit. 51_{18}-52_{3}: gsang ba mkha' 'gro ma'i brda skad du bshad na | zhi gnas khyad par can de'i mthus rnam rtog gi rlung phyir rgyu ba chad nas nang du sems la 'jug cing | mthar sems btsal na ma rnyed pa dran pa'i man ngag dang | yid la mi byed pa dran med kyi man ngag dang sems gdod nas ma skyes kyi man ngag dang | dpe don dang bral ba blo 'das kyi man ngag ste | de bzhi la brten nas rlung dang me dang dbang chen gyi sgrar bstan pa'i rnam par rtog pa 'gags pa na | mi rtog ye shes kyi bdud rtsi rgyu ba'i dus su las rlung dang rnam rtog ni | sems nyid gnyug ma'i dbyings la 'jug cing thim par 'gyur bas | dus nam zhig gi tshe dran pa'i man ngag la sogs pa'i sbyor ba bzhi po phyag rgya chen po lhun gyis grub pa'i gnas gcig la zhugs pa na bde ba chen po'i mchog chos kyi sku nam mkha'i khams su mi shong ba thob bo zhes bya ba'o ||

> Inevitably gives rise to nothing but suffering.[93]

Karma Phrin las pa explains:

> As for the secret explanation, view, tenet, and meditation experience are only indicated. The treatise has been taught for the sake of realization without determining any phenomenon from matter up to omniscience. If determination and attachment occur, one does not, thanks to the pith instruction "mindfulness," cling to thoughts about any object, be they pleasant, unpleasant, or in between. Through the pith instruction "beyond mindfulness," one establishes that also the mind that apprehends an object is empty. Through the pith instruction of "non-arising," the followers [of mind-only, who are] attracted to a truly existing consciousness beyond the duality of a perceived and a perceiver, are protected by [the practice of] the indivisible union of appearance and emptiness, which is true non-arising. In accordance with the pith instruction "transcending the intellect", one practices by resolving not to cherish even the ultimate abiding mode, Mahāmudrā. Otherwise, if one treasures objects and subjects as true appearances, [even] a slight determination would be a thorn, even if it were only [as insignificant as] the husk of a sesame seed. Through determination, one will definitely create nothing but the cause for suffering. The idea is that one must practice in accordance with the four signs.[94]

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[93] Op. cit. $81_{3\text{-}4}$: gal te yid du 'ong ngam snyam pa'i sems | | snying la bab pa gces par byas na ni | | til gyi shun pa tsam gyi zug rngus kyang | | nam yang sdug bsngal 'ba' zhig byed par zad |. The first two lines are missing in DKP, but reported in Shahidullah 1928: 153.

[94] Op. cit. 81_{21}-82_{8}: gsang ba ltar du bshad na | lta grub dang | nyams myong ni mtshon pa tsam ste | gzugs nas rnam mkhyen gyi bar gyi chos thams cad la zhen pa med par rtogs pa'i ched du gzhung 'di gsungs so | | de yang gal te zhen pa dang chags par gyur na dran pa'i man ngag gis yul gang la yang yid du 'ong ba dang | mi 'ong ba dang | bar ma'o snyam du mi 'dzin | dran med kyi man ngag gis yul de 'dzin gyi sems kyang stong par gtan la 'bebs | skye med kyi man ngag gis gzung 'dzin gnyis med kyi shes pa bden par snying la gang bab pa rnams snang stong zung 'zug tu bden pa'i skye ba med par skyong | blo 'das kyi man ngag gis gnas lugs phyag rgya chen po la'ang gces par mi 'dzin par la bzla ba'i tshul du nyams su len dgos te | de las log nas yul yul can snang bden du gces 'dzin byas na ni 'dzin pa chung ngu til kyi shun pa tsam gyi zug rngu ste zhen pas kyang nam yang sdug bsngal gyi rgyu 'ba' zhig byed par zad pas brda bzhi po'i sgo nas nyams su long zhig ces dgongs pa yin no |

The way the four signs are explained here introduces a slightly different context, namely the fourfold Yogācāra practice, which leads to the realization of a state free from perceived and perceiver. Any notion of an ultimately existing non-dual mind, however, is remedied with a Madhyamaka interpretation based on the third sign "non-arising" in terms of the indivisible union of appearance and emptiness. The realization of mind's emptiness through the second sign equates with the Yogācāra emptiness that a perceiving subject does not exist. In the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (LAS X.256-58) the four practices are presented as follows:

> When one has relied on [the notion of] mind only,
> External objects should not be imagined.
> Based on the apprehension of suchness,
> One should pass beyond [even] mind only.
>
> Having passed beyond mind only,
> One should pass over into a state without appearances.
> A yogin who is established in a state without appearances
> Does not [even] see the Mahāyāna.[95]
>
> The state of effortlessness is quiescent and purified
> By [one's previous] aspirations;
> And, being in a state without appearances,
> Wisdom sees the most excellent, which has no self.[96]

Similar to previous contexts, in which appearances are established as mind, the first sign "mindfulness" in the secret commentary on *dMangs do hā*, verse 75, is the means to deconstruct external objects and establish them as mind or perception only. "Beyond mindfulness" establishes the emptiness of the perceiving mind, which amounts to

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[95] It should be noted, that in his Tattvāvatāra, Jñānakīrti reads this line without the particle of negation and glosses Mahāyāna with Mahāmudrā: "Sees the Mahāyāna, i.e., Mahāmudrā." See Mathes 2008:36.

[96] LAS 298_{15} – 299_{3}: cittamātraṃ samāruhya bāhyam arthaṃ na kalpayet | tathatālambane sthitvā cittamātram atikramet || cittamātram atikramya nirābhāsam atikramet | nirābhāsasthito yogī mahāyānaṃ naa paśyati || anābhogagatiḥ śāntā praṇidhānair viśodhitā | jñānam anātmakaṃ śreṣṭhaṃ nirābhāsenab paśyati ||.

[a] Only the Tokyo manuscript reads sa. [b] Nanjio proposes reading nirābhāse na, but this does not yield a satisfying meaning.

passing beyond mind-only (*cittamātra*) in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*.[97] To what extent the third sign "non-arising" – which establishes Madhyamaka emptiness in the commentary on *dMangs do hā* verse 75 – accords with the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* is a controversial issue. Nevertheless, a variant reading of LAS X.257d has a negation (*na*) instead of the personal pronoun (*sa*), and this gives the reading, "Does not see the Mahāyāna," which could be more easily brought in line with Madhyamaka. The last line of sūtra quote, however, does not point univocally to an emptiness beyond Yogācāra.

In one instance, in the commentary on *dMangs do hā*, verse 86, the four signs do not appear in a secret explanation, but in a *mahāmudrā* explanation at the end of explanations for the other *mudrā*s. The verse in the root text is as follows:

> She eats and drinks, and does not care.
> This female friend [does] whatever comes to mind.
> I have seen that external objects [cannot be] identified [as anything other than] mind.[98]

Advayavajra[99] explains this enigmatic verse as follows:

> Whatever act she performs – eating, drinking, and the like – she does without interruption, doing whatever comes to mind. But it does not affect [her] mind. What is the use of [such wisdom,] so difficult to

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[97] For taking cittamātra in the context of the four prayogas as the perceiving subject only, and not the non-dual mind of the dependent nature, see Salvini 2015:42f.

[98] Karma Phrin las Pa: "dMangs do hā" $95_{17\text{-}18}$: za zhing 'thung la bsam du med par gyur | | grogs mo 'di ni sems la gang snang ba | | phyi rol sems la mtshon med bdag gis mthong ||.

The reading in DKP ($136_{17\text{-}18}$) differs: "She eats and drinks without interruption. Whatever appears in her mind is outside of her mental engagement. [Does this] affect her mind? Hey, the path of the yoginī is difficult to fathom! Hey, and at odds [with worldly convention]!" (khajjaï pijjaï *ṇa*[a] vichinn*a*[b][jjaï (ccitta□pa]ḍ.hitā*a*[c]) | maṇu bāhir*a*[d] r*e*[e] dullakkha har*e*[f] visaris*a*[g] joiṇi-mā*a*[h] |)

[a] E_{Sh} na [b] E_BE_{Sh} vicinte N vicinti- [c] E_BN citte paḍihāa E_{Sh} citte paḍḍihāa [d] $E_BE_{Sh}N$ vāhi [e] N re□ [f] E_B hale□ $E_{Sh}N$ hare [g] E_{Sh} ria [h] E_BE_{Sh} māi

[99] Advayavajra's style, numerous flagrant grammatical violations, and, most important, the varying view on the sequence of the four moments and four joys, exclude the possibility that he is the famous Maitrīpa, who also goes under this name. See Mathes 2015a:17-18.

> fathom by reason? For those who have the wisdom of the *yoginī*s, [all this] is dissolved, as [explained] before.[100]

Instead of the modifier "without interruption," Karma Phrin las pa has "and does not care" (*bsam du med par gyur*). In his *mahāmudrā* explanation of this verse 86, Karma Phrin las pa relates the four signs to (1) she eats, (2) drinks, (3) does not care, and (4) friend. It is the only time the four-stepped practice of the four signs is not the frame of a 'secret,' but a *mahāmudrā* explanation. Through their equation with "eating", "drinking"', and so forth we can see how the frame of the four signs indirectly works in the respective *dharmamudrā*-, *jñānamudrā*-, and *samayamudrā*-explanations of verse 86:

> As for the *dharmamudrā* explanation, one takes perceived [objects] as food and has the perceiving [subject] as drink and does not think (or "care") about the perceived and perceiver as being distinct. Once one calls a female friend the *dharmakāya*, perceived [objects] and perceiving [subjects] merely appear distinct from each other in this and that form, which are related to habitual tendencies in the confused mind. But since external objects cannot be characterized as something separate from the mind, one sustains in an uncontrived way [the resting in] the essential nature of the object itself. Thus, I come to see co-emergent wisdom and remain never separated from the *dharmakāya*. This is how one's faults (i.e., habitual tendencies) are but awareness.[101]

> As for the *jñānamudrā* explanation, because perceived objects appear as illusions and [their reality] cannot be indicated by examples, one takes them as mere appearances and has them as food. [Their]

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[100] DKP 137$_{1-3}$: ya [t kiṃcit khādayanti] pibantītyādi[a] karma kriyate | ([b]tasya karma sā avicchinnaṃ kriyate |[b)] sa ca yaṃ yaṃ cittena pratibhāsate taṃ taṃ kuryāt [kiṃ tu manavā] hi na kriyate | kiṃ yuktidurlakṣyeṇa[c] | yoginījñānavantasya līnaṃ pūrvavat |

[a] E_{Sh} -ntīti [b] $E_B E_{Sh}$ om. N inserts tasya. ka ... avichinnaṃ kriyate [c] $E_B E_{Sh}$ –lakṣeṇa

[101] Op. cit. 95$_{19-24}$: chos kyi phyag rgya bshad na | gzung ba zas su za zhing 'dzin pa skom du 'thung la | gzung 'dzin tha dad du bsam du med do | grogs mo zhes chos sku la bos nas gzung 'dzin tha dad pa 'di ni 'khrul pa'i sems la bag chags kyi gzugs gang dang gang du snang tsam yin gyi | phyi rol gyi don sems las gzhan du mtshon du med pas yul rang gi ngo bo la ma bcos par bskyangs pas lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes bdag gis mthong bar 'gyur te | chos kyi sku nam yang mi 'bral bar bzhugs pa'i rang mtshang rig pa yin no |

emptiness one has as drink, not thinking (i.e., caring) about anything. Therefore, this female friend who is the emptiness of objects, cannot be characterized as mind in the sense of a perceiving mind in relation to an objective basis – that is, apart from the mere appearances as this and that in one's unreal mind. Therefore, I come to know appearances to be the light of my own mind, and abiding without wavering within empty mind, I see the ultimate abiding nature.[102]

As for the *samayamudrā* explanation, during intercourse one has the white and red elements as food and great bliss as drink. Having thereby enjoyed the four joys sequentially, one does not conceptualize co-emergent joy and abides in mental disengagement. Why is that? This bliss and emptiness is inconceivable, "transcending the intellect," and cannot be cultivated in meditation. This co-emergent wisdom of bliss and emptiness is a friend from whom one is never separate. Giving birth to all Buddhas, she is a female friend. How do appearances occur as this and that in the mind of one who experiences co-emergent bliss and emptiness? Even though the co-emergent mind cannot be characterized by any example in the outside world, it being beyond the objects of thought and expression, one sees it through individual self-insight.[103]

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[102] Op. cit. 96$_{1\text{-}6}$: ye shes kyi phyag rgyar bshad na | gzung ba sgyu ma lta bur snang zhing dper bya ba dang bral bas | snang tsam gyis 'dzin pa zas su za zhing stong pa skom du 'thung ba la cir yang bsam du med do | | des na yul stong pa nyid kyi grogs mo 'di ni rang gi sems bden med la gang dang gang du snang ba tsam las gzhan du phyi rol gyi dmigs rten la sems 'dzin pa sogs kyis sems la mtshon du med pas | snang ba sems kyi rang 'od du shes par byas nas sems stong pa'i ngang mi g.yo bar bzhag pas gnas lugs kyi don bdag gis mthong bar 'gyur ro |.

[103] Op. cit. 96$_{7\text{-}15}$: dam tshig gyi phyag rgyas bshad na | snyoms 'jug gi gnas skabs su khams dkar dmar zas su za zhing | bde ba chen po skom du 'thung bar byas pas dga' ba bzhi rim gyis myong nas lhan cig skyes pa'i dga' ba la bsam du med cing | yid la mi byed par mnyams par bzhag go | | ci ste zhe na | bde stong de nyid bsam pa dang yid las 'das shing sgom du med pa'o | | bde stong lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes de dang dus rtag tu 'bral ba med par 'grogs shing sangs rgyas thams cad bskyed pas na grogs mo ste | bde stong lhan cig skyes pa nyams su myong mkhan gyi sems la gang dang gang du tshul ji ltar snang bar 'gyur zhe na | bsam brjod kyi yul las 'das pas phyi rol na dpe la sogs pas lhan cig skyes dga'i sems la mtshon du med kyang | so so rang rig pa'i tshul du bdag gis mthong bar 'gyur |

> As for the *mahāmudrā* explanation, through the pith instructions on "mindfulness", one eats appearances [by recognizing them] as the indivisible union of awareness and emptiness. Through the pith instructions on "beyond mindfulness", one drinks this emptiness [by recognizing it] as the indivisible union of emptiness and luminosity. Through the pith instructions on "non-arising", one takes it as the indivisible union of self-awareness and profound luminosity, not to be conceptualized as arising and passing out of existence throughout beginningless time, and the like. Through the pith instructions on "transcending the intellect", that which is characterized by the name "female friend", this indivisible union of mind and co-emergent wisdom is the natural light of wisdom – its unobstructed vibrant radiance appearing as anything in the non-arising, fundamental nature of mind. It seems to appear outside but this is merely the mind's magical illusion. Since it is taken as transcendent, it cannot be characterized by anything that might indicate it – examples, reasonings, signs, or means. I can directly see it to be self-awareness free from mental fabrication, the *dharmakāya*.[104]

Mindfulness is thus related to taking appearances, perceived objects, or in the case of samayamudrā, red and white elements as food, which means to either recognise them as being mere illusion or mind-only. While recognition of emptiness is normally introduced only in the following steps, in the mahāmudrā explanation, appearances are already recognised as inseparable awareness and emptiness during the first practice. An exception is the dharmamudrā explanation, which operates within the Yogācāra framework of going beyond the duality of a perceived and perceiver only. Of note here is that the move away from a physical practice with a tantric partner in the outer explanation to the secret explanation in terms of the four signs found in dMangs do

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[104] Karma Phrin las pa: "dMangs do hā" $96_{16\text{-}23}$: phyag rgya chen por bshad na | dran pa'i man ngag gis snang ba rig stong zung 'jug tu za zhing | dran med kyi man ngag gis stong pa stong gsal zung 'jug tu 'thung la | skye med kyi man ngag gis rang rig zab gsal zung 'jug tu 'dod ma nas skye 'gag la sogs par bsam du med par byed cing | blo 'das kyi man ngag gyis grogs mo'i ming gis nye bar mtshon pa sems lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes zung 'jug 'di ni | sems kyi gshis skye med la gang snang ba'i gdangs 'gag pa med pa'i ye shes kyi rang 'od phyi rol ltar snang yang sems kyi cho 'phrul tsam las dpe gtan tshigs brda thabs sogs mtshon byed gang gis kyang mtshon du med par la bzla bar byas pas | rang rig kyang spros pa dang bral ba chos kyi skur bdag gis mngon sum du mthong bar 'gyur |

hā, verse 24, finds its parallel in this context, where the samayamudrā explanation leads over to the mahāmudrā explanation.

Of particular interest is an explanation of the four signs in dMangs do hā, verse 90,[105] as it shows a close link to Maitrīpa's understanding of amanasikāra:

> As for the secret explanation, the means to accomplish the supreme *siddhi* is fourfold and indicated by the letters [*e vaṃ ma yā*]: "mindfulness", "beyond mindfulness", "non-arising", and "transcending the intellect." First, by way of special instructions, I teach "mindfulness", which means cutting [ordinary conceptual] mind from its root. Then, [second,] drinking the juice of "beyond mindfulness", that is, of resting in the sphere of mental non-engagement (*a-manasikāra*), one forgets to cling to the notion "mine". Then, [third,] through special instructions on "non-arising", which make one understand the meaning of the single syllable for "non-arising", [the privative] *a*, one realises that the nature of mind has never arisen. Then, [fourth,] through the special instructions on "transcending the intellect", [which allow] passing over to the ultimate, one no longer knows [even] the words or signs for "non-arising". This is liberation beyond expression in words or thoughts.[106]

Both Dam pa Sangs rgyas and Vajrapāṇi received Saraha's teachings through their common teacher Maitrīpa. For Maitrīpa "beyond mindfulness" is linked with "non-arising" through the wide semantic range he attributes to his central term *amanasikāra*, which not

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[105] DKP 138$_{14\text{-}17}$: "First, I [could] read [the sentence]: "May there be realization!" [Later,] I drunk the essence [of its meaning] and forgot [the words. At first,] I only understood the letters but not the words based on them, my friend." (*siddhir atthu maï paḍame paḍhiaü* | *maṇḍa pivanteṃ* ([a]*visaraa e maïu*[a)] | *akkharam ekka ettha maï jāṇiu* | *tāhara ṇāma ṇa jāṇami e saïu* |)

[a] E$_{Sh}$ *viṇa maï*

[106] Karma Phrin las pa : "dMangs do ha'i rnam bshad" 101$_{4\text{-}10}$: gsang ba ltar bshad na | mchog gi dngos grub bsgrub par byed pa'i thabs yi ges nye bar mtshon pa ni bzhi ste | dran pa | dran med | skye med | blo 'das so | de bzhi las dang po sems rtsa ba gcod pa dran pa'i man ngag bdag gis ston te | de nas yid la mi byed pa'i ngang du 'jog pa dran med kyi khu ba 'thungs pas nga yir 'dzin pa ni brjed par 'gyur ro | de nas gang gis a skye ba med pa'i yi ge gcig don shes par byed pa skye med kyi man ngag gis sems nyid gdod nas ma skyes par rtogs | de nas mthar thug la bzla ba blo 'das kyi man ngag gis skye med ces bya ba de'i ming dang brda ni mi shes te sgra bsam brjod med du grol ba'o ||

only means "mental non-engagement", but also mental engagement with the privative *a* of *amanasikāra* standing for *anutpāda* ("non-arising") or emptiness. In Maitrīpa's final analysis the letter *a* becomes luminosity and *manasikāra* self-empowerment (*svādhiṣṭhāna*).[107] It could be argued that such an understanding of *amanasikāra* is the fourth sign, which is, as we have seen above, at times taken as self-awareness or co-emergent joy. Such positive descriptions of the ultimate, however, harbor the danger of reifying it. This is why Karma Phrin las pa also warns in his commentary on dMangs do hā, verse 75, not to cherish the ultimate mode of Mahāmudrā.

Conclusion

It could be shown that the three signs "beyond mindfulness", "non-arising", and "transcending the intellect" characterize a practice beyond the usual duality of a perceived and perceiver. Combined with initial mindfulness, they form a useful frame for gradual Mahāmudrā meditation. Starting off by being mindful of whatever appears to the sense faculties, in line with early Buddhist principles, one eventually realises that there is nothing to concentrate on. In terms of a Yogācāra-Madhyamaka-based philosophy, when accepting that all external appearances are but the vibrant radiance of one's own mind, a process of deconstruction sets in that also leads to the abandonment of a perceiving subject and eventually all reifying notions of non-dual states of mind. At this point, the final three signs, which in the eyes of Dam pa Sangs rgyas are Saraha's only three signs, describe the collapse of our common experiences, to make room for the soteriologically relevant emergence of co-emergent bliss or wisdom.

[107] This is clear from Maitrīpa's Amanasikārādhāra (see Mathes 2015:245-47).

Bibliography

Abbreviations and Sigla for *Dohākoṣa* and *Dohākoṣapañjikā* material

B Dpal spungs Edition, vol. *āḥ*, fols. 121b$_4$-161a$_5$.

D Derge bsTan ‘gyur, no. 2256, *rgyud ‘grel*, vol. *wi*, fols. 180b$_3$-207a$_7$

DK Dohākoṣa
Contained as *pratīka* in the DKP.

[] Missing in N

Indian texts

CMU: **Caturmudropadeśa* (Tibetan translation)
B dPal spung block print of the *Phyag rgya chen po’i rgya gzhung*, vol. *hūṃ*, 9a$_1$-13b$_1$.
D Derge bsTan ‘gyur 2295, *rgyud*, vol. *shi*, 211b$_4$-214b$_5$.
P Peking bsTan ‘gyur 3143, *rgyud ‘grel*, vol. *tsi*, 231a$_1$-234a$_5$.

DK: Dohākoṣa
Contained as *pratīka* in the DKP.

DK$_G$: *Dohākoṣa* (photos taken by Sākṛtyāyana)
Ms Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen Xc 14/16. Praemittit: [1a$_1$] [*siddham*] namaḥ sarvajñāya ||

DKP: Dohākoṣapañjikā

E_B The Sanskrit of DKP edited by Prabodh Chandra Bagchi. Calcutta Sanskrit Series No. 25c (1938), 72-148.

E_{Sh} The Sanskrit of DKP edited by Haraprasad Shastri on the basis of his transcript made from an unknown Nepalese manuscript in 1897 or 1898 in Kathmandu (Shastri 1916:4-5). The edition is from Shastri 1959:84-118.

N DKP on NGMPP Reel No. A 932/4, 17b3-102b5. The Nepalese manuscript of Hemraj Sharma (now at the National Archives, Kathmandu)

P The Tibetan translation of DKP in Peking bsTan ‘gyur, no. 3101, *rgyud ‘grel*, vol. *mi*, fols. 199a$_7$-231a$_5$

DKSGṬ: *Dohākoṣasārārthagītāṭīkā
D Derge bsTan ‘gyur 2268, *rgyud*, vol. *zhi*, 65b$_7$-106b$_4$.
P Peking bsTan ‘gyur 3120, *rgyud ‘grel*, vol. *tsi*, 97a$_6$-138a$_1$.

BhPHṬAP: *Bhagavatīprajñāpāramitāhṛdayaṭīkārthapradīpanāma (by Vajrapāṇi)
D Derge bsTan ‘gyur 3820, *shes phyin*, vol. *ma*, 286b$_5$-295a$_7$.
P Peking bsTan ‘gyur 5219, *mdo ‘grel*, vol. *tsi*, 309b$_1$-319b$_8$.

MTAĀU: *Mahāmudrātattvanākṣaropadeśa
D Derge bsTan ‘gyur 2325, *rgyud*, vol. *zhi*, 266b$_6$-267b$_2$.
P Peking bsTan ‘gyur 3164, *rgyud ‘grel*, vol. *tsi*, 283a$_7$-284b$_4$.

LAS: Laṅkāvatārasūtra

Ed. by Bunyiu Nanjio (Bibliotheca Otaniensis 1). Kyoto: Otani University Press, 1923.

SYTĀ: *Sarvayogatattvāloka
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P Peking bsTan 'gyur 3281, *rgyud*, vol. *tshi*, 116b$_2$-145b$_6$.

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Tantric Practice Beyond Mahāyāna Doctrine: Ritual Identification

Richard K. Payne

Early tantric literature tends to be predominantly didactic, providing explanations and justifications for yogic and ritual practices, rather than being doctrinal discourses. While doctrinal exegesis is not predominant in the content of the tantras, doctrine and practice are necessarily engaged with one another in a dialectic relation, a relationship referred to here as praxis. Since the tantras are not doctrinal exegeses, identifying the ideological orientations of tantra is not a straightforward matter, but rather a matter of looking indirectly, from practice to the conceptual basis supporting the practice.

In the following, then, we are interested in looking at how some of the key Mahāyāna (Tib. *Theg pa chen po*) doctrinal concepts can be discerned in tantric practice. These include emptiness, the dynamics of consciousness, and inherent awakening. Although these concepts are identified with Madhyamaka (Tib. *Dbu ma pa*), Yogācāra (Tib. *Rnal 'byor spyod pa*), and tathāgatagarbha (Tib. *de bzin gshegs pa'i snying po*) strains of Mahāyāna thought, we want to consider them here simply as conceptual elements available for use in the development of tantric praxis. In other words these ideas are part of the "repertoire of resources" available to Buddhist practitioners, as described by Jacqueline Stone in her study of deathbed practices in medieval Japan.

I have followed the lead of those who see the Buddhist tradition not as a holistically unified entity, but as a shifting repertoire of

resources that individuals and communities might draw upon and interpret in different contexts and in varying ways. Here I introduce the idea that the tensions between multiple, sometimes incommensurable discourses or "logics" were constitutive of Buddhist approaches to death (Stone, 2016, p. 4).

While noting that this is a perspective shared with others, she adds an important insight: that in such a repertoire there are not simply alternative understandings, but that there is tension and indeed incommensurability between such understandings. This approach is more representative of the actual complexity of the tradition in its historical development than are scholastically oriented approaches that attempt to present the tradition as a single, unified, coherent, and logically consistent theo-philosophical system of thought.

For over a century and a half European and American scholarship addressing the relation between the Buddhist tradition as a whole, and tantric texts and teachings was informed by the rhetoric of decadence. This way of writing Buddhist history embraced the Protestant model of the history of Christianity as one of original purity, gradual decay, and a reform that returns the tradition to the purity of the original. At the same time, in accord with nineteenth century European liberal values, the original was conceived as an individualized doctrine of ethical self-development. Under the influence of this model of writing Buddhist history, tantra was cast as the lowest point in the process of decay. Although in the twentieth century definitions of tantra moved away from seeing it as a demonic form disjunct from authentic Buddhism, the tendency to identify tantra in terms of differences – particularly dramatic or even salacious ones – continues into the present. Lists of putatively defining characteristics, what I have called elsewhere the "mudrā, mantra, maṇḍala" approach, largely create the impression of separateness. The relation between early Buddhism and the later Mahāyāna and Theravāda forms is often portrayed as a natural progression. Tantra, however, particularly when described as showing "Hindu influences," remains marked as "the Other within Buddhism." Because of the presumption of separate, reified and somehow authentic traditions – Hinduism and Buddhism – the idea of influence suggests that tantra is an inauthentic syncretism.

The theoretical approach being developed here is that the conceptual framework of tantra draws on Mahāyāna concepts and develops a distinctive conceptual framework for praxis. This approach provides a perspective for interpreting the practice of tantric ritual

within the context of Buddhist thought, instead of holding it off as separate from some conception of a more "mainstream," and implicitly authentic form of Buddhism.

What may be the central question of Buddhist practice of all kinds is: How does a practitioner act on the teachings in such a fashion as to make them actual, that is, to make them real, to "realise" them, not in the sense of cognitive comprehension, but as an embodied way of being? The doctrinal concepts discussed below can be seen as simultaneously supporting the idea that tantric practice is effective, and as expressing what is to be actualised by means of tantric practice, both ritual and yogic. In addition to these functions, each concept may be understood as having three dimensions: doctrine, practice, and experience.

In keeping with the idea of tension within the repertoire this essay seeks not only to place tantric praxis within a larger Mahāyāna framework, but also to highlight one of the unique contributions made from the perspective of tantric praxis. While tantric Buddhist praxis does draw on a variety of Mahāyāna doctrinal resources, it configures these in a new way and thereby creates a new way of understanding practice. The central event of much of tantric ritual is the expression of the identity of the practitioner's body, speech and mind with the body, speech and mind of the deity evoked in the ritual. Focusing on ritual identification as a ritual practice indirectly reveals those doctrines that were brought together in a new formulation. Methodologically this means giving neither doctrine nor practice primacy, but rather considering the two as existing in a dialectic tension with one another.

Orienting Concepts of the Mahāyāna

As mentioned above, three concepts will be given particular attention here. These three are being highlighted because they are prominent markers of Mahāyāna thought, and are at the same time exemplary of particularly important streams within the Mahāyāna.

Impermanence as the Necessary Ground for Transmutation

Since everything that exists is empty of any permanent, eternal, absolute, and unchanging essence, they are all susceptible to change and transformation. It is, for example, the emptiness of mind that Śāntideva identifies as key to the status of being always and already

awakened. In the ninth chapter of his *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, traditionally understood as focusing on Madhyamaka teachings, Śāntideva asserts that:

> The mind is not positioned in the sense faculties, nor in form or the other aggregates, nor in the space in between. The mind is found neither internally nor externally, nor anywhere else either. <9.102> What is not in the body nor elsewhere, neither intermingled nor separate anywhere, that is nothing. Therefore, living beings are inherently liberated. <9.103> (Śāntideva, 1995, p. 125).

The concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*, Tib. *stong pa nyid*) is key not only to Madhyamaka thought but also to locating tantric practice in a Mahāyāna intellectual context. The centrality of emptiness to the early tantric Buddhist practitioners is evident in the prominent place it is given in the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi tantra*.

Among a variety of topics, the opening section addresses the idea that there is a prime cause, which is contrary to the Buddhist conception that the cosmos is an open-ended process of change "from beginningless time." One of the ways that a prime cause was conceived is by the idea of a self (*ātman*, Tib. *bdag*). The text examines this idea in a variety of what appear to be different interpretations contemporaneous with the text. Speaking to Vajrapāṇi, called the Lord of Mysteries in the text, the Buddha Mahāvairocana explains that ordinary people "cling to the notion of 'self' and to the possessions of the self, and differentiate among immeasurable distinctions of the self" (Giebel, 2005, p. 9). Others imagine that the prime cause can be characterized in other interpretations of the atman, such as:

> … the inner self, or [self in] the measure of man, or the completely adorned, or life-force, or *pudgala* (person), or consciousness, or *ālaya* (store [-consciousness]), the knower, the seer, the grasper, the grasped, what knows internally, what knows externally, *jñatvam* (intelligence), mind-born, youngster, what is eternally and determinately born . . . Lord of Mysteries, such distinctions of the self have since times of yore been associated with [false] differentiation, and [the adherents of these views] hope for liberation in accordance with reason (Giebel, 2005, p. 9).

Beginning a course of practice, ordinary people are able to progress through a set of developmental stages (Giebel, 2005, p.10).

Eventually, following the instructions of a good spiritual friend, they enter a stage of special practice in which "the wisdom that seeks liberation" arises. This wisdom relates to the teachings of:

> … permanence, impermanence and emptiness, and they follow these teachings. Lord of Mysteries [Vajrapāṇi], it is not that they understand emptiness and non-emptiness, permanence and annihilation … [Rather,] one should realise that emptiness is dissociated from annihilation and permanence (Giebel, 2005, p.11).

Later, the text illustrates the nature of impermanence with a set of metaphors closely matching those found in the writings of Nāgārjuna: "If one is to give rise to freedom from attachment to the aggregates, one should observe foam, bubbles, a plantain tree, a mirage and an illusion, thereby attaining liberation" (Giebel, 2005, p. 15). In his *Śūnyatāsaptatī* Nāgārjuna says that: "Produced phenomena are similar to a village of gandharvas: an illusion; a hair net in the eyes; foam; a bubble; an emanation; a dream; and a circle of light produced by a whirling firebrand." (Nāgārjuna, 1987, p. 94). While not identical, the similarity of the two sets of metaphors, both of which are used to explain emptiness, indicates a shared pool of didactic concepts and metaphors.

What is particularly noteworthy here is that a central doctrine of Madhyamaka teaching, that is, the teaching that emptiness is distinct from annihilationism and eternalism, is not argued for, but instead simply taken for granted. Perhaps most importantly, Madhyamaka thought provided a view in which, because there are no permanent, unchanging essences, everything that exists is subject to change and transformation. Buddhas and tantric practitioners are equal in having no permanent, unchanging essence, and in ritually actualizing this, the latter is equal to the former.

Universal Potential for Awakening

Key to tantric praxis is the idea that all sentient beings are always and already awakened. One expression of this is the concept of *tathāgatagarbha*, the "embryo" (or "womb," *garbha*, Tib. *snying po*) of the "thus come one" (*tathāgata*, Tib. *de bzhin gshegs pa*), this latter is commonly used as a synonym for "buddha," awakened one. This concept was subject to two different interpretations, one that practice creates awakening, and the other that practice reveals it.

One of the key sources for this idea is the aptly named *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*. Vesna Wallace explains that:

> According to the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra*, which identifies all sentient beings with the embryo (*garbha*) of the Tathāgata, the Buddha sees with his divine eye that all sentient beings are endowed with the Buddha's knowledge (*buddha-jñāna*), Buddha's eyes (*buddha-cakṣu*), and Buddha's body (*buddha-kāya*) . . . This view of all sentient beings as being endowed with the embryo of the Tathāgata has lent itself to two different interpretations. One is that the *tathāgatagarbha* refers only to sentient beings' potential for spiritual awakening; and the other is that the presence of the *tathāgatagarbha* in every sentient being implies that all sentient beings are fundamentally enlightened but need to recognise it (Wallace, 2001, p. 171–172).

Another key teaching within tantra is that it provides methods that lead to awakening in a single lifetime, known in Japanese as "this embodiment becomes awakened" (Jap. *soku shin jō butsu*). Of the two implications drawn from *tathāgatagarbha*, potential to be actualised or actuality to be realised, the second is conceptually more in accord with the idea of awakening in a single lifetime.

Fundamental Turning Over

Fundamental turning over, or revolution at the base of consciousness (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*, Tib. *gnas yongs su 'gyur pa*) is the Yogācara conception that provides a conceptual grounding for ideas regarding the efficacy of tantric practice. In broad summary, Yogācāra thought divides consciousness into the sensory realms (six: five sensory and one mental), the mind (*manas*, Tib. *yid*), and the underlying continuum of consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*, Tib. *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*). Turning over at the base of consciousness (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*) is the key to awakening, freeing the practitioner from the delusion of a separate, autonomous self, and from dualistic knowledge (*vijñāna*, Tib. *rnam par shes pa*) to wisdom (*prajñā*, Tib. *shes rab*) (Lusthaus, 2002, p. 317, n.94). The "manas [mind] appropriates the activity of the ālaya-vijñāna as its 'self' (*ātman*), and then clings to that self as its object ... After the *āśraya-paravṛtti*, the ... *ātmanic* appropriation of the ālaya-vijñāna" is extinguished (Lusthaus, 2002, p. 504). That is, a consequence of the turning over is that the *ālayavijñāna* is no longer mistaken as one's self. This is *tathatā* which "is not a thing or entity, but a descriptive term for

the activity of cognizing things just-as-they-are" (Lusthaus, 2002, p. 504). Lusthaus provides us with another description of this process, here employing the phrase "Warehouse Consciousness" as a gloss for *ālayavijñāna*:

> Overturning the Basis [*āśrayaparāvṛtti*] turns the five sense consciousnesses into immediate cognitions that accomplish what needs to be done (*kṛtyānuṣṭhāna-jñāna*). The sixth consciousness [mental] becomes immediate cognitive mastery (*pratyavekṣaṇa-jñāna*), in which the general and particular characteristics of things are discerned just as they are. This discernment is considered nonconceptual (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*). *Manas* becomes the immediate cognition of equality (*samatā-jñāna*), equalizing self and other. When the Warehouse Consciousness [*ālayavijñāna*] finally ceases it is replaced by the Great Mirror Cognition (*Mahādarśa-jñāna*) that sees and reflects things just as they are, impartially, without exclusion, prejudice, anticipation, attachment, or distortion. The grasper-grasped relation has ceased. It should be noted that these "purified" cognitions all engage the world in immediate and effective ways by removing the self-bias, prejudice, and obstructions that had prevented one previously from perceiving beyond one's own narcissistic consciousness. When consciousness ends, true knowledge begins. Since enlightened cognition is nonconceptual its objects cannot be described (Lusthaus, 2018).

Like emptiness and inherent awakening, the idea of *āśrayaparāvṛtti* has its own long history, and its meaning changed over time. The details of that history are beyond the scope of this essay. One thing worth noting, however, is that over the course of the history of the concept as studied by Ronald Davidson, the idea of the "foundation" (*āśraya*) started out as a physiological, became psycho-physiological, and eventually fully psychological (Davidson 1985, p. 199–227). The tantric emphasis on body, speech and mind as the transformative/ transformed basis would seem to evidence an ongoing understanding that awakening entailed a wholly embodied transformation, and not only a psychological one.

Central to Yogācāra thought is the work of Asaṅga (Tib. *Thogs med*) and Vasubandhu (Tib. *Dbyig gnyen*). Vasubandhu concludes his *Thirty Verses* by saying

> Without thought, without conception, this is the supramundane awareness:
> The overturning of the root, the ending of the two barriers. <29>
> It is the inconceivable, wholesome, unstained, constant realm,
> The blissful body of liberation, the Dharma body of the great sage. <30> (Connelly, 2016, p. 23–24).

The "two barriers" mentioned in verse 29 are "misplaced affections" and "mistaken conceptions," or as Matthew Kapstein explains, "The affective obscuration (Skt. *kleśāvaraṇa*) includes all dispositions underlying the emotions that bind us to worldly patterns; the cognitive obscuration (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) the inability to penetrate to a full realization of the true nature of things" (Kapstein, 2011, p. 264, n. 8).

In his exposition of this verse for practitioners, Ben Connelly explains *āśrayaparāvṛtti*, saying that

> It is the point at which the entire karmic process in the store consciousness [*alayavijñāna*] is transformed. When . . . the ancient conditioned habitual tendencies of consciousness are transformed. The storehouse is transformed from being the place or process whereby our conditioning manifests and is stored, into a vast mirroring wisdom that directly knows and shows the world (Connelly, 2016, p. 190).

Turning over at the foundation of consciousness is the understanding of awakening in the conceptual framework of Yogācāra thought.

It is not the claim here that tantric practitioners were (or are) necessarily consciously familiar with the details of Yogācāra thought, either as they constructed tantric rituals or as they performed them. Instead, Yogācāra teachings, such as those about transformation at the base of consciousness, were in the intellectual milieu, and being in that milieu they provided ways of thinking about how rituals are effective. According to Yogācāra thought, the fundamental transformation of the mind is possible through practice. I believe that the idea of a fundamental transformation of the mind informed how tantric practitioners thought that ritual identification – becoming a buddha in the context of ritual practice – is effective for awakening. An explanation of the efficacy of visualizing the buddha provides an

instance of this way of thinking about the process of awakening by ritual identification between practitioner and buddha.

Visualization: Practicing the Identity of Practitioner and Buddha

Central to much of tantric practice is visualization, which understood broadly is found throughout the Buddhist tradition. In the second section of his *Vissudhimagga*, which is devoted to *samādhi* (Tib. *ting nge 'dzin*), Buddhaghosa lists some forty objects of meditation, including several different visualizations. These include simple circular objects (*kasinas*, Tib. *zad par gyi skye mched*) as well as more complex ones, such as a decaying corpse. Other meditations might be better called contemplations, including such exalted objects as the buddha, dharma and sangha (Buddhaghosa, 2010, p. 81–427). Tantric practice developed even more complex visualizations, such as for example in "visualization-based deity meditation," that is, deity yoga. Dusana Dorjee notes that long-term practice of deity yoga is associated not only with "the usual signs of progression in Shamatha practice – increased clarity and stability of meditation – they are also accompanied by phenomenological shifts in terms of connection with the qualities of the deity" (Dorjee, 2018, p. 112). These phenomenological shifts are exemplified by increasing compassion and awareness of emptiness. The efficacy of visualization practice in the form of deity yoga is explained in what is conventionally known as the Amitāyus Contemplation Sutra (the †Amitāyurdhyāni sutra, or †Amitāyur-buddhānusmṛti sutra, Guan Wuliangshou jing). As a consequence of sectarian history in Japan, this is considered a Pure Land text, which has unfortunately all too often foreclosed its consideration in relation to tantric Buddhist thought.

Instead of allowing arbitrary sectarian divisions to handicap our research, let us consider what the Contemplation Sutra says about visualization practice. The frame narrative of the sutra is the story of Prince Ajātaśatru. Ajātaśatru desires the throne but is advised that regicide is impermissible, so he imprisons his father, King Bimbisāra, intending to let him starve him to death. Queen Vaidehi keeps Bimbisāra alive by smuggling food into the prison, but learning this, Ajātaśatru imprisons her as well. Wondering what better world, she might seek rebirth in, she is visited by the Buddha Śākyamuni and Ānanda. At the core of the Contemplation Sutra is a thirteen-step

visualization sequence that the Buddha Śākyamuni teaches to Queen Vaidehi in her imprisonment. The sequence begins with visualizing the setting sun, and proceeds to build up an image of Sukhāvatī, the Land of Bliss. Following the twelfth step, which is visualizing the lotus throne of Amitāyus, the Buddha explains the reason for this practice.

The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehi, "After you have seen this, next visualise the Buddha. Why the Buddha? Because Buddha Tathāgatas have cosmic bodies, and so enter into the meditating mind of each sentient being. For this reason, when you contemplate a Buddha, your mind itself takes the form of his thirty-two physical characteristics and eighty secondary marks. Your mind produces the Buddha's image and is itself the Buddha. The ocean of perfectly and universally enlightened Buddhas thus arises in the meditating mind. For this reason, you should singlemindedly concentrate and deeply contemplate the Buddha Tathāgata, Arhat, and Perfectly Enlightened One (Inagaki, 2003, p. 85, T. 12.343a).

In this instance, the efficacy of visualization practice is explained in terms of the identity of buddha and practitioner. This is directly comparable to tantric conceptions, and point to the widespread sharing of such concepts in the various milieux in which texts such as the Contemplation Sutra were written and compiled.

Ritual Identification: Tantric Thought

Within the many strands that form the loosely coherent whole of tantra, one of the strands that runs the longest is the practice of ritual identification, that is, the central segment of a ritual in which the practitioner visualises identity with the deity evoked. In Shingon ritual, that evocation takes place in the center of the ritually enclosed altar which also serves as the deity's maṇḍala, and usually has a stupa at its center. For performances of the homa ritual, such as that discussed below, the altar has a hearth instead of a stupa. Ritual identification is the expression in action of an idea that is central to tantic conceptions of the ground, path and goal, that is, conceptions of human existence (ground), the activities conducive to awakening (path), and the goal of awakening itself.

This central organizing idea is that the practitioner is already, just as he/she is, inherently pure and identical with the buddhas, in that both are empty of any permanent, eternal, unchanging, eternal essence

(*ātman*). In other words, one is already awakened from the very start – the ground is identical with the goal. The path then, simply becomes the way of realizing – literally, making real – that always and already awakened mind. Ritual identification is one of the tools for this realization. By enacting the identity of practitioner and buddha, the practitioner actualises his or her own buddha-potential (*tathatāgata-garbha*).

As practiced today in the Shingon tradition, ritual identification comprises three ritual acts, one each for the identification of the practitioner's body with the body the chief deity, for the identification of the practitioner's speech with the speech of the chief deity, and one for the identification of the practitioner's mind with the mind of the chief deity. In order, these are "interpenetration of self and deity" (*nyū ga ga nyū*), primary recitation, and the syllable cakra contemplation (*akṣaracakra*, *jirinkan*) (Sharf, 2003, p. 69–70). Turning to a specific ritual manual, we can better understand the ritualized character of this three-fold identification as it is actually performed. The specific ritual is the Acalanātha Vidyārāja śāntika homa of the Chuin lineage (*Fudō Myōō sokusai goma Chuin ryū*), which is paradigmatic for other homa in the Chuin lineage of Shingon tradition, which is the lineage found on Mt. Kōya. It is the ritual that a Shingon ācārya (*ajari*, Tib. *slob dpon*) learns in the training program offered on Mt. Kōya in the present (Payne, 1991, p. 165–167). As indicated in the title of the ritual manual, the "chief deity" (*honzon*) with whom the practitioner identifies is the "Immovable Wisdom King," Acalanātha Vidyārāja (Tib. *Mi gyo mgon po rig pa'i rgyal po*).

Mutual Interpenetration: Identity of Body

Making the mudrā of Amitābha's samādhi (hands folded in his lap with the tips of thumbs and forefingers touching), the practitioner is directed to:

> Visualise the syllable *a* above the heart; it changes, becoming a moon cakra; above the cakra is the syllable *hrīḥ*; it changes, becoming an eight-petalled lotus blossom seat; above the seat is the syllable *haṃ*; it changes, becoming the Sword of Wisdom; the Sword of Wisdom changes, becoming Acala Vidyārāja with all the auspicious marks; my body becomes the body of the Chief Deity (Payne, 1988, p. 31).

Making the sword and sheath mudrā of Fudō Myōō, the practitioner gestures with it while reciting the mantra of Fudō Myōō twenty-eight times:

> Jpn. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN SENDA MAKAROSYADA SOWATAYA UN TARATA UN KAN MAN
> Skt. namaḥ samanta vajrāṇām caṇḍa mahāroṣaṇa sphoṭaya hūṃ traṭ hāṃ māṃ

This is followed by a series of additional ritual acts.

Primary Recitation: Identity of Speech

Then, holding his beads in the teaching mudrā, the practitioner recites the mantra of Fudō Myōō one hundred eight times:

> Jpn. NAUMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN SENDA MAKAROSYADA SOWATAYA UN TARATA UN KAN MAN
> Skt. namaḥ samanta vajrāṇām caṇḍa mahāroṣaṇa sphoṭaya hūṃ traṭ hāṃ māṃ

This is also then followed by a series of additional ritual acts.

Syllable Cakra Contemplation: Identity of Mind

Again, forming the mudrā of Amitābha's samādhi, and viewing a diagram of the "cakra of the imperishable" (akṣara cakra; a circular diagram of five bīja mantra in Siddham script), the practitioner recites:

> From the syllable *a* dharmas fundamentally do not arise, therefore from the syllable *va* words and speech are incomprehensible; from the syllable *va* words and speech incomprehensible, therefore from the syllable *ra* impurities cannot be comprehended; from the syllable *ra* impurities cannot be comprehended, therefore from the syllable *ha* actions and their results cannot be comprehended; from the syllable *ha* actions and their results cannot be comprehended, therefore from the syllable *kha* universal *śūnyatā* cannot be comprehended; from the syllable *khaṃ* universal *śūnyatā* cannot be comprehended, therefore from the syllable *haṃ* actions and their results cannot be comprehended, from the syllable *haṃ* actions and their results cannot be comprehended, therefore from the syllable *raṃ* impurities cannot be comprehended; from the syllable *raṃ* impurities cannot be comprehended, therefore from the syllable *vaṃ* words and speech

> cannot be comprehended; from the syllable *vaṃ* words and speech cannot be comprehended, therefore from the syllable *aṃ* the fact that all dharmas are not born cannot be comprehended (with the discriminating mind). (Payne, 1988, p. 34–35)

Thus, the identification of the practitioner's body with Fudō Myōō's body proceeds by first declaring the identity, and then using the sword and sheath mudrā reciting Fudō Myōō's mantra. Identification of speech is done by forming the teaching mudrā with the mala, and reciting Fudō Myōō's mantra one hundred eight times. Identification of mind is done by comprehending the intangibility of a set of key doctrinal concepts linked mnemonically to a short sequence of syllables. Looking both at the content of this third part of the practice of ritual identification and at the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi tantra* upon which it is based, the repeated assertion that the concepts are "ungraspable," or "intangible," that is, empty, is because these doctrinal concepts could otherwise be mistakenly reified as permanent, eternal, absolute and unchanging. As a practice, it goes beyond simply being a reminder of the central doctrinal theme of emptiness, to repeatedly thinking through the emptiness of each of these key concepts to the point of realization.

Conclusion

The holistic character of tantric practice as embodied is best understood by seeing the practice of ritual identification as integral with key Mahāyāna concepts – not only emptiness, but also inherent awakening, and the fundamental transformation of body, speech and mind. A long-standing tendency in the scholarly study of Buddhism has been to focus on its doctrines, and to apply the technology of philology to that end. This tendency not only dates from the mid-nineteenth century when Buddhism as an object of study was constituted as a subset of the category "religion," but continues into the present as well. Over the last few decades, a counter-trend has emerged, however, one that focuses on Buddhist practices. This was instigated in part by scholars who were trained in anthropological and other social science approaches, rather than exclusively in philological approaches, which by analogy with Biblical philology as a foundation for Christian theology presumed the importance of major doctrinal works. In order to develop a balanced scholarly study of Buddhism neither a primary focus on doctrine nor a

primary focus on practice is alone adequate to an understanding of the lived religion of Buddhists over the two and a half millenia of Buddhist history. It is necessary to understand what people thought, as well as what they do, but critically it is the integral relation between thought, experience, and action that is necessary.

Taking praxis as an integral relation between doctrine and practice as one's orientation is much more informative than looking at doctrine in isolation. Although commenting on later, Tibetan developments, Matthew Kapstein notes the importance of the context of practice for understanding the concepts central to the tantric forms of Mahāyāna thought, saying that the fourteenth century saw deepening interest in topics associated with the so-called "third turn of the doctrinal wheel": Buddha-nature or the "matrix of the tathāgata" (*tathāgatagarbha*), the "consciousness of the ground-of-all" (*ālayavijñāna*), and the "luminosity of mind" (*cittaprabhāsa*) foremost among them. There can be little doubt that the effort to elaborate satisfactory intellectual frameworks for the investigation of these and related topics received its impetus in part from the spread of contemplative and yogic techniques, which made use of these same concepts in the practical context of spiritual disciplines (Kapstein, 2011, p. 254–255).

The common approach found in religious studies is grounded on its long tradition of privileging doctrine over practice, and employing the intellectualist presumption that thought causes action. From that perspective it would be quite easy to conclude by talking about how the Mahāyāna doctrines discussed above provide a framework for tantric practice. In closing, however, I would like to assert that the metaphor is inaccurate. Just as much as doctrine affects practice, so does practice affect doctrine. To envision the two in a dialectic relation is, I believe, both more accurate phenomenologically and closer to the Buddhist understanding of human existence as holistic – a threefold integrity of body, speech, and mind.

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Esoteric Buddhism and Vajrayāna in China

Graham Lock & Anthony Ho Waipan

This paper aims to review the history of esoteric Buddhist teachings in China and to explore the relationship between 'Esoteric Buddhism' and 'Vajrayāna', as these terms have been used and are still used to refer to texts, concepts and practices within Chinese Buddhism. The assumed readership for this paper is scholars or other interested readers who may know much about Vajrayāna in Tibet and Bhutan, but perhaps little about Esoteric Buddhism in China. It may also interest students of Chinese Buddhism with little familiarity with esoteric teachings.

'Esoteric Buddhism' is the translation preferred by anglophone scholars of Chinese Buddhism for the terms 密教 and 密宗[108], which are pronounced in Putonghua (the standard variety of Modern Chinese) as *mìjiào* and *mìzōng*. *Jiào* means 'teaching' or 'teachings' and *zōng* means 'lineage(s)' or 'school(s)'. The first character in both of these expressions, 密 (*mì*), like many Chinese characters, has a fairly broad range of potential meanings, including 'secret', 'confidential', 'mysterious', 'mystical' and even 'dense'. In Buddhist contexts, *mì* teachings are usually contrasted with *xiǎn* (顯) teachings. *Xiǎn* means 'obvious', 'apparent', 'visible', 'prominent'. A possible gloss on *mìjiào* might be something like 'teachings of which the meanings are not apparent and require some kind of interpretation or explanation'.

[108] See for example Orzech, Sørensen, Hjort, & Payne (2011).

If you look up the terms *mìjiào* and *mìzōng* in Chinese-English dictionaries, including specialist Buddhist dictionaries, you will often find them translated not only as 'Esoteric Buddhism' but also as 'Vajrayāna', 'Tantra', 'Tantrism' or 'Tantric Buddhism'[109]. However, the terms *mìjiào* and *mìzōng* are by no means synonymous with Vajrayāna or Tantra. The former terms are much broader in their reference. For example, the *Mìjiào* section of the Taishō Chinese Buddhist canon (Vols. 18-21[110]) contains 573 texts, many of which, as we shall see, cannot be regarded as Vajrayāna or Tantric as these terms are normally understood.

There is, in fact, a more direct or specific translation of Vajrayāna into Chinese, *i.e.*, *jīn'gāngchéng* (金剛乘). *Chéng* (sometimes pronounced *shèng)* means vehicle, *i.e.*, Skt. *yāna*, while *jīn'gāng* means 'adamantine', 'diamond-like' and is the word normally used to translate Skt. *vajra*. The great Táng dynasty ācāryas Vajrabodhi and Amoghvajra (8th century CE) and their disciples did sometimes use the term *jīn'gāngchéng* for some of their teachings, as did later translators in the Northern Sòng dynasty, but in general *jīn'gāngchéng* – Vajrayāna – is not much used in Chinese whereas *mìjiào*/ *mìzōng* are much more commonly used terms.

For convenience, in this paper we shall use the terms 'esoteric teachings' and 'Esoteric Buddhism' for *mìjiào* and *mìzōng*[111]. We shall also use the terms 'Vajayāna' and 'Tantric Buddhism' without making any systematic distinction between the two terms.

We begin by considering Esoteric Buddhism in the 8th and early 9th centuries CE during the Táng dynasty, when it reached the height of its development and influence. We then look at some of the elements of esoteric teachings that were brought to China prior to this period, before moving on to considering the longer-term influence of Esoteric Buddhism down to the present day. In all of this, we draw extensively on authoritative works in English, in particular Orzech, Sørensen, Hjort & Payne (2011) and Payne (2006), and works in Chinese, in particular Wang (2017) and Shi (2017). We will also provide brief summaries of

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[109] e.g., Chen & Li (Eds., 2005); Kleeman & Yu (Eds., 2003)

[110] See https://terebess.hu/zen/szoto/Map-of-the-Taisho.pdf for detailed map in English of the Taishō canon.

[111] For more discussion of "Esoteric Buddhism" and related terms, see the Introduction to Orzech, Payne, & Sørensen (2011) as well as "On Esoteric Buddhism in China: A Working Definition" by Sørensen in the same volume.

concepts and practices as described in certain key texts in the Esoteric Teachings' section of the Taishō canon dating from different periods.

The essential story of Esoteric Buddhism in China is fairly well known, although to some extent filtered through traditions passed down in Japanese Shingon. Esoteric teachings, like the teachings of other schools of Buddhism, came originally from Buddhist centres in South Asia that are now part of India, Pakistan, Nepal or Kashmir. Monks (usually) travelled along the trade routes of Central Asia (the so-called Silk Road), passing through Buddhist centres such as Khotan, Kucha and Dunhuang and entering China through the Yùmén 'Jade Gate' Pass (at least until the Táng dynasty). Alternatively, they travelled by sea through Southeast Asia, often via the Buddhist Kingdom of Srivijaya on the island of Sumatra, entering China through Guǎngzhōu in the south. Arriving in China, they taught and translated into Chinese the texts they had brought with them, usually in collaboration with local monks and scholars. Some Chinese monks also travelled in the opposite direction, either as far as the Indian sub-continent, or to Buddhist centres in Central or Southeast Asia, bringing back texts with them. Translation of texts that came to be called 'esoteric' (密 *mì*) began as early as the 3rd century CE and continued until at least the Northern Sòng dynasty (960–1127). Many of these texts can also be found in the Tibetan canon, but there are also many texts unique to the Chinese canon (Giebel, 2011, p. 29).

Táng Esoteric Buddhism

Esoteric Buddhism reached the height of its development and influence in the 8th and early 9th centuries during the Táng dynasty. This is the age of the three great ācarayas Śubhākarasiṃha (善無畏 *shànwúwèi*), Vajrabodhi (金剛智 *jīn'gāngzhì*) and Amoghavajra (不空金剛 *bùkōng-jīn'gāng*, or just 不空 *bùkong*) and their disciples.

Śubhākarasiṃha is said to have been from Orda in Eastern India (though sources differ) and to have spent some time studying at the great Buddhist university of Nālandā, where he became the disciple of Dharmagupta, and studied esoteric teachings with him. He travelled along the Central Asian Route arriving at the Táng capital of Cháng'ān in 716 CE. Soon after he arrived he began the work of translating into Chinese the Sanskrit texts he had brought with him. He found imperial favour and in 724 accompanied the emperor to the secondary Táng

capital of Luòyáng, where he translated the Mahāvairocana Sūtra (Taishō 848) with the assistance of his Chinese disciple Yìxíng (一行). Subsequently they translated other texts associated with the Mahāvairocana Sūtra, and Yìxíng wrote a commentary on it. The Mahāvairocana Sūtra, together with another text translated by Śubhākarasiṃha, the Susiddhikara Sūtra, are two of the three most important, central texts of Táng Esoteric Buddhism and Táng Dynasty Esoteric Buddhism and subsequently of Japanese Shingon (see below).

The actual title of the Mahāvairocana Sūtra is 'Sūtra on the Achieving of Buddhahood, the Spiritual Transformations and the Empowerment (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of Mahāvairocana' (大毘盧遮那成佛神變加持經 *dàpílúzhēnà chéngfó shénbiàn jiāchí jīng*). In the Taishō canon, it is the first text in a group of related texts entitled *Dàrìjīng*, (大日, literally 'Great Sun Sūtra[s]'), and it is by this name that the sūtra is generally known. *Dàrì* is a translation of the meaning of Mahāvairocana, while *pílúzhēnà* (毘盧遮那) is a transliteration of Vairocana.

The sūtra begins with a dialogue between Vajrapāni (referred to as 執金剛祕密主 *zhí jīngāng mìmìzhǔ*, literally 'Vajra-Holder-Lord-of-Mysteries') and Mahāvairocana that sets out the conceptual basis for the teachings. Vajrapāni asks Mahāvairocana how he obtained all knowledges (一切智智 *yíqiè zhìzhì*, translation of Skt. *sarvajñājñāna*). Mahāvairocana explains that *bodhi* heart-mind (菩提心 *pútí xīn*) was the cause, compassion (悲 *bēi*) was the root and expedient means (方便 *fāngbiàn*) was its culmination. He goes on to explain that *bodhi* means knowing one's mind as it really is, which amounts to *anuttarā samyaksaṃbodhi* ('unsurpassed, perfect, awakening'). However, it cannot be grasped (得 *dé*, literally 'got' or 'gained'), because *bodhi* has the characteristic (相 xiàng, translation of Skt. *lakṣaṇa*) of empty space and no-one can comprehend it. In fact, all dharmas lack characteristics, or rather they have the characteristic of empty space.

Following chapters detail the expedient means or practices that can lead to such an awakening. These include construction of maṇḍala, recitation of mantra, mudrā (印 literally 'seal'), initiation rituals and deity visualization.

The main maṇḍala in this sutrā is the 'Maṇḍala born from the Womb (Skt. *garbha*) of Great Compassion (大悲胎藏生曼荼羅 *dàbēi tāizàngshēng màntúluó*)', often simply referred to as the Garbha Dhātu (胎藏界 'Womb Realm') Maṇḍala. Detailed instructions are given as to the preparation and layout of the maṇḍala, including the qualities and attainments that the participating *ācarya* and his disciples should have,

the preparation of the site, the mantras to be recited and the buddhas that are to be visualised. These are firstly Vairocana (大日 *dàrì*) and then the buddhas of the four quarters – Ratnaketu (寶幢 *bǎochuáng*, literally 'precious pennant') in the East, Saṃkusumita (華開敷 *huákāfū*, literally 'Abounding in Flowers') in the South, Akṣobhya (不動佛 *bùdòngfó*, literally 'Immovable Buddha') in the North, and Amitāyus (無量壽 *wúliángshòu*, literally 'of boundless age') in the West. It also includes instructions for drawing the circles of the maṇḍala itself. In later chapters, the maṇḍala is described slightly differently and the buddhas are represented by their seed syllables or ritual instruments.

A full translation into English of this sūtra can be found in Giebel (2005). There is a version of this text in Tibetan, translated about a century after the Chinese translation. However, the Tibetan text lacks the seventh fascicle of the Chinese, which is a ritual manual preserved as a separate work in the Tibetan canon. On the other hand, the Tibetan translation contains a 'Continuation Tantra' (*Uttara-tantra*) not found in the Chinese version (Giebel, 2005, p. xiv). In Tibet, the Mahāvairocana Sūtra is classified as a cārya tantra, However, China does not have this Tibetan fourfold classification of tantras, and in fact does not even distinguish tantras from sūtras. They are all labelled *jīng* (經), 'classic [text]', which in the Buddhist context is the normal translation of Skt. *sūtra*.

The other two great Táng ācāryas, Vajrabodhi and his disciple Amoghavajra, arrived at the Eastern Táng capital of Luòyáng in 720, just four years after Śubhākarasiṃha. They came by the sea route via Srivijaya and entered China through Guǎngzhōu**.** According to one source**,** Vajrabodhi was a South Indian and had also spent some time at Nālāndā. He is said to have received tantric initiations in Southern India from Nāgabodhi (龍智 *lóngzhì*). In China he found imperial favour and the Táng emperor awarded him the title of 'State Teacher' (國師 *gúoshī*), a title that the emperor bestowed on eminent Buddhist teachers (Shi, 2017).

Vajrabodhi is said to have been tireless in his propagation of esoteric teachings, travelling to many temples, where he established platforms or altars for *guāndǐng* (灌頂 'sprinkling the crown [of the head]' also sometimes translated as 'pouring from the peak'), *i.e.*, Skt. *abhiṣekha*, usually translated as 'initiation' or 'empowerment'. He gave such an initiation to the Táng emperor Xuánzōng, as well as to many monks, nuns and laypeople. He also became renowned for his skill in various efficacious rituals and was invited by the imperial court to

perform rainmaking ceremonies and to give medical treatment to an imperial princess (Shi, 2017). Together with his disciple Amoghavajra he translated the Vajraśekhara Sūtra (金剛頂經 *Jīn'gāngdǐng Jīng* 'Vajra-Peak Sūtra'), as well as many other texts.

The full title of the Vajraśekhara Sūtra is the *Jīn'gāngdǐng Yīqiè Rúlái Zhēnshí Shèdàshèng Xiànzhèng Dàjiàowáng jīng* (金剛頂一切如來眞實攝大乘現證大經王經), which Giebel (2001) translates as 'The Adamantine Pinnacle: The Compendium of the Truth of All the Tathagatas and the Realization of the Great Vehicle, Being the Scripture of the Great King of Teachings'. It also features Mahāvairocana, presented at the beginning as teaching a large assembly of Bodhisattvas. Some of them approach Siddhartha Gautama (under the esoteric name Sarvartha Siddhi) while he is meditating under the bodhi tree close to enlightenment but unable to attain it. They instruct him in esoteric rituals that provide a more direct path to enlightenment. As in the Mahāvairocana Sūtra the various rituals are described in detail and include rites of initiation, mantra, mudrā and construction of maṇḍala. The central maṇḍala of the Vajraśekhara Sūtra is the 'Vajra Dhātu (金剛界 *jīn'gāng jiè* 'Adamantine or *Vajra* Realm') Maṇḍala. Giebel has also translated this sūtra into English (Giebel, 2001).

Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra gave many teachings based on the Vajraśekhara Sūtra and related texts. The sūtra became another of the central texts of Táng Esoteric Buddhism and subsequently of Japanese Shingon, where the Vajra Dhātu maṇḍala of the Vajraśekhara Sūtra Maṇḍala is seen as complementary to the Garbha Dhātu (胎藏界 'Womb Realm') Maṇḍala of the Mahāvairocana Sūtra. Vajrabodhi died in 741.

If Śubhākarasiṃha and Vajrabodhi laid firm foundations for Esoteric Buddhism in the Táng dynasty, it was through the work of Amoghavajra and his students that it flourished and reached the height of its influence. Amoghavajra appears to have links with Central Asia and according to one source his father was an Indian merchant and his mother was Sogdian. Although he spent much time in the capital Cháng'ān, he also travelled to many other parts of China setting up abhiṣekha platforms and gave initiations to many nuns, monks and lay people. At the request of Emperor Xuánzōng he set up altars for abhiṣekha and for homa (fire) rituals in the imperial palace and gave initiations to the emperor himself. Amoghavajra is also well known for developing Wǔtáishān (五臺山) as a major centre for esoteric Buddhism sacred to Mañjuśrī. He died in 774.

The teachings of these three Táng dynasty ācārya and their disciples came to be referred to as *Zhēnyánchéng* (真言乘) or just *Zhēnyán*. *Zhēnyán*, literally 'true words', and is one translation of Skt. *mantra*. So *zhēnyánchéng* can be translated as Mantrayāna, which is an indication of the importance of mantra in their teachings. The teachings are also retrospectively known as *Tángmì* (唐密 'Táng [dynasty] Esoteric [teaching]).

Shingon is the Japanese pronunciation of *Zhēnyán* and is the name by which these teachings and the lineages that continued to transmit and develop them are usually known in Japan, although the Japanese pronunciation of *mìjiào*, *i.e.*, *mikkyō*, is also used. The teachings were brought to Japan by the Japanese monks Kūkai (空海 774-835) and Saichō (最澄, 767-822), who came to China during the Táng dynasty and studied esoteric teachings. Kūkai received initiation from and studied with Amoghavajra's student Huìguǒ (惠果) as well as with Śubhākarasiṃha's student 玄超 (Xuánchāo), so he was able to combine the Vajra Dhātu teachings and the Garbha Dhātu teachings. He is regarded as the founder of Japanese Shingon. Saichō received initiations and studied Zhēnyán with the monk Shùnxiǎo (順曉). When he returned to Japan, he founded the Japanese Tendai (天台 Chin. *tiāntái*) school, incorporating esoteric practices into Tendai.

Táng Esoteric Buddhism and Vajrayāna

The concepts and practices of the esoteric teachings and texts associated with the three Táng ācaraya seem to have all the essential features of Vajrayāna, or Tantric Buddhism, although it is important to be aware that we do not know for sure that these teachings were regarded as separate schools at that time. The conceptual orientation is that of uncovering, discovering or realizing Buddha-nature or the innately enlightened nature of one's mind, potentially in this very lifetime. This is done through deploying practices such as mudrā, mantra and maṇḍala, representing the 'three mysteries' (三密 *sānmì*) of body, speech and mind, as well as deity visualizations and other rituals specific to Esoteric Buddhism, such as homa (fire) rituals. All this is systematized into a path with a soteriological purpose, which can only be accessed through initiation rituals led by a qualified master.

However, note that Táng Esoteric Buddhism (and therefore Shingon) lacks tantra of the annuttarayoga or 'highest yoga' class, of

Tibetan Vajrayāna.[112] So, from a Tibetan perspective, Táng Esoteric Buddhism could be seen as representing only an incomplete or partial Vajrayāna. Indeed, some of the Chinese masters who re-imported Zhēnyán or Táng Esoteric Buddhism into China in the 20th century (see below) do seem to have subsequently found it necessary to combine what they had brought back from Japan with study of Tibetan Vajrayāna.

Esoteric Teachings before the Three Táng Ācārya

The Esoteric Teachings section of the Taishō canon contains many translated texts that pre-date those associated with the Táng Esoteric Buddhism or Zhēnyán of the 8th and 9th centuries and scholars have drawn attention to the fact that many of the 'esoteric' practices central to Zhēnyán existed before this time.

Such esoteric practices include the chanting of *zhòu* (咒). *Zhòu* is a fairly general term that basically means incantation, magic spell, enchantment and even curse, but was, and is, used in Chinese Buddhism to refer to both mantra and dhāraṇī (the two are not consistently distinguished). Originally, a zhòu would have been transcribed according to the sound of the original Sanskrit (or other language) using Chinese characters chosen entirely for the closeness of their sounds to the Sanskrit, with no regard to their meaning. The characters would have been pronounced in a variety of Chinese pronunciation current at the time, most likely the variety of Middle Chinese spoken in the capital. When such zhòu are chanted today, a modern pronunciation of the characters are normally used, usually that of Putonghua, but sometimes of other dialects such as Cantonese. These pronunciations are of course very far from the original Sanskrit sounds, although efforts have occasionally been made to reconstruct the original Sanskrit pronunciations and use that.

The first text containing zhòu, the Mātaṅga Sūtra (摩登伽經 *módēngqié jīng*), was translated as early as 230 CE. Nearly a century later, in 310 CE, Fótúchéng (佛圖澄), a monk from Central Asia, arrived

[112] Tantra of the Tibetan annuttarayoga class do in fact exist in the Chinese. The Guhyasamāja Sūtra and the Hevajra Sūtra are both to be found in the Buddhist canon (T0885 & T0892). However, both of these texts were translated much later in the early 11th century during the Northern Sòng dynasty and these two tantra and the practices they describe never seem to have become popular in China.

in Luòyáng and persuaded Shílè (石勒), founder of the Later Zhào Kingdom, to take him into his service. Fótúchéng used his supernormal skills to further Shílè's and his successor's political and military ambitions and became reknowned for his use of *zhóu* for rainmaking, curing diseases, warding off evil and obtaining blessings. Although Fótúchéng is not recorded as having made any translations, he was the first to obtain substantial imperial patronage for Buddhism and is said to have been responsible for building many temples and obtaining official recognition for the ordination of Chinese monks into the Sangha.

Over the next two or three centuries, there was a flood of translated texts containing zhòu, mainly used for the purposes of warding off various kinds of evil or obtaining blessings. One text that, according to Kieschnick (2017), probably dates to the first half of the sixth century is the 'Miscellaneous Collection of Dhāraṇī' (陀羅尼雜集 *tuóluóní zájí* T1336), which has a large collection of what are referred to both as *dhāraṇī* (using the transliteration 陀羅尼 *tuóluóni*) and as *shénzhòu* (神咒 'spiritual incantations'). The dhāraṇī /zhòu are given by various buddhas and bodhisattvas and the texts provide instructions for their use, an explanation of their power and what they are for. The collection includes zhòu for curing illnesses, difficult childbirth, snake and scorpion bites, bringing rain, and so on.

Although they are put into the mouths of Buddhist personages, such dhāraṇī /zhou, being directed towards purely mundane ends, they are of course basically 'magic' incantations (or thaumaturgy, to use a technical term), and can hardly on their own be considered tantric or Vajrayāna practices. However, some zhòu in the collection are described as leading to progress along the Bodhisattva Path, and we might see these as embryonic of the practice of mantra or dhāraṇī chanting within the soteriological systems of Zhēnyán. For example, of the sixth zhòu in the collection, which is given by Kaśyapa Buddha (迦葉佛 *jiāshèfó)*, the text says that:

> ... beings who practice the chanting of this dhāraṇī and who have not yet set forth the intention to achieve enlightenment will all set forth this intention and will not retreat from it. Those who have previously put forth this intention, if they practice this dhāraṇī, will exceed the seventh stage, reaching even the tenth stage. This dhāraṇī is the vajra samādhi, the gate to liberation of great emptiness. A bodhisattva, from the time he first takes the vow, will practice this samādhi from

> the time he reaches the site of enlightenment, at the foot of the bodhi tree, until he enters vajra concentration [and becomes a Buddha]. All will do so in this way. (Translation in the *Supplement: Esoteric Texts,* as cited in Kieschick, 2017, p. 15)

From the 5th century on, we see the development of more complex esoteric rituals, including the setting up of dedicated sites and altars for zhòu practices. At first, devotees simply presented incense and flowers before the Buddha and intoned the zhoù, then mudrā were added, then came homa (fire) rituals. The rituals became more embellished and during the short-lived Suí dynasty and early Táng (7th century) there developed the full maṇḍala platforms with altars surrounded by images of 'the honoured ones' (諸尊 *zhūzūn*), *i.e.*, the various buddhas, bodhisattvas and other deities of esoteric Buddhism (Shi, 2017).

An example of an early Táng collection of dhāraṇī/zhòu is the 'Dhāraṇī Collection Sūtra (陀羅尼集經 T901) containing texts translated during the period 653–654 by Atikūṭa (阿地瞿多), a monk from Central India. The texts in the collection contain many esoteric practices later deployed in Zhēnyán. Dhāraṇī dedicated to various buddhas, bodhisattvas and devas (天 *tiān*) are given together with accompanying mudrā. There are detailed instructions for setting up the sites of enlightenment and altars before which the dhāraṇī/zhòu are to be chanted, as well as other rituals that will lead to the manifestation of the beings they are dedicated to. The zhòu are said to be for the attainment of *shénlì* (神力), 'spiritual' or 'supernormal powers'.

Orzech summarises the developments during the early Táng (founded 618 CE) as follows:

> We first see the translation of a variety of texts representative of the growing interest in mantra and dhāraṇī. Many of these texts promote a particular dhāraṇī, ritual, and deity. Second, we see the advent of texts representing distinct and comprehensive systems that are meant to codify the swelling tide of mantric texts, deities, and techniques. Full entry into these systems was accessed only through abhiṣeka, effecting the ritual transformation of a disciple into a cosmic overlord. Third, these overarching systems were given what amounts to imperial imprimatur during the twenty-year period from the 760s into the 780s. (Orzech, as cited in Orzech et al., 2011, p. 265)

Thus, it may be difficult to draw a clear line between what we might consider Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhism as represented by

Zhēnyán teachings and the Esoteric Buddhism in general. Early forms of esoteric practice gradually became more complex and eventually became integrated into comprehensive systems. At the same time, the purpose of the practices shifted from the purely mundane, to the gaining of various kinds of spiritual attainments and progress along the bodhisattva path, and eventually to the realizing of Buddhahood.

Later developments

The Zhēnyán lineages suffered particularly badly during the persecution of Buddhism under Emperor Wuzong in the mid-ninth century. However, for a while there does seem to have been a continuation of some lines of transmission until at least the Sòng dynasty, especially in areas remote from the capital. In the early 11th century during the Northern Sòng dynasty, there was another burst of translation of Buddhist texts, including tantras. However, they do not seem to have had much influence at the time.

Nevertheless, the practice and influence of some aspects of esoteric teachings did continue. There are at least three contexts for this.

Firstly, over the centuries there have been the scattered activities of groups, usually led by charismatic teachers, centred around the worship of specific buddhas or bodhisattvas of Esoteric Buddhism, with rituals including mudrā, zhòu and maṇḍala. For example, Robert Gimello (Gimello, 2004) has described the popularity of the worship of the Bodhisattva Cundi (準提菩薩 *Zhǔntí Púsà)*, using her associated dhāraṇī, mudra and maṇḍala as late as the 17th century during the period between the fall of the Ming dynasty and the establishment of the Manchu Qīng dynasty.

Secondly, there has been a revival in China and other Chinese-speaking communities of Táng Esoteric Buddhism based on Japanese Shingon and Tendai esoteric teachings. This began in the early 20th century during the Republican Period and can be seen as part of the project to reform and 'modernize' Chinese Buddhism by examining and re-evaluating the tradition (Bianchi, 2004). Several monks and laymen went to Japan to study the esoteric Buddhism of Shingon and Tendai and to spread the teachings in China on their return. One such notable monk was Dàyǒng (大勇), a disciple of Tàixū (太虛), the great 20th century teacher and reformer of Chinese Buddhism. Dàyǒng arrived in Japan in 1921 and the next year he entered the Esoteric

Buddhist University on Mount Kōya (高野山密宗大學), where he studied and received transmissions in both the Vajra Dhātu and Garbha Dhātu maṇḍala systems from Kanayama Bokushōy (金山穆韶) and the title ācārya was conferred on him. He returned to China in 1923, set up abiṣekha platforms and gave initiations in Shànghǎi and Hángzhōu, and then responded to Táixū's invitation to teach Esoteric Buddhism at Wǔchāng Buddhist College. Not long after this, he also began to study Tibetan Vajrayāna and devoted the rest of his life to integrating the practices of the Japanese and Tibetan Esoteric traditions (Deng & Wang, 2016).

Another monk who travelled to Japan at about the same time was Tèsōng (特松). He also studied with Kanayama Bokushō and had the title of ācārya conferred on him. On his return to China he transmitted teachings, gave initiations and performed tantric rituals for the protection of the state. Later he also studied with a Tendai master. Tèsōng wrote a dozen of books on Esoteric Buddhism.

A layman, Wáng Hóngyuàn (王弘願), is most notable for his translation in 1918 of *An Outline of Esoteric Buddhism* (*密宗綱要*, 王 1981/2007) by the Shingon monk Gonda Raifu. This was the first Chinese work dedicated to Japanese Shingon (Bianchi, 2004). The book is still in print and widely available in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Later events in the 20th century, especially the so-called Cultural Revolution of the late 60s and early 70s, more or less put an end to the practice of Táng Esoteric Buddhism in Mainland China. However, it survived in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and since then there has also been a limited revival in Mainland China[113]. In Hong Kong, Zhēnyán centres have usually not founded their own lineages. They maintain close connections with Japanese Shingon and still sometimes send students to Japan for initiations. However, in Taiwan, the Zhēnyán School Guāngmíng Lineage (真言光明流) founded by Master Wùguāng (悟光上師) does not identify as Japanese Shingon. Rather it sees itself as a resurrection of Táng Esoteric Buddhism. This lineage is said to have over 6,000 members and its influence has spread throughout Chinese-speaking areas (Bahir, 2018).

The third way in which the influence of Esoteric Buddhism persists in modern Chinese is in the integration of esoteric teachings and practices into other schools. The Tiāntái school was the earliest to do

[113]see 當代中國唐密法系的發展. Retrieved July 23, 2019, from http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_64958e4301016gzz.html.

this, but the two schools that came to dominate Chinese Buddhism, Pure Land (淨土 *jìngtǔ*) and Chán (禪 Jap. Zen), also came to incorporate elements of Esoteric Buddhism.

A good example of this is the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, usually known in Chinese as *Dàfódǐngshǒu Léngyán Jīng* (大佛頂首楞嚴經, T945), often shortened to *Léngyánjīng* (楞嚴經).

Although the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* is to be found in the Esoteric Teachings section of the Taishō canon, it has come to be regarded as an essential Chán (Zen) text and is in fact among the most influential sūtras in modern Chinese Buddhism. According to Ven. Xuānhuà (宣化, also transcribed as Hsüan Hua), Abbott of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in California until his passing in 1995 and founder of the Dharma Realm Buddhist University, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* was often the first major text to be studied by newly ordained monks in Chán monasteries from at least the Míng dynasty. It was also studied by laypersons.

Xūyún (虛雲, also transcribed as Hsü Yun), a Chán master and influential teacher in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, promoted study of the sūtra and practice of the zhòu within it. Later Xuānhuà (mentioned above) was also a very strong promoter of the sūtra and its zhòu. When he arrived in San Francisco his first project was to explain the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* and in 1968 he held a 90-day retreat that focused on this sūtra. The Buddhist Text Translation Society made a translation into English of the sūtra under Xuānhuà's direction, which was published together with extracts from Xuānhuà's commentary (BTTS, 2009).

According to Xuānhuà:

> In Buddhism all the sūtras are very important, but the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* is most important. Wherever the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* is, the Proper Dharma abides in the world. When the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* is gone, the Dharma Ending Age is before one's eyes[114].

The sūtra is broad in scope, drawing ideas from various Mahāyāna Buddhist schools. A central concept is that of the Tathāgata Garbha (如來藏 *rúlái zàng* 'thus-come storehouse') inherent in all sentient beings and from which the illusory world of mental and physical phenomena

[114] From *On the Authenticity of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (http://online.sfsu.edu/~rone/Buddhism/Shurangama/Shurangama%20Sūtra%20Is%20Definitely %20Authentic.htm), as quoted in BTTS, 2009, p. xLi.

arises. The Tathāgata Garbha also contains our potential for enlightenment once our practices remove the layers of illusion. This perspective is compatible both with the Vajra path to enlightenment and with Chán techniques for 'directly pointing to people's heart-minds' (直指人心 *zhízhǐ rénxīn*), *i.e.*, where a teacher enlightens students by directly revealing to them the nature of their minds.

The most explicitly esoteric sections of the sūtra are the Buddha's Peak (*uṣṇīṣa*) Glorious Mahā Sitātapatra ('Great White Canopy') Unsurpassed Spiritual Zhòu (我佛頂光明摩訶薩怛多般怛囉無上神呪 *wǒfódǐng guāngmíng móhē sàdáduōbāndálúo wúshàng shénzhòu*), usually referred to simply as the 'Śūraṅgama Mantra', and the details of the practices in which it is to be embedded.

The instructions for setting up the site of enlightenment (道場 *dàochǎng*) are long and complicated, and include preparing various kinds of offerings for the buddhas and bodhisattvas. On the walls inside the room, images of the Buddhas of the Ten Directions are to be displayed, including facing south images of Rocana (盧舍那 *lúshènà*), *i.e.*, Vaírocana, Śākya (釋迦 *shìjiā*), *i.e.*, Śākyamuni, Maitreya (彌勒 *mílè*), Akṣobhya (阿閦 *āqíng*) and Amitābha (彌陀 *mítuó*).

Practitioners have to first receive precepts from a 'truly pure' member of the Sangha, be trained in methods for attaining samādhi and must establish purity in conduct. For the first seven days they are to circumambulate the place of enlightenment, reciting the zhòu. For the next seven days they should focus on the bodhisattva's vows, and for the last seven days they must recite the zhòu continuously throughout day and night. On the final day the buddhas will appear from the ten directions. After the three weeks, the practitioners should then remain in sitting meditation upright and peacefully for a hundred days. "If their roots in the Dharma are strong, they will not rise from their seats during that time, and they will become Arhats at the first stage. Even if they do not reach the level of a sage in body and mind, they will be certain that in the future they will become Buddhas" (from the Buddhist Text Translation Society translation, BTTS, 2009, p. 286).

Despite being an important text of Chán Buddhism, the esoteric elements in this sūtra are clear. It includes chanting zhòu or mantra, constructing a site of enlightenment as a maṇḍala with altars surrounded by images of the 'honoured ones', and visualizing manifestations of the 'honoured ones'. The practices are integrated into a rigorous system oriented to realizing Buddhahood.

However, it should be noted that chanting of the Śūraṅgama mantra itself is often taken out of this context. For example, if you search YouTube for the Śūraṅgama mantra, then you will find many versions of it, sometimes chanted, sometimes sung, usually according to the Putonghua pronunciations of the characters, occasionally according to Cantonese pronunciation and sometimes in a reconstructed Sanskrit pronunciation. Often great claims are made for the various mundane powers to be gained from simply reciting it, including blessings for oneself, one's family and one's country.

Conclusion

Varieties of Buddhism are often conceptualised taxonomically. That is, there are three main vehicles – Hinayāna (or Nikāya or Theravāda), Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, each with distinct lineages or schools within them. Or there are two main vehicles – Hināyana and Mahāyāna, with Mahāyāna further divided into Paramitayāna (or Sūtrayāna) and Vajrayāna (or Tantrayāna). Scholars then try to come up with criteria that would clearly distinguish among the different yānas and schools. However, the case of Esoteric Buddhism in China reveals the limitations of such an approach. In order to take into account the ways in which various concepts and practices overlap and have varying degrees of difference from and similarity to one another, it seems more useful to map the relevant 'space' topographically (see figure below for an initial attempt at this).

Taking this perspective, we might say that within the space of Esoteric Buddhism, there is a prototyical Vajrayāna in which practices of mantra/dhāraṇī chanting, maṇḍala construction, mudrā, deity practice, and homa rituals are all deployed and integrated into a system aiming to fast-track practitioners to enlightenment, which can only be undertaken after initiation by a qualified master and which is underpinned by an ideology of enlightenment through uncovering or realizing the true nature of the mind.

At varying distances from the prototypical Vajrayāna, there may be a variety of practices that perhaps deploy some, but not all, of these practices and/or are directed to developing mundane powers rather than the supermundane power of enlightenment. These overlap with 'magic' or thaumaturgy, which uses incantations or other practices to gain

purely worldly benefits. Alternatively, certain esoteric practices may be seen simply as 'add-ons' to 'ordinary' Mahayāna.

In the case of Chinese Esoteric Buddhism, as indeed any kind of Buddhism, we would then be spared from the necessity of having to come up with definitions with clear criteria that would enable us to state in every case that such and such a complex form of concepts and practices are or are not Vajrayāna, Esoteric Buddhism, Mahayana and so on.

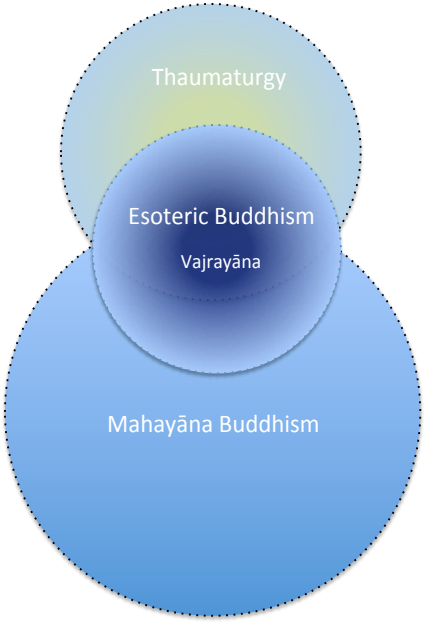

Figure 1: Mapping Esoteric Buddhism and Vajrayāna

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The Trance or Speed Walking Tradition of Tibet

John Clarke

A yogic tradition of speed or trance walking was once practised in Tibet and in particular had a strong centre in *Nyang stod kyi phug* or the Happy Caves of the Upper Nang Valley, a side valley to the *Nyang* Valley near to *Zhwa lu* monastery in southern Tibet.[115] The skill was called *lung gom* "wind walking" or *gyok lung* meaning "quick wind". Both Madame Alexander David Neel and Dewan Bahadur Palha, the Tibetan confidant of Sir Charles Bell witnessed speed walkers at first hand. Although not directly witnessing the phenomenon himself, Sir Charles Bell, Political Officer, Sikkim and Bhutan, 1908 to 1921, made notes in the 1934 diary of his second trip to Lhasa of reported sightings, while Lama Anagarika Govinda wrote the most well-rounded account after talking to informants at *Nyang stod kyi phug* on a visit in 1947. This is published within his book Way of the White Clouds (Govinda, 1980, p. 84-92). However, like Bell he had no direct experience and was working from the reportage of others.

Madame David Alexandra Neel tells us in her account of the phenomenon that references to speed walking are found in many places in Tibetan literature, such as for example in the *Padma Kah Tang* where it is termed *kang gyok ngo drub* or "success in swiftness of foot" (David-Neel, 1985, p. 215). A later historical reference is found in the terma life of *Ye she mtsho rgyal* written in the 18th century by *sTak*

[115] It is 13 miles north of Gyantse.

sham nu den rdo rje where speed walking is described as one of the mundane siddhis gained by *Ye she mtso rgyal* as a stage on her spiritual path to enlightenment (Dowman, 1984, p. 96).

We may begin with the eye witness accounts. Palha told Bell that he had seen speed walkers twice, once when he was 10 and again about "30 years ago". As he was talking in 1934 to Bell that makes the last occasion around 1904. He described the lung gompa in this way, he said he was "taking steps as in walking and his feet seemed to touch the ground, but only lightly as though he was almost treading the air. The steps came very quickly, he travelled with extraordinary speed". He added that one of these men walks in one day as far as others would walk in seven (Bell, 1934).

Madame Alexandra Neel recounted that she saw a speed walker while crossing the uninhabited great *chang tang* plain in Tibet, during her 1924 incognito trip there. The man had a calm impassive face, his gaze was fixed above the horizon as if on something high in the sky like a star and his feet seemed to rebound each time they touched the ground, as if they were elastic. He did not run but his steps were regular like a pendulum. He held a *phurpa* in his right hand. Neel was warned by the lamas accompanying her not to speak to the man as he passed as they believed this would kill him since he needed to keep repeating the mantra of the deity possessing him (David-Neel, 1985, p.201-203). She was told that the practice involved a combination of mantra recitation, breathing exercises and that these had to be exactly coordinated with the steps being taken, everything had to be synchronised. The trance state depended on fixing one's eyes on something above the horizon, a star was ideal and the best times of the day for practice were at sunset or in the twilight (David-Neel, 1985, p.213). On another occasion David Neel passed a *lung gom* who was wearing chains and was told that they do that to hold themselves down as their bodies become so light over time with practice that there is a danger of them floating up into the sky (David-Neel, 1985, p.210).

Charles Bell photographed a *drub thop* or mahasiddha on the 17th October 1934 who is shown in the cross armed posture associated with the Semde Series of Dzogchen (Plate 1). Ali, one of Bell's caravan men, told Bell that he knew him well and that he lived near him in Gyantse when not in retreat. He had attained several siddhi: that of levitating to 3 or 4 storeys, the ability to make himself hot in winter (*tro lung*) and cool in the heat of summer (*trang lung*). He was also a *lung gom pa*.

This yogin was married and a heavy beer drinker (Bell 1934; Clarke, 1997, p. 97, Fig.103).

Lung gom could of course be practised by a solitary practitioner but there were two centres associated with well known monasteries where rigorous closed or sealed 12 year retreats were used to perfect it. These centres at Samding monastery and at *Nyang stod kyi phug* near *Zhwa lu* monastery in *gTsang* were associated with a particular ritual held every 12 years. According to Lama Govinda's informants (Govinda, 1980, p. 84-85)[116] at *Nyang stod kyi phug* the origins of the practice lay with a legendary episode in the life of the great *Bu ston rin chen grub*, the codifier of the Tibetan canon, who lived between 1290 and 1364. *Zhwa lu*, whose monastery *Bu ston* was the 11th Abbott of, near to *Nangto kyi bu*, became a centre of esoteric yogic practices, most notably that of *gtum mo* or Inner fire.

During the time that *Bu ston* was Abbott of Shalu there lived close by his close disciple and practitioner *g.Yung ston rdo rje dpal* (1284-1365), a master of all the Nyingma tantras, Mahayoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga, including the Dzogchen Semde. Amongst other places he practiced at Paro. He was renowned for his practice involving Yamantaka and is usually depicted holding a *phurpa* with a wrathful protector appearing before him as in a 19th century tangka now in the Rubin Museum, New York (Plate 2).

During one ritual *g.Yung ston rdo rje dpal* propitiated *Shin je cho gyal*, Lord of Death with offerings in order to prolong the life of humans by 12 years. *Shin je* agreed, but only on condition that a life was willingly offered as compensation to him. None of those present at the ritual was willing to offer himself except the saintly *Bu ston*. Instead of accepting his offer *Shin je* laid upon *Bu ston* and his successors the duty of performing the ritual every 12 years. In order for the ritual to be performed the yidam or tutelary deities of *U/gTsang* had to be summoned within one day. This was the reason speed walking was instituted, moreover the walker had to be fearless as he had to face wrathful Tantric deities. The practices were set up at *bSam sding* and *Nyang stod kyi phug* and these places alternated in sending *lung gom pa* every 12 years. We are given no details of how the candidate for this was chosen. Such *lung gom pa* were also called according to David Neels informants *maheketang*, after the *mahe* or buffalo on which *Shin je* the lord of Death rides.

[116] See also David-Neel, 1985, p. 205-207 for another version of this legend.

At the end of the twelve year retreat the sealed doorway would be broken down and the *lung gom pa* would begin his lightening trance journey through *U/gTsang*. Speaking to no one and maintaining the trance he would blow on a thighbone trumpet when approaching each dzong to alert the authorities to his progress through the country. The journey ended with a silent audience before the Dalai Lama in the Potala palace. Phala, Bells informant told Bell that the carrying out of the trance walk was considered beneficial and protective for Tibet as a whole (Bell 1934). He believed the last time it had happened before Bell's trip was 1932. In theory then it should have occurred again in 1944 and 1956.

Plate 3 is a general view of the sealed hermitages at *Nyang stod kyi phug* taken in October 1934 by Bell. We can only guess at the dimensions of the buildings as being perhaps about 20 feet square. We see thick mud walled structures, built around an open courtyard, though not all of these may have been *lung gom* hermitages.

Lama Govinda provides us with a plan of a hermitage (Plate 4) at *Nyang stod kyi phug*. A gallery is shown surrounding an open courtyard. Under this the meditation practices took place. The retreat building also had a kitchen and a place for washing and toilet needs, served by a stream.

The *gom chen* or yogin could also use the top of the gallery for exercise, this space was hidden from outside view by the tall outer wall which rose to above a man's height as we see in the cross section.

Lung gom can traditionally be approached in one of two ways. The siddhi may be aimed for directly and developed by specific exercises, or it may arise as a siddhi or power at a certain stage in one's inner development.[117] The training exercises for *lung gom* involve meditation on the element air or *lung* itself together with the use of the mantras of a deity. The main physical exercise is one of yogic jumping where the practitioner jumps vertically upward without the use of hands as seen here. This is identical to a *Tsa lung 'khrul-'khor* exercise designed to cleanse the *nadis* as part of the completion stages of Tantric practice. The exercise is also used to develop the siddhi of levitation. Before each leap a full vase of *kumbhka* breath has to be taken and held during the leap upward. It would seem that both levitation and speed-walking depend on a conscious manipulation and control of *lung* as an elemental force within the body. But far more unanswered questions remain than

[117] I am grateful to Nida Chenangtsang for this information, given verbally.

the things we do know about *lung gom*. Where, for example, are the texts to be found that relate to this yogic discipline? While we have descriptions in texts of practices such as g*tum mo, 'po ba*, and other of the Six Dharmas or yogas of Naropa textual descriptions of *lung gom* appear to be elusive. These may exist of course. Alternatively, might this have been a purely oral tradition?

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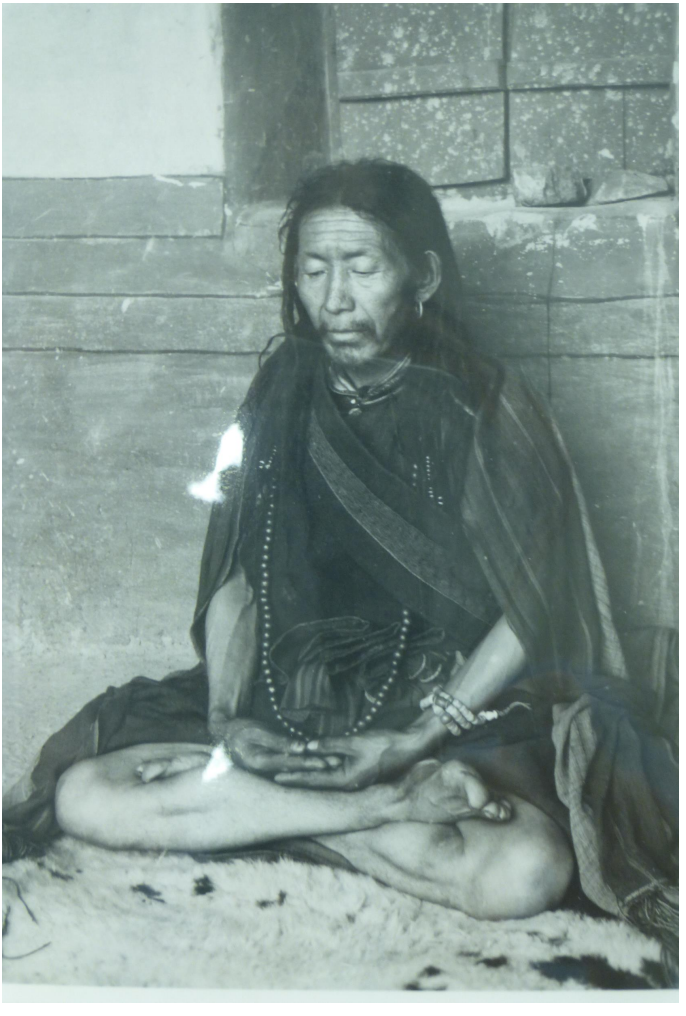

Figure 1: Mahasiddha and practitioner of lung gom. Photographed by Sir Charles Bell on 17/10/1934 at Gyantse. Photograph British Library, London

Figure 2: g.Yung ston rdo rje dpal and fierce protector, 18th century thangka, Rubin Museum, New York

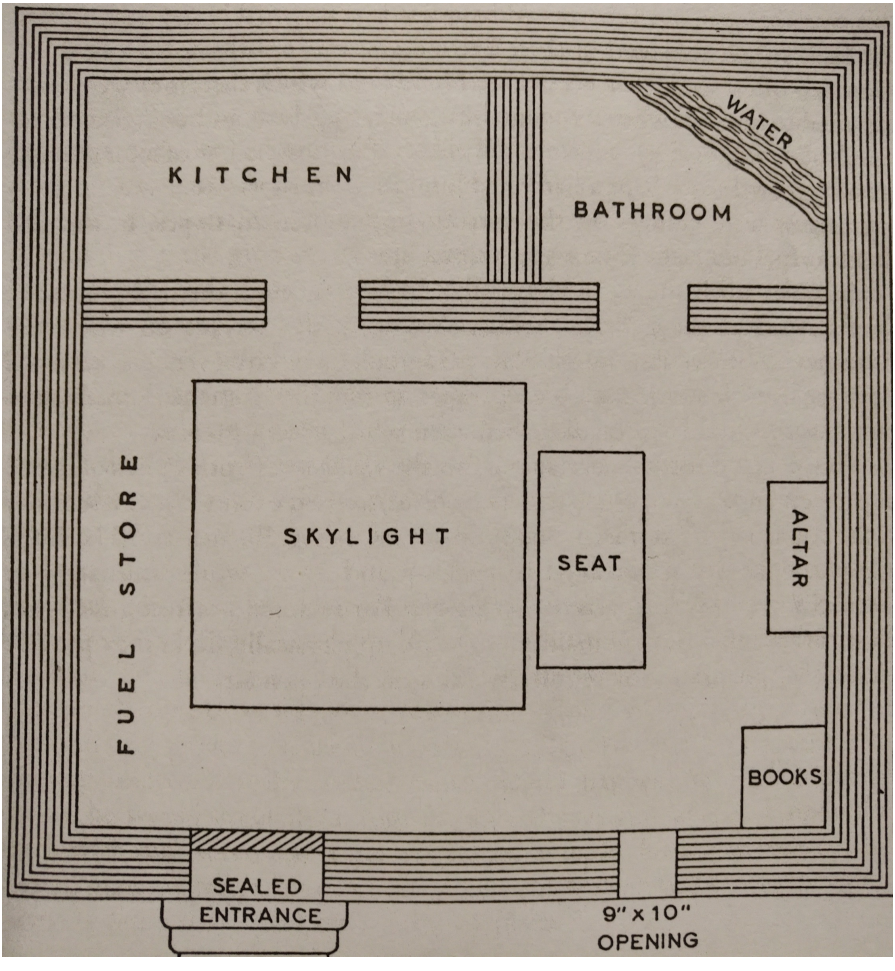

Figure 3: Plan of a lung gom hermitage, taken from Anagarika Govinda Way of the white Clouds page 87

Atisha's Journey to the Golden Isle

Denise Tomecko

The Indian Buddhist master Atisha Dipamkara Srijana[118] (982–1054 CE), is a well–known and much revered religious teacher who played a major role in the spread of both Mahayana and Vajrayāna Buddhism in Asia. This paper focuses on a pivotal twelve-year period in Atisha's remarkable life, a period during which he undertook a long and perilous sea voyage from the Pala kingdom in modern day Bengal to Suvarnadvipa (Tib. *Serling*), the "Golden Isle or Island of Gold". There he studied with the renowned Bodhisattva Dharmakirti (Tib. *Serlingpa*), a master skilled in non – dual forms of cognition and in the key practice of altruistic awareness or bodhichitta. Atisha's time in the Golden Isle profoundly influenced his life and his later teachings, both in India and Tibet.

When we think of the legendary Bengali Buddhist master Atisha Dipamkara today, we are reminded of a body of teachings, some of which are attributed to Atisha himself, while others are credited to his

[118] Throughout this paper we will see that Atisha's name changes over time. In fact, the name Atisha itself was given to him only much later in life, when he journeyed to Tibet. In his youth he was known by the name his family had given him, which seems to have been Chandragharba (Pala). He maintained that name until his Buddhist ordination at the age of twenty-nine, so I will do likewise. Then, after his Buddhist ordination he was known as Dipamkara Sri Jana or just Dipamkara. However, as an acknowledgement of his more well-known name of Atisha, I will either call him Atisha Dipamkara or, simply Atisha.

close disciples or to later scholars of his lineage. Works that mention Atisha, or that are accredited to him directly, are to be found in a collection compiled by the forefathers of the Kadampa lineage[119] of Tibetan Buddhism, the so called "Father Dharma" texts, featuring contributors such as: Atisha Dipamkara (982–1054), his close lay disciple Dontompa Gyelwe Jungne (1005/6–1064), as well as the prolific Kadampa writer Chekawa Yeshe Dorje[120] (1102–1176).

These texts have over time, and with a great deal of revision, led to such well-known systems of practice as: The Stages of the Path (*Lam Rim*), the Seven Point Mind Training (*Lojong*) and the practice of giving and receiving (*Tong Len*). Practices which have influenced all major schools of Vajrayāna[121] Buddhism today.

At this point, it seems that all remaining written sources concerning the life and teachings of Atisha are preserved only in the Tibetan language, so it is to these that we must turn for clues to understanding his life, travels and teachings. These sources are:

- The Histories of the Doctrine *(chos-byung)* – Historical and semi-historical literature.
- The Royal Chronicles *(rgyal-rabs)* – Histories of the Kings in which he is mentioned.
- Biographical Literature *(rnam-thar)* – Biographical literature on Atisha's life
- Eulogies to Dipamkara *(bstod-pa)* – Praises of his life
- Tibetan translations of mainly Indian texts *(bs-Tan-gyur)* – Preserved translations and original literary works by Atisha as well as colophons of these works. (Chattopadhyaya, 2011, p. 27)

These precious texts which have been carefully preserved in Tibet and transmitted around the world since the 11th century, have been of inconceivable value to long lines of scholars and practitioners until the present day, but how reliable they are as historical sources is much less clear. Are we, for example, able to trace a true historic account of the

[119] Atisha's closest student Dontompa Gyelwe Jungne founded the Kadampa School and established the Reting monastery north of Lhasa in 1056. He was also the holder of Atisha's tantric lineage.

[120] Author of the root text *Training the mind in seven points*, in which he laid out the practice of mind-training (Lojong) and popularised the practice of giving and taking (Tonglen), both attributed to Atisha.

[121] Esoteric or tantric Buddhism

life of Atisha from their pages, or are they to be seen as an idealised biography of a great Buddhist master, or perhaps a little of both?

For the purpose of this research, there will be an attempt to corroborate at least some of the stories contained in these documents against historical evidences from the period. For example, through archaeological finds, traveller's records, inscriptions found at relevant sites as well as some recently recovered texts which have come to light in Tibet (Paltsek Institute, 2006). In this way, we will attempt to form a slightly more nuanced picture of Atisha and his legacy.

Therefore, research for the paper has involved several visits to important archaeological sites in South and South-East Asia, interviews with relevant Buddhist scholars and translators, as well as a review of related literature.

The Birth of Atisha and Pala Influences on Buddhism

According to Tibetan biographical literature, Atisha was born into one of the ruling families of the Buddhist Pala dynasty of Northern India, in about 982 CE, during the reign of King Mahipala 1st (c. 977–1027). He was named Chandragharba and was the second of three sons. His father's name was Kalyanasri and his mother's Prabhavati. His place of birth is said to have been the Vajrayogini village, near Vikrampura, a district of Dacca in modern Bengal (Majumdar, 1986).

The Pala dynasty had emerged from one of the most turbulent periods in Buddhist history, namely 6th–8th centuries northern India, during the late Gupta and early Pala periods. It had been a time of violent political rivalries and territorial fragmentation. Then in the 8th century, some of the political power vacuum was taken up by the first of the Buddhist Pala Kings, Gopala 1st (750s–770s). The Pala dynasty reached its height in the 8th–10th centuries (Figure 1), under the rule of Gopala's son and grandson, the second and third Pala monarchs, Dharmapala (770–810) and Devapala (810–850), respectively (Majumdar, 1986). Under their rule, the territories of the Pala Empire covered vast areas of northern India influencing cultures, not only within their own borders, but as far away as South East Asia and China. They were the dominant power throughout the area and their navy performed both mercantile and defensive roles in the Bay of Bengal.[122]

[122] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pala_Empire

By the mid-10th century however, much of their territory had been lost, mainly due to quarrels about the Pala royal succession and invasions from other regional powers. As a result, the Pala Empire was reduced to parts of what is now Bihar. Then, in c.977 a new king came to the Pala throne. His name was Mahipala 1st. During his reign the Palas were able to partially restore the fortunes of their dynasty, by strengthening royal bastions in Bengal and Bihar and by taking back some of their territories. Mahipala was said to have captured the imagination of his subjects by his pious and compassionate rule and by his success in repelling numerous invasions by the South Indian Cholas, a dominant maritime power on the east coast of India, with extensive influence over the trade routes between India and South East Asia. Chandragharba Pala (Atisha) was born into this more fortunate time in Pala history.

Figure 1: The Kannauj Triangle, c.750–900

This was also a time when earlier experiments with esoteric religious practices known as tantras had taken firm root within the context of Mahayana[123] Buddhism. This new approach introduced "skillful-means" or methods which expedite enlightenment, and

[123] A Buddhist tradition which had emerged around the 1st century AD and is typically concerned with altruistically oriented spiritual practice as embodied in the ideal of the bodhisattva or "buddha to be"

became known as the Vajrayāna or Diamond Vehicle.[124] Vajrayāna had initially shared many of its practices and texts with the early Hindu Tantras[125] but, by the time of Atisha, it already had Tantras of its own and its texts had become better adapted to fundamental Buddhist principles. No doubt these developments had had a profound effect on the syllabi of traditional Buddhist monastic institutions, such as the well-established Nalanda University, as they struggled to compete with newly built, and possibly more liberal, universities such as Vikramasila and Odantapura.

The Institutionalisation of Buddhism

Perhaps the most important legacy of the Pala Empire was its contribution to the spread of Buddhism. The teachings of the Buddha, known as the Buddha Dharma, flourished in its lands where great works of art were created and new monastic universities (viharas) built with the support of royal patronage. It was due to the continued success of these great monastic universities that the Palas were to influence Buddhist history and thought for centuries to come. Four of them were already established by the time Chandragharba Pala (Atisha) was born and at least three of them played a significant role in his life story. They were important both in his early education and later when they became venues for his own teaching career, upon his return from South East Asia and before he left for Tibet. They are listed here in order of their construction:

Nalanda Mahavihara – focus Mahayana (Gupta Period 5th-6th Century)

The first of these great Buddhist viharas was built towards the end of the earlier Gupta period and still remains the most famous of all the ancient viharas of northern India. Nalanda,[126] which was situated east

[124] Vajrayāna Buddhism developed in India around the 6th or 7th century CE. Tantric ideas began to be incorporated into the teachings of Buddhist universities in Northern India, gradually leading to the development of a new tradition.

[125] Tantras ("Looms" or "Weavings") refers to numerous and varied scriptures pertaining to any of several esoteric traditions rooted in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy.

[126] Historical studies indicate that the University of Nalanda was established during the reign of the Gupta emperor Kumaragupta (415 – 455)

of the present-day city of Patna in Bihar, sustained almost unbroken support under the Hindu Gupta kings and the Buddhist Pala kings. In its prime, the vihara was renowned throughout the Buddhist world, more generally for its scholarship and wide range of subjects, but in particular for the study of the Bodhisattva Path or what became known as Buddhism's Great Vehicle, the Mahayana. Renowned for its outstanding and vast library, it attracted not only Indian students and scholars, but those from as far away as China, Central Asia, Tibet, Korea and South East Asia (Java and Sumatra).

Odantapuri Mahavihara – focus Sravakayana (Pala Empire 8th Century)

The second oldest of India's great viharas, was Odantapuri. It was established in the 8th century, in the reign of the founder of the Pala dynasty, the democratically elected, Gopala 1st (c. 750s–770s). According to a Tibetan history of the Kalachakra Tantra[127] there is a reference to Odantapuri as being administered by a Sravakayana Buddhist school[128]. If this is the case then it would perhaps have been teaching traditional early Buddhist subjects, such as the sutras[129] and the vinaya[130], with the goal of the practitioner becoming an Arhat[131]. It was a large institution situated in Magadha, in the modern state of Bihar Sharif, Nalanda district

Vikramashila Mahavihara – focus Vajrayāna (Pala Empire 8th–9th Century)

This vihara was built in the reign of the second Pala king Dharmapala, in the late 8th to early 9th century. It was considered the primary university of its time and the largest. Esoteric Buddhism was in an embryonic stage at the time of its construction and as tantric ideas were

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[127] A term used in Vajrayāna Buddhism that means "wheel(s) of time."

[128] Śrāvakayāna is a path based on early Buddhist teachings, the goal of which is for an individual to achieve liberation as a result of listening and practising the teachings of a fully enlightened Buddha.

[129] Discourses attributed to the historical Buddha.

[130] A regulatory framework for the Buddhist monastic community, based on the canonical texts called the Vinaya Pitaka.

[131] One who has gained insight into the true nature of existence and achieved nirvana, the goal of Sravakayana Buddhism.

incorporated into the syllabus of these newly built universities, it led to the flowering of the Buddhist Vajrayāna. By this period, the Palas supported Mahayana Buddhism, Vajrayāna Buddhism and Shaivite Hinduism.[132] Some sources say that it was built partly due to a perceived decline in the scholarship of the older Nalanda University, but in any case, Vikramashila became a well-known centre for the study of Buddhism, Hinduism and Tantra, amongst many other topics. It was located near present day Bhangalpur, in Bihar. Professors and monks from Vikramashila were frequently invited to foreign countries to spread Buddhist scholarship and religion.

Somapura Mahavihara – focus unknown (Pala Empire 8th–9th Century)

Somapura was also started by Dharmapala. A clay tablet found at the site describes him as the king of Varendri-Magadha.[133] This large university was probably completed by his son Devapala and seems to have mirrored the architectural styles of South East Asia and Burma. Tibetan sources state that many of their monks visited Somapura from the 9th–12th centuries and Atisha lived there for several years while he translated a text called the *Madyamaka Ratnapradipa* into Tibetan. His spiritual teacher was the abbot of the vihara, whose name was Ratnakara Shanti.[134]

Another Buddhist vihara was built after the time of Atisha in the late 11th–12th centuries, probably in the reign of Ramapala (1077–1120). It was to be named Jagaddala vihara, but since it was built after the death of Atisha it is less relevant to our research.

These famous centres of learning formed a kind of network of interconnected establishments between which professors and scholars could move easily from position to position (Dutt, 1962). Such was their fame that they attracted eminent scholars and students both domestic and international. Their syllabi were extensive and included science, medicine, mathematics and of course the full range of Buddhist and Hindu texts. Infact, the powerful Pala synthesis of Mahayana thought, combining the Prajnaparamita[135] with Tantra, spread to Java, Sumatra, Nepal and Tibet and continues to be a thriving tradition today.

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[132] Devotees of the god Shiva, patron of yogis.

[133] Northern Bengal and Southern Bihar.

[134] http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Somapura_Mahavihara

[135] The Perfection of Wisdom in Mahayana Buddhism.

Atisha's Early Education

It is important to note here that although the early education of Atisha is lacking in reliable detail and the biographies simply do not agree on many points, it seems very likely that in his early life, before his Buddhist ordination and subsequent journey to Suvarnadvipa,[136] he would have been exposed to Tantric Buddhism because he:

> Grew up in an age in which the spiritual atmosphere of the country was saturated with Tantrism. Mahayana Buddhism, under various names, was becoming then more and more indistinguishable from Tantrism and Tantrika Buddhists, under the title of Siddhacaryas, were enjoying the highest spiritual prestige. In short, there was then in Eastern India no wisdom that was not essentially spiritualistic and Tantrism represented spiritualism par excellence. (Chattopadhyaya, 2011, p. 71)

In the Tibetan hagiographies, five main teachers have been mentioned in his early education:

Jetari

A well-known Brahmin teacher, possibly at Vikramasila, and to a lesser extent at Nalanda, specialising in epistemology and tantra. Chandragharba, who was said to be just ten or eleven years old, supposedly took the Buddhist refuge with him and learned five kinds of minor sciences, paving the way for his study of philosophy and religion (Chattopadhyaya, 2011). Jitari then sent him to continue his studies with Bodhibhadra at Nalanda.

Bodhibhadra

Tibetan sources explain that Chandragharba may have received his novice vows from the scholar-monk Bodhibhadra and that it was he who exerted a great influence on his further studies. It is interesting to note that the great and famous Mahasiddha Naropa[137] would have been his contemporary at Nalanda during this time, but it is not clear if he was a preceptor as it is not mentioned directly.

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[136] The Island of Gold.

[137] Famous for teaching advanced tantric practices known as *The Six Yogas of Naropa.*

Rahulagupta

In the life of Atisha by SC Das, Chandragharba is then said to have gone to the vihara of Krishnagiri[138] to study with the Tantric yogin Rahulagupta. There he was said to have been initiated into the practices of the Hevajra Tantra and given a secret Tantric name, possibly Guhyajnanavajra, although this cannot be verified. He was also thought to have studied under the tantric yogi Avdhutipa (Apple, 2019, p. 3).

Silaraksita

According to CS Das, Chandragharba then took monastic ordination in the Mahasangika lineage[139] of monks with Silaraksita[140] at Odantapuri Vihara. Why he might have changed direction so drastically is unknown but he appears to have gone from the life of a wandering Tantric practitioner and yogi, to that of an ordained Buddhist monk. His ordination name was almost certainly Dipamkara (Sri-Jana) and henceforth he seems to have been known simply as Dipamkara. He then went on to make an in-depth study of the Buddhist scriptures from the Mahayana and early Buddhist schools so that, in later life, he was perfectly placed to reconcile differing views of Buddhist practice for students in India and Tibet.

So, it seems, at least from Atisha's life story that by the young age of thirty-one Dipamkara had already received both scriptural and experiential teachings in all three vehicles of Buddhism, namely the Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayāna, as well as the four classes of Tantra.[141]

Apparently, it was also during his time at Odandapuri Vihara that he first heard of Dharmakirti of Suvarnadvipa,[142] a master of the

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[138] BC Law, identifies this place with one of the seven hills of Rajagrha, modern day Rajgir, site of the first Buddhist council.

[139] The Sanskrit name Mahasanghika means "Great congregation" or "Great order of monks," an early Buddhist sect from which Mahayana developed.

[140] A famous teacher of the Mahasanghika School.

[141] Kriya tantra (*bya-rgyud*) – ritual deity practice; Charya tantra (*spyod-rgyud*) – behavioural deity practice; Yoga tantra (*rnal-'byor rgyud*) – integrated deity practice; Anuttarayoga *(bla-med rnal-'byor rgyud*) – peerlessly integrated (highest yoga) deity practice.

[142] Dharmakirti, known as Serlingpa in Tibet, was a teacher living in Suvarnadvipa or the Golden Isle. The Golden Isle or Serling was almost certainly Sumatra,

Mahayana who was reputed to have achieved special realisation of bodhichitta at a very profound level. News of his erudite explana-tions and high realisation must have spread along the trade routes between India and South East Asia where, during the 7th to 11th centuries, there was a "constant circulation of ideas, which was paralleled by a universal respect for prominent teachers" (Miksic, 2010, p. 8). It is also possible that Atisha may have met Dharmakirti personally, when he was on pilgrimage in India or at the Nalanda Mahavihara as, some sources say that he has spent seven years in India. In any case Atisha's life story tells us that after having had auspicious visions of his Tantric master Rahulagupta and his tutelar deity the goddess Tara, all pointing to his need to perfect the practice of bodhichitta, he seems to have been inspired to travel to the famous Suvarnadvipa, Golden Isle, to study with Dharmakirti, sometimes known as Dharampala.

Dharmakirti

Atisha embarked on a long and arduous sea journey of some fourteen months to reach Suvarnadvipa, which was known to be a main centre of Buddhist learning in the East and where, according to his own writings, he was to meet and study with the most important teacher of his life, Dharmakirti. Atisha and his party of 125 monks probably left in 1012 and arrived there in 1013.[143] Their journey of about fourteen months points to a place some distance from the shores of eastern India and Tibetan sources tell us that they took a large merchant ship to make the trip.

Indonesia. He was thought to have been a member of the royal family of the Buddhist Sailendra dynasty of Java and Sumatra.

[143] Rahul Sankrityayan (9 April 1893 – 14 April 1963)

Figure 2: Srivijayan Trade Routes

Possible locations of Suvarnadvipa (the Golden Isle)

As always with the development of empires and their civilizations, the story of Suvarnadvipa begins within the economic and religious context of its time, in this case three hundred years before Atisha was born, in 7th century South East Asia.

It was then that a kingdom based out of Palembang, on the island of Sumatra (Figure 3), extended its influence by taking effective control of the Malacca and Sunder Straits with the lucrative international sea trade that passed through them. This power was to become known as Srivijaya,[144] a maritime and commercial empire or federation which established trade relations, not only within the states and kingdoms of the Malay Archipelago, but also with India and China. It was a federation of coastal city-states, controlled primarily with naval supremacy and the effective policing of regional waterways and ports. It had little control of the hinterlands of such ports, which were managed by local leaders, who were obliged to pay taxes and tributes to Srivijaya. Most scholars seem to agree that the capital of this loosely

[144] Translates as "shining victory"

affiliated maritime empire was located at Palembang in south Sumatra at least from the 7th until the early 11th century and was ruled by the Maharaja of Srivijaya. After that, the capital may have shifted to other constituent parts of the federation but this is still a hotly debated issue among scholars of South East Asian history.

The first stone inscriptions which mention the name Srivijaya date from the 7th century and were found in and near Palembang[145] in south Sumatra.

Figure 3: Srivijayan Ship, Bas Relief Borobudur 9th century

[145] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kedukan_Bukit_inscription and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talang_Tuo_inscription.

Figure 4: Sunset over Borobodur

Indian merchants, who had been trading within the region from at least the 5th century, referred to the area as Suvarnabhumi, the Land of Gold, possibly due to its wealth of high value trade goods and abundance of gold. It was as a result of the colonizing influences of these same Hindu traders that Buddhism also reached Srivijaya. By the 7th century merchant ships were carrying passengers, including Buddhist monks and Tantric masters, from the eastern seaboard of India and Sri Lanka, along their complex maritime networks to destinations such as Java, Sumatra and beyond. In this way esoteric Buddhism, alongside earlier Hindu influences spread rapidly, becoming established in port cities along the shores of Sumatra, Java and Malaysia. The most famous royal house to offer its royal patronage to the expansion of esoteric Buddhism at this time, was that of the great kings of Java and Sumatra[146], the Sailendras, who built such iconic Buddhist structures as Borobudur[147] in the highlands of Central Java.

As can be seen from an inscription found at Nalanda Mahavihara in northern India (Figure 5), the Sailendra dynasty in Sumatra was

[146] In modern Indonesia

[147] Borobudur is a 9th century Mahayana Buddhist temple, the largest in the world, built in Java by the Sailendra dynasty.

already in close contact with Pala kings by 860. In fact, by looking at the art and architecture of Srivijaya during this time we can see that it is clearly influenced by that of the Gupta and Pala empires, as well as Odisha.

The kings of Srivijaya in Palembang, Sumatra, and those in the Melayu kingdom of Jambi, Sumatra, also supported major centres for the study and practice of Buddhism. The influence of esoteric Buddhism spread to the nearby Khmer (Cambodia) and Cham (Vietnam) kingdoms, peninsular Thailand, the Malay Archipelago, and as far away as China and Japan. From the earliest days of this religious diffusion, spiritually minded individuals had been travelling great distances to reach India by sea, often stopping in Srivijaya to learn Indian languages and study with masters there. One such early traveller was the famous Chinese monk Yijing, who recorded his journey from China to the Nalanda and back in 671 CE and 695 CE respectively. He praised the high level of scholarship in Srivijaya and recommended that other Chinese monks break their sea voyage to India there, in order to prepare themselves for further studies at their final destination. Yijing translated many texts from Sanskrit into Chinese, including the Golden Light Sutra (Takakusu, 2005). In the 8th century CE Vajrabodhi[148] (671–741 CE) and his soon to be famous disciple Amoghavajra[149] (705–774 CE) also stopped in Srivijaya whilst en route from South India to China and finally Japan. They followed the well-travelled Tamraparniyan sea route, which took them from India via Sri Lanka, Srivijaya and on to China and Japan. Whilst in Srivijaya they are said to have studied a new Vajrayāna tradition, which seems to have been distinct from those taught at Nalanda. During this period Buddhism and Vedic Hinduism had already become so infused with Tantric influences and forms of practice that a kind of Hindu/Buddhist syncretism had arisen in South East Asia. In addition, the empire grew to such an extent that by the time of Atisha's visit in the early 11th century, it was considered a major centre of Buddhist studies in the East.

When searching for evidence of the location of Suvarnadvipa, the Golden Isle, where Atisha travelled with his retinue, it is important to examine archaeological evidence, alongside the Tibetan texts and hagiographies, to corroborate some of the assumptions that are made

[148] A South Indian Vajrayāna missionary travelling to China in the Tang dynasty.

[149] Uzbek Buddhist translator who was to become perhaps to most powerful monk in Chinese history

about places and events from that time. So what evidence do we have to support a location for Suvarnadvipa, the Golden Isle, which was the destination of Atisha's journey?

Firstly, we have the aforementioned Nalanda Inscription of 860 (Figure 5) found in the antechamber of Monastery 1 at the archaeological site of Nalanda Mahavihara, in India (Munoz, 2006, p. 175). The inscription is written in Devanagri and Proto–Bengali script. It states that the Pala king Devapaladeva of Bengala, had granted the request of the Sri Maharaja of Suvarnadvipa, Balaputra (833–850), to build a Buddhist monastery at Nalanda (Sen. Sailendra, 2013, p. 34). Balaputra was a prominent member of the Javanese Buddhist Sailendra family, and is known to have been the Maharaja of Srivijaya in Palembang, Sumatra, at that time. Therefore, in this inscription, we can see that Sumatra is directly referred to as Suvarnadvipa or the Island of Gold.

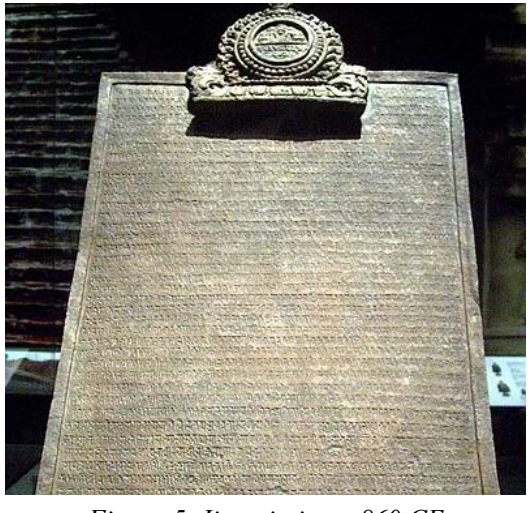

Figure 5: Iinscription c.860 CE

In addition, there is the later Padang Roco inscription dated 1024, which was found in the highlands of Sumatra.[150] It tells of an image of the Bodhisattva Amoghapasa Lokeshvara[151] being delivered to the

[150] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Padang Roco Inscription

[151] A form of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (the lord who looks down), who is the embodiment of Buddhist compassion. The statue is now on show at the National Museum of Indonesia, Jakarta

King at Dharmasraya,[152] a place on the upper reaches of the Batang Hari River of Jambi, Sumatra. It was transported from Bhumi Java and delivered to Suvarnabhumi or The Land of Gold. This inscription was found in situ providing further evidence that Sumatra was not only referred to as Suvarnadvipa but also as Suvarnabhumi, the Island of Gold and Land of Gold respectively.

In his book Suvarnadvipa, RC Majumdar states:

> There can be … hardly any doubt, in view of the statements of Arab and Chinese writers, and inscriptions found in Sumatra itself that the island was also known as Suvanadvipa and Suvarnabhumi. (Majumdar, 1986)

In fact, modern Malays still refer to Sumatra as Pulaw Emas, meaning Island of Gold. If we take a closer look at early Sumatra and its two main centres of power, it is likely that Atisha sailed either to Palembang or to Jambi to study with Dharmakirti. To this end I went to investigate both the sites myself.

Palembang, Sumatra

Archaeological surveys which have taken place to the west of Palembang since the 1970s have uncovered large amounts of Chinese ceramics from the 8th–10th centuries and in neighbouring areas ceramic shards from the 11th–14th centuries. This could suggest shifts in commercial and political activity in the area over time. Not much evidence has been found of human habitation from the period, but this may be due to its location on the low-lying flood plain of the Musi River, where most of the homes were probably made of wood, bamboo and straw, as indeed they still are in parts of rural Sumatra today (see Figure 7). A Chinese Song dynasty official named Chu-Fan-Chi seems to confirm this fact in his two-volume book, entitled Zhu Fan Zhi, in which he describes Palembang:

> The residents of Sanfo-tsi (Srivijaya) live scattered outside the city on the water, within rafts lined with reeds.

[152] King Srimat Tribhuwanaraja Mauli Warmadewa of the Mauli dynasty of Central Sumatra

The most significant site around Palembang today, at least from a Buddhist perspective, seems to be Seguntang Hill,[153] which is located at the highest point in Palembang and above the flood waters of the river. Here a large Buddha statue (6th–7th centuries) and another representing the celestial Bodhisattva Vairochana, were found together with fragments of other statues, the remains of a small stupa and two inscriptions concerning curses and war. There are also said to be seven tombs on the hill, dating to the Srivijayan period. Other than this, not much else remains. Due to lack of preservation from flooding, sedimentation, changes in the river course and human activity, ancient Southeast Asian ports sites are an archaeological challenge.

Figure 6: The Riverine Networks of the Musi River

[153] Bukit Seguntang

Figure 7: Floating Homes on the Musi River

When searching for a "great centre of Buddhist learning in the East", such as the one Atisha is said to have attended, one would be disappointed with what remains in Palembang today. While it seems very likely that the wealthy Srivijayan capital at Palembang (7th–11th centuries), with its all-powerful Great King, would have had a large contingent of monks and many foreign contacts, there does not appear to be much evidence of an extensive brick or stone-built site suggesting a large educational institution with housing for one thousand monks as is stated in Yijing's story. On the other hand, it is important to note that large numbers of Buddhist and Hindu statues have been recovered from around the Musi river basin, both from the riverbed as well as from its banks, and there is scope for further salvage archaeology in the future, although this is expensive and complex. Meanwhile the river beds are regularly being looted.

Unfortunately, one more promising area located near Kemaro Island,[154] which would also have been on dry land at the time of our enquiry, is occupied by a modern fertiliser plant. Indonesian archaeologists seem convinced that the site of the factory covers an important area of Srivijayan activity (Miksic, 2011), so it is possible that other more substantial sites have been lost under the urban sprawl of modern-day Palembang or under the river itself.

[154] An island in the Musi river basin.

Jambi (Muaro Jambi) Sumatra

Figure 8: Srivijayan Trade Routes

Most of the information we have about the kingdom of Melayu (4th–13th centuries) which lies about two hundred kilometres to the north of Palembang, on the east coast of central Sumatra, comes from the New History of the Tang[155] and from the memoirs of the Chinese Buddhist monk Yijing who visited the area in 671. According to these

[155] *The New Book of Tang* (Xīn Tángshū), generally translated as *"New History of the Tang", or "New Tang History",* is a work of official history covering the Tang dynasty in ten volumes and 225 chapters. The work was compiled by a team of scholars of the Song dynasty, led by Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi.

Chinese records, the Melayu kingdom [156] probably remained independent until 692, at which time it came under the suzerainty of Srivijaya. It is likely that ancient Melayu was a very rich kingdom indeed and this is perhaps the reason why Srivijaya sought to subjugate it in 692?

The chronicler Hin T'ang Shu refers to a port there named "Kompei", which may refer to a river port in Jambi province known as Muara Kumpei or more commonly as Suak kandis today. What is particularly interesting about this port is its location to the east of a large Buddhist archaeological site known as Muaro Jambi and at the mouth of the Kumpeh River, which is a tributary of the largest river of Sumatra, the Batanghari. Perhaps it had better access to ocean trade than Jambi itself which was upriver on the Batanghari and which enters the Malacca Straits near Muara Sabak. In any case a lot of ceramic shards were found there, from Sung[157] dynasty, China (960–1279), the Khmer kingdom (802–1431),[158] Myanmar and all across Srivijaya's vassal states, showing active trade throughout these periods. In a survey project in 2006, which looked at the river banks at low tide, many 11th and 12th century sites were identified and are yet to be explored.

One possible factor contributing to Melayu's wealth and success was its access to an abundance of gold. Gold came from the mountain ranges of their hinterlands, known as the Bukit Barisan, which run from north to south on the island of Sumatra, but particularly from the headwaters of the Batanghari River and its tributaries in the Minangkabau Highlands. These rivers brought significant amounts of gold downstream and into the whole area known as the Merangin regency, which is still producing gold ore today.[159] In fact, the presence of gold there has attracted the attention of international investors[160] as well as numerous illegal prospectors who still operate along its banks today.[161]

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[156] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melayu_Kingdom

[157] 10th – 13th centuries

[158] Cambodia

[159] Batanghari Misuji, Merangin, Batanghari, Sei Limun were important areas

[160] The Jakarta Post. 02/03/2011. Foreign investors' eye Jambi gold

[161] The Jakarta Post. 03/07/2004. Illegal Jambi gold mining inflicts heavy losses on the state

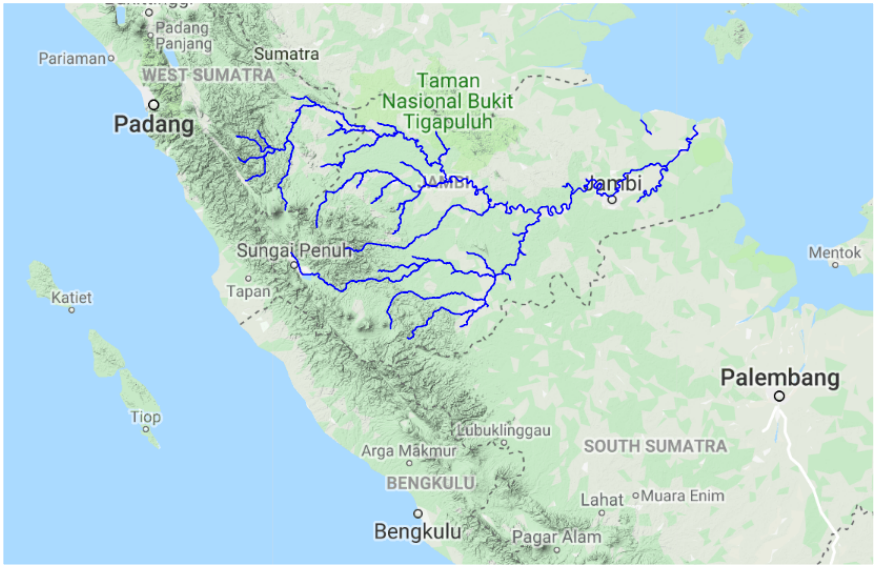

Figure 9: Riverine Hinterland of Jambi

In addition to its gold, the forests in Jambi's hinterlands produced many desirable and high value products, such as: ivory, honey, fragrant Agarwood (for use in perfumes and incense), amber, and astringent Gambier extract (for tanning leather). These were exchanged for goods like ceramics and silks from China, cotton textiles from India, and goods from mainland South East Asia. Wealthy Jambi experienced a golden age from 7th–13th centuries and it is during this period that a huge Buddhist complex was built at Muaro Jambi by its pious Hindu/Buddhist royalty. It is also the period in which Atisha visited Sumatra.

Muaro Jambi was rediscovered by a British soldier named SC Crooke in the early 1820s, while he was mapping the Batanghari River. It was further explored by the Dutch Geographical Society in 1877–1879. A Dutch archaeologist named FM Schnitger, who excavated at the site from 1935–1936, published his findings in two books: *Forgotten Kingdoms in Sumatra* (1939) and *The Archaeology of Hindoo Sumatra* (1937).

This well-preserved site is located about twenty-six kilometres northeast of the modern city of Jambi and thirty kilometres from the mouth of the Batanghari River. The complex runs along both banks of the Kumpeh River for over seven kilometres. It is one of the most impressive temple complexes in South East Asia, covering an area of

12 square kilometres, an area that could easily accommodate a large number of Buddhist monks and students of Dharma.

Ancient man-made waterways and canals, some of which can still be seen today, circulated the site (Figure 10) allowing easy access by boat from the Batanghari River and its tributaries, into the temple compounds. As in Palembang, the general population probably lived in floating wooden structures that have long since disappeared. It is of interest to note that there are still floating houses to be seen on the Batanghari River today.

Figure 10: Canals at Muaro Jambi today

Only eight of eighty-four structures have so far been excavated at Muaro Jambi, the rest forming mounds in the lush and encroaching forest. Several statues, pottery shards and Chinese ceramics have been discovered at the site, largely dating from the 9th–11th centuries but, without any written transmission, archaeologists are reluctant to say definitively what the site was used for. However, they do say that the structures resemble study centres rather than temples as each one appears to be composed of seating podiums, once sheltered by a tiled roof supported on wooden pillars (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Reconstruction of original structure

Figure 12: Candi Kedaton

Figure 13: Nalanda

When we compare the twelve square kilometre area of this Buddhist complex with that of famous Nalanda Mahavihara at just two square kilometres,[162] it becomes clear that this centre of learning was extremely significant in its day. In fact, the layout, red brickwork and even the simplicity of its unadorned design are similar to that of Nalanda.

Excavations at Muaro Jambi have resulted in a number of important finds. The three most noteworthy and well-preserved structures are identified as Candi Tinggi, Candi Kedaton and Candi Gumpung.

Candi Gumpung

This building was first mentioned in a report by FM Schnitger in 1937 and is one of the largest to be found in the Muaro Jambi compound. It consists of an inner chamber located on a high platform with six smaller compounds surrounding it. Inside the chamber, along with human remains, a box was discovered containing gem stones and twenty-one inscribed gold plates. The plates mention the names of Tantric deities.[163] According to the archaeologist Boecheri, who translated the plates in 1985, this was a place of Buddhist worship which was constructed in the 9th–10th centuries and enlarged in 11th – 12th centuries. Other finds from the site were a makara[164] or sea creature, variously represented in Indian art and which often appears at the entrances of temples and other structures, to ward off evil. Although only one remains here (Figure 14), there would have been two, flanking the stairs. A headless statue of the female Bodhisattva Prajnaparamita or Perfection of Wisdom, was also found in a niche in the foundation area and has been dated to the 13th century, based on its similarity to a statue found in the Javanese kingdom of Singosari in East Java[165] dated 1222–1292. Although some of these finds post-date the time of Atisha by

[162] https://whc.unesco.org/document/152813

[163] These plates have been interpreted as belonging to either the Vajradhatu Mandala (Boechari 1985) or the Trilokavijaya Mandala (Nihom 1998).

[164] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/makara.

[165] The statue is currently exhibited at the National Museum of Jakarta (inv.-no. 1403/XII587), whereas most of the other recoveries from Muaro Jambi are housed at the site museum or in the provincial museum in Jambi. The date of Muaro Jambi Prajnaparamita statue is disputed, having been discussed by (Edward McKinnon, 1985, pp. 12, 13, 28–29) and (Dumarcay and Smithies, 1998, p. 29).

about two hundred years, it appears that the teachings he is said to have received from Dharmakirti of Suvarnadvipa, on the secret meaning of the Prajnaparamita Sutra, must have survived well into the 13th century.

Figure 14: Candi Gumpung

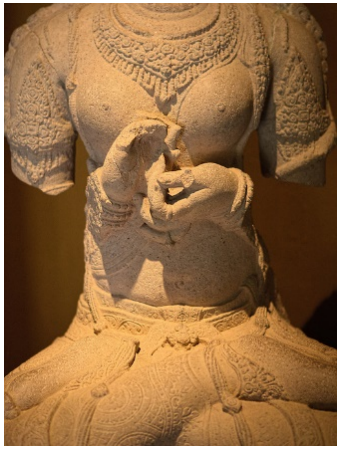

Figure 15: Prajnaparamita

Candi Tinggi

Candi Tinggi is located northeast of Candi Gumpung and facing in an east/west direction. It was reconstructed from 1980–1982, giving it its present appearance. Other buildings were found in the compound, to the northeast, southwest and south, although only the foundations are visible at this point.

Candi Kedaton

Found in 1976, after an archaeological survey of the Muaro Jambi, it is the largest structure excavated to date. Its unique feature was its interior which was decorated with white corals. These are to be found in the Bukit Duabelas highlands, upstream on the Batanghari River.

Currently, the ancient site of Muaro Jambi is used as a public park, where the structures remain largely unprotected. In addition, several boxes of ashes and bone fragments, which have been removed from important locations on the site, are stored in open boxes in a rear storeroom at the onsite museum with no current plans to perform forensic testing. These sites are still largely undocumented by historians and archaeologists as permits are hard to come by from the authorities.

In recognition of its importance and vulnerability, the Muaro Jambi Temple Compound was submitted to UNESCO for consideration as a world heritage site in 2009, by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Indonesia, where it still remains on their World Heritage "In Danger" list.

In a further attempt to stimulate local and international interest in the future study of Muaro Jambi and Melayu cultural history the Jambi Arts Council, in cooperation with the Seloko Journal, held The First Conference on Jambi Studies – history, art and culture, religion and social change, in November 2013, in the city of Jambi, which I attended. In fact, it was a very successful and well organised conference, attracting over thirty local and international speakers from many disciplines. A second proposed conference has never materialised. Nevertheless, I would strongly recommend any scholar of Atisha, Tibetan Vajrayāna or the history of Buddhism in South East Asia, to visit the site as a place of special interest.

Based on the inscriptions mentioned earlier in this paper, which refer to Sumatra as Suvarnadvipa and Suvarnabhumi, the Island of Gold and the Land of Gold respectively, it seems probable that it was to Sumatra that Atisha travelled in 1012 to 1013.

In addition, during the course of this research both the Srivijayan capital of Palembang and the later Melayu capital at Jambi have been considered as possible contenders for the location of a great vihara in Sumatra, a centre of Buddhist learning in the east, where Atisha went to study with Dharmakirti.

At the time of Atisha, Palembang was the capital city of Srivijaya and seems to have been a wealthy naval and trading port with good harbours and waterways, suitable for the control and taxation of shipping as it passed through the Malacca and Sunder Straits. It was also the residence of the Maharaja of Srivijaya and his seat of power. Although a number of historical and religious items have been excavated in the area of Palembang, there does not appear to have been much dry land and little has been found in terms of significant stone or brick structures to indicate the existence of a large vihara of the type that Atisha is said to have attended there.

On the other hand, the other riverine kingdom of Melayu, which lay further north on the Sumatran coast, was not only rich but had enough of dry land on which to build. Its wealth was based on direct access to large quantities of gold and high value forest products which were harvested from its hinterlands and transported to the sea for trade on the largest of Sumatra's rivers, the Batanghari and its tributaries. The wealth of Melayu was probably the reason that Palembang (Srivijaya) sought to bring Melayu under its control and into its federation in the 7th century. It is interesting to note that, shortly after the sacking of Palembang by the Cholas in 1025, Melayu sent its own emissaries to China (Munoz, 2006, p. 165) showing renewed independence and autonomy once again.

The wealth of the Melayu kings, who may themselves have visited Buddhist sites in India including perhaps the great viharas, allowed them to offer royal patronage in the building of a Buddhist vihara of their own, Muaro Jambi. The structures of Muaro Jambi mirror those of the great viharas of India, both in design and materials. Perhaps they also sought to emulate them in fame and scholarship as well. Certainly, it is the only Buddhist site of such an immense size and consequence so far rediscovered on the Malay Peninsula and it is for these reasons that I would like to suggest Muaro Jambi as a strong contender for the centre of learning to which Atisha travelled to study with Dharmakirti of Suvarnadvipa (The Golden Isle) from 1013-1025 CE.

Other important city-ports at the height of the Srivijayan Empire were: Kedah (Bunang Valley) on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula which, with its neighbour Takua Paa, were the first ports of call for Chola trading vessels coming from South India and where the remains of ship's hulls from the period have been discovered, and Chaiya, with its neighbour, Legor, on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, which were convenient ports for Chinese vessels coming from the east.

Studies and Realisations with Dharmakirti

In the Life of Atisha we learn that the master Dharmakirti (*Tib. Serlingpa*), with whom he was to study for twelve years, was born into the royal family of Suvarnadvipa. Although we cannot be certain of this, it was not uncommon for the sons and grandsons of the Javanese Sailendra royals to hold positions of importance throughout the Srivijayan federation, and for such aristocrats to receive a higher education.[166] What seems more certain is that he was considered a person of some stature before he became a famous teacher and advocate of Buddhism. In the colophons of three of Dharmakirti's six works recorded in the Tan-gyur,[167] an Indian student is mentioned by name Dipamkara Srijana, who had requested teachings from him. Here we see a direct reference to Atisha Dipamkara Srijana as a student of the master. In fact, Atisha Dipamkara later participated in the Tibetan translation of these texts, with the exception of the last one, which seems to have been translated by Dharmakirti himself, without the help of a Tibetan translator, at Vajranagara of Suvarnadvipa (Chattopadhyaya, 2011, p. 34). Once again, this shows that the master Dharmakirti was located in Suvarnadvipa, the Golden Isle.

Dharmakirti's greatest work appears to have been the: *Abhisamaya-alamkara-nama-prajnaparamita-upadesa – sastra-vritti-durbodha-aloka-nama-tika*, otherwise known simply as the *Abhisamaya-langkara*. To translate this work into Tibetan Atisha Dipamkara worked with the great Tibetan scholar and translator Rinchen Zangpo (958–1055). This text is studied by all lineages of Tibetan Buddhism today (Drayfus, 2003, pp. 175–176), but particularly by the Ge-luk School of Tibetan Buddhism.

> It is a stupendous work of Mahayana Philosophy, devoted mainly to the clear exposition of the highest paramita conceived by Mahayanists, namely the Prajnaparamita. In bulk the work is forty times that of Dipamkara's Bodhi-patha-pradipa in the Peking edition of the T'an-gyur, while the later occupies only fifty-three lines, the

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[166] Sumpa 118, asserts that he spend twelve years studying at Vikramasila monastery in India.

[167] 1. *Abhisamaya-alamkara-nama-prajnaparamita-upadesa – sastra-vritti-durbodha-aloka-nama-tika;* 2. *Bodhisattva-caryavatara-pindartha;* 3. *Bodhisattva-carya-vatara-sattrimsat-pindartha;* 4. *Siksa-samuccaya-abhisamaya-nama;* 5. *Arya-acala-sadhana-nama;*6. *Krodha-ganapati-sadhana*

> former occupies about 2044 lines. From this work alone, we could have perhaps considered him as one of the most outstanding representatives of the Mahayana philosophy of the 10th–11th C. (Chattopadhyaya, 2011, p. 34)

We are told in the Life of Atisha, that after their arrival in Suvarnadvipa, Dharmakirti invited Atisha and his party of monks to the Palace of the Silver Parasol[168] where he taught them Maitreya's *Abhisamaya-lankara* (Ornament for Clear Realisations),[169] in fifteen sessions over several days. His great mastery of this text enabled him to teach Atisha and his retinue advanced methods of mind training and exchanging oneself for others, which Atisha later propagated through his own teachings.

Under deep discussion among scholars and practitioners of the time was the nature of emptiness itself and its significance for enlightenment. Tibetan sources tell us that within the Mahayana tradition two schools of thought predominated namely, the Yogakara or Cittamatra (mind-only school) and Madhyamaka (middle-way school). Before we contemplate the differences between the views of these two schools, it is important to understand that all Buddhist views were, and are, commonly based on the Buddha Sakyamuni's teaching on the absence of an individual self and other earlier Buddhist teachings. There are, however, some significant differences between the views of the Mind Only and Middle Way schools of thought.

Yogacara or Chittamatra

The Yogakara or mind-only view, which was said to have been held by Dharmakirti of Suvanadvipa,[170] was founded by Asanga and his student, the logician Dinnaga, in the 4th–5th centuries. Dinnaga was also credited with the systemization of epistemological studies amongst Buddhists. Yogacara is a Mahayana School based on the Lankavatara

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[168] It is interesting to note that there is a place on the site of Muaro Jambi which is marked as Bukit Perak in Indonesian language which, when translated into English, means Silver Hill.

[169] *Abhisamaya-langkara* (Tib. *mNgon par rtogs pa'I rgyan*), P5184, Vol. 88.

[170] Not to be confused with the famous logician Dharmakirti (c.600-650 CE).

Sutra[171] and other scriptures. The main premise of its view is that all phenomena are merely mental projections, manifesting as objects and thoughts based on habitual tendencies, which are stored as karmic seeds in the "all-ground consciousness", a subtle level of consciousness from which traces of past actions ripen into future experience. The Mind Only School is known for its denial of a truly existent external world but its acceptance of the true existence of mind or consciousness.

> It was in fact from the Yogacara branch of the Mahayana that the Tantric ideas and practices originated. (Conze, 2008)

From a meditative perspective it promotes the first truly non-dual forms of meditation, in which the focus is empty of any of dualistic fixation between the mind and its projections or phenomena. This view relinquishes the fixation on a solid reality but there is still acceptance of a truly existing 'mind' or consciousness within which everything takes place (Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso, 1993).

Madyamika

The Madhyamaka or middle way view, which was said to have been held by Atisha Dipamkara, was founded by Nagarjuna in the 2nd–3rd centuries. It is a Mahayana school based on the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā,*[172] a foundational text by Nagarjuna, and other scriptures.

The main premise of this view is that self and all phenomena are empty of independent existence. This is because they can only arise dependent on previous causes and conditions in an impersonal flow of apparent phenomena, which Buddhism calls dependent origination or causality. Nagarjuna was also instrumental in introducing the idea of two truths, the truth of apparent existence, or relative truth, and the truth of ultimate existence, or absolute truth. The truth of ultimate existence, according to the Middle-Way School, is that even consciousness itself is empty of essence, or any reality whatsoever, transcendental or otherwise. To Madhyamaka thinkers this was the middle way expressing freedom from the extremes of nihilism and externalism.

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[171] The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* is a prominent Mahayana Buddhist sūtra. The sūtra recounts a teaching primarily between Gautama Buddha and a bodhisattva named Mahāmati,

[172] Roots of the Middle Way.

From a meditative perspective, this view offered several stages of progressive meditations towards a final meditative equipoise in which the practitioner was to rest in the true nature of mind itself, a nature which was at once empty and clear (Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso, 1993).

Atisha received both these lineages: The Profound Path of the Madyamika from Lama Rigdul Kuchu in India, and the Extensive Gradual Path of the Yogacara from Dharmakirti in Sumatra, who was said to have possessed both these lineages himself, as well as the lineage of Profound Experience from the Mahasiddas Tilopa and Naropa.[173]

For the next twelve years Atisha studied, debated and meditated under the guidance of Dharmakirti, focusing on the profound teachings concerning the hidden aspect of the Prajnaparamita, which came through Maitreya and Asanga, and the altruistic aspect which came through Manjushri and Shantideva. At last, the master had passed all his knowledge on to Atisha who was said to have, not only understood the depth of the teachings intellectually but who had, in his own experience, achieved the profound insights and realizations into bodhicitta that he had long sought. It was because of this that his capacity to inspire and teach grew exponentially, alongside his deep reverence for Dharmakirti, which is expressed in this quote from Atisha in his life story:

> I make no distinctions among all my spiritual mentors. But because of the kindness of my sublime master from the Golden Isle, I have gained peace of mind and the dedicated heart of a bodhichitta aim.

Atisha was considered one of Dharmakirti's four closest and most prominent disciples, the others being: Ratnakarasanti, Jananasrimitra, and Ratnakirti.

In the year 1025 Srivijaya suffered a major setback when it was attacked by the South Indian Cholas who laid waste to the capital, emptied its treasury vaults and even eliminated the royal family. They later boasted of their exploits in an inscription dated 1030, which was found in the city of Thanjore (ancient name) in Tamil Nadu, South India. The inscription is called the Thanjore inscription and it states:

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[173] Khenpo Lodro Namgyal of Pullahari Monastery, Nepal. In an interview in which he mentioned these three lineages which were held by Dharmakirti.

> Rajendra captured King Sangrama Vijayottunggavarman of Srivijaya and took a large heap of treasures including the Vidhyadara Torana, the jewelled 'war gate' of Srivijaya adorned with great splendour. (Craig, 2012, p. 367)

The Chola invasion led to the decline of the Sailendra Dynasty of Srivijaya (Chattopadhyaya, 2011). It may also have led to the departure of Atisha, who left Suvarnadvipa that same year to return to India and, although this cannot be verified, it is a notable coincidence.

Of all the profound contributions Dharmakirti is said to have made to Atisha's study and practice of the Mahayana, perhaps the most pivotal was to introduce him to the Yogacara/Chittamatra, or mind-only view, and its practice. It offered a systematic approach to the teaching of Buddha Dharma and its practices, with a focus on the development of bodhichitta or altruistic awakening. Having realised the full meaning of this approach under the careful tutelage of his master, Atisha expounded these teachings within his own discourses and in his writings throughout the rest of his life.

It seems clear that an Indian scholar of Atisha Dipamkara's standing would not have spent twelve long years with a master in foreign land, had he not regarded his time there to have been of very great value, not only to himself as a scholar and as a practitioner, but as future teacher and Dharma master himself. By the time he left Sumatra, Atisha seems to have returned home as a celebrated master of bodhichitta himself.

Atisha in India and Tibet

On his return to India Atisha Dipamkara taught and translated at Vikramasila Vihara, where he also studied with Ratnakarasant (Tib. *Santipa*), at the recommendation of Dharmakirti. He also worked at Somapura but, until recently, not much was really known about his work in India and Tibet. However, in 2003, some lost original Tibetan manuscripts were rediscovered in the dusty storerooms of Drepung and Sera monasteries near Lhasa in Tibet. They were found in disorderly heaps, moulded with age, dating from the late tenth to fifteenth centuries. After several years, during which time Alak Zenkar Rinpoche Tupten Nyima supervised the cleaning and organising of the hand-written manuscripts, facsimiles were published and then made available for purchase by scholars of Tibet's ancient texts. They were

published by the Paltsek Institute for Ancient Tibetan Manuscripts. Some of them relate to the early Madhyamaka teachings of Atisha and his students, bringing us closer to the style and content of 11th century Indian Buddhism, and the earliest teachings of Atisha's Kadampa lineage. They are contained in the *Collected works of the Kadampas: An open basket of jewels, Entry to the two realities* and the commentary on it named the *Collection of the two realities*, *A general explanation of the two realities*, and the Kadampa commentary *Collection of special instructions on the Middle Way* (Apple, 2019). In their pages we are introduced to an Atisha who regarded himself as a student in the lineage of Nagarjuna[174] and who was also significantly influenced by the works of Chandrakirti.[175] His own teachings seem contemplative in nature, focusing on the cultivation of compassion and faith in the pursuit of enlightenment, rather than later interpretations which were to focus more on logic, linguistics and metaphysical speculation. He proposed that Buddhahood was a non-dual and ever-present spiritual mystery, bereft of any mental elements and that conventional reality was merely a projection of ignorance. He further taught that this understanding was to be developed with the aid of special instructions from a realised master. This view brought him into conflict with, not only some of his Tibetan students but also subsequent scholars, who did not share his view of conventional and ultimate reality. During the time of Atisha and for fifty years after his passing, these essays and translations helped to illuminate early Madyamaka thought, which was largely lost after the thirteenth century.

Buddhism had first been introduced to Tibet in the 7th century by King Songtsen Gampo and seems to have been taught mainly for the benefit of the royalty and aristocrats. However, these early teachings gradually dissipated, particularly under the rule of a subsequent King known as Langdarma, who actively opposed the spread of Buddhism, favouring instead the traditional religion of Tibet known as Bon.

In the 11th century there was a gradual resurgence of Buddhism in Tibet, but with it came a lot of confusion about how the Buddhist teachings should be understood and practiced. Buddhist practitioners of different traditions, such as Sutra and Tantra, were disparaging of each other's practices and with no Buddhist authority figures to clarify the

[174] Nagarjuna is often cited in Atisha's own works, which were published in India and Tibet.

[175] A famous Buddhist scholar of the Madyamika School.

issues, internal conflicts raged. According to the Blue Annals,[176] the Kings of western Tibet had traditionally supported Buddhism and the new King of Guge,[177] by the name of Yeshe-O, sent twenty-one bright young men to India, to study and translate Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan. Only two of them returned while the rest of them died of illnesses and fever. The returnees were named Rinchen Zangpo[178] and Ngo Lekpe Sherap.[179] On their return they explained that there was in fact no conflict between the practice of Tantra and Sutra and advised the king that, on the advice of prominent scholars at the viharas of India, he should invite the master Atisha to resolve their conflicts.

The king sent a large party, led by Gya Tsonndru Sengye, to make offerings of gold to Atisha and to request him to visit Tibet. On their first visit to Vikramasila they did not manage to persuade Atisha to go, but another party was soon sent by the determined King. On the way, however, they were robbed by the King of Garlog[180] who was hostile to Buddhism and who had Yeshe-O thrown into prison. After many divinations and discussions, it was decided that Nakso would travel to India with six companions to explain the King's predicament to Atisha and beg him to return with them to Tibet. Atisha was old and although he had many responsibilities at the university, he promised to consider their request. In the end he did agree to go and help their king but added that he would only stay for three years. On the way they decided to make a pilgrimage to Bodhgaya and then travelled on to Nepal, where they stayed for a year.[181]

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[176] The Blue Annals, completed in 1476, by Gö Lotsawa Zhönnu-pel, is a Tibetan historical survey with a marked ecumenical view, focusing on the dissemination of various sectarian spiritual traditions throughout Tibet.

[177] Guge was an ancient kingdom in Western Tibet, to the west of Mount Kailash.

[178] Rinchen Zangpo, was a principal translator of Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan during the second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet. He was a student of the famous Indian master, Atisha.

[179] Ngo Lekpe Sherap, a prominent spiritual heir of Atisha.

[180] Tibetan mountain tribes of the far north.

[181] In 1041, Atisha founded the Tham Bahal temple in Kathmandu Valley. The temple preserves a beautiful, hand written copy of the Prajnaparamita Sutra (100,000 slokas), which is protected in copper text boxes. It is written in gold ink onto paper coloured with genuine lapis lazuli stone. More research needed to confirm its dates.

Atisha arrived in Ngari, West Tibet, two years later and was greeted by Jangchup Wo, the nephew of Yeshe Wo, who delivered him message from the imprisoned king. It was a request to write a text on the fundamental meaning of the Buddha's teachings, a text simple enough for anyone to understand, which offered a complete path, and which would settle the religious conflicts that had arisen in Tibet. Atisha was pleased that the king had requested a teaching suitable for everyone to practise and in response he wrote his seminal work: *Bodhipathapradipa* or Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment. The original is a short text of sixty-seven verses written in Sanskrit and later translated into Tibetan under the title, *Byang chub lam gyi sgron ma*. It lays out the entire Buddhist path in terms of all three vehicles of Buddhism: the Sravakayana or Theravada, Bodhisattvayana or Mahayana and the Tantric Vajrayāna.

During this period Atisha also met his main disciple Dromton, a layman who became his spiritual heir and the holder of his tantric lineage, as well as the founder of the Kadam Lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment, became a model for subsequent texts, written by his lineage sons and based on his stages of the path, which later formed the basis for the Lam-Rim tradition of the Kadampa Lineage. In this way the great Indian Buddhist master Atisha was instrumental in reintroducing Buddhism to Tibet and clarified the many misconceptions about its understanding and practice.

Naturally Atisha's original writings and live teachings have been edited and embellished over time, but the first thirteen chapters of the "so called" Father Dharma texts "are vibrant, immediate, poignant, and convey a profound spirituality, often tinged with wonderful humour and irony" (Thupten, 2006) Each chapter ends with Drontompa summarising the exchanges in a series of questions and answers, citing relevant lines from Atisha's *Bodhisattvamanyavali* or the Bodhisattva's Jewel Garland.

Conclusion

Atisha's long and arduous journey to distant Suvarnadvipa, the Golden Isle of Sumatra, is illustrative of his determined quest for knowledge and enlightenment. His twelve year stay there, possibly at the Muaro Jambi vihara, was replete with philosophical teachings, lively debates, in depth study and profound practices of meditation. The famous

teacher and master of bodhichitta, Dharmakirti, was always held in the highest esteem by Atisha. It was a period which deeply informed his own spiritual quest and became a focus of his later teachings. Key considerations under debate focused on differing views about non-dual cognition and compassion, as well as finding ways to reconcile these with the earliest teachings of Buddhism, like: no-self, suffering, and impermanence, and with the views of the bodhisattvas such as expanded notions of emptiness and selfless compassion as well as with the powerful practices of Tantra.

On leaving Sumatra in 1025, Atisha returned to translate and teach at the Vikramasila Vihara and Somapura Vihara, near his ancestral home in Bengal. He became the abbot of the Vikramasila and his fame spread far and wide, attracting students and scholars from many countries, including Tibet where renewed interest in Buddhism was developing. Among his Tibetan students were: Gya Tsondru Senge, Naktso Lotsawa and Tsultrim Gyalwa, who translated works[182] by Atisha into Tibetan while they were studying at Vikramasila.

Finally, his adventurous spirit and devotion to the Dharma encouraged him to accept an invitation from the King of Guge in west Tibet, who wanted him to come and resolve disagreements between the different schools of Buddhism. He travelled to Tibet via Nepal and only planned to stay for three years. During that time, at the request of the king, he wrote his most famous text, Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment, which clarified the apparent discrepancies between the schools and laid out a clear path for practitioners to follow, a text which still provides clear stages of the path for students of Buddhism today.

In fact, Atisha never did return to India but died in 1054 in Nyetang, Central Tibet. His writings, translations and teachings were preserved by his immediate disciples, who founded the Kadam lineage, and which later became known as the Father teachings or the teachings of the founders of the lineage. Over the following centuries, subsequent students and scholars have further codified and commented on these precious texts, which became known as the son teachings or those by later students of the lineage. Now, almost a thousand years later, through the father and son teachings of Atisha's lineage, we can still follow the tales of his inspiring life and study the vast body of teaching he left behind. They are studied by all Vajrayāna schools and, although

[182] *Entry to the two Realities* and *Open Basket of Jewels* (written at Vikramasila Mahavihara, colophon states: under the patronage of the Pala king Mahipala 1st).

they may have become less spontaneous over time, they still contain the most precious of Dharma advice. In our contemporary world they speak with the fresh voice of reason and kindness, encouraging us to emulate the wisdom masters, whose voices carry down through the ages admonishing practitioners to reduce self-importance, develop compassion, contentment, empathetic joy and the aspiration to help all beings. The teachings of Atisha remain a true garland of jewels to be practised and preserved anew.

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Guru Yoga – The Essence of the Path to Enlightenment and the Intricacies of Guru-Disciple Relations in the 21st Century

Tenzin Dadon (Sonam Wangmo) & Karma Tashi Choedron

The most essential and unique feature in Vajrayāna[183] Buddhism is the Guru Yoga (Tib. *lama'i naljor*) practice. Embedded in virtually every tantric prayer and liturgy, the Guru Yoga or 'union with the nature of the guru' is an indispensable element in Vajrayāna practice and cornerstone of the path to enlightenment. Yet, contemporary Buddhist scholarship places relatively little emphasis on this fundamental and profound practice. This paper intends to fill the gap in scholarship on this pertinent subject matter by highlighting the importance and mechanics of the Guru Yoga technique as practiced in Vajrayāna Buddhism of the Tibetan culture.

The purpose of the Guru Yoga practice is no different from any other practice in Vajrayāna Buddhism and Buddhism in general, i.e. to attain enlightenment. Attaining enlightenment is synonymous with purifying the defilement of ignorance, the root of which is 'ego' (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 17). As Kyabje Khyentse Rinpoche explained, "The very essence of Buddhist practice is to destroy ego-clinging, totally – and the most inspiring way to do that is through the practice of Guru Yoga" (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 78).

[183] Referring to Tibetan (which includes Bhutanese) Vajrayāna Buddhism only and not to the Chinese and Japanese (Shingon) version of Vajrayāna

Guru Yoga is a simple yet powerful method to mould the mind of a practitioner to transcend self-grasping and self-cherishing tendencies that lie latent in the mind. It is no easy feat to reprogramme the mind to purify self-grasping or ego-clinging which has firmly taken root due to conditioning over limitless rounds of rebirth in the vicious cycle of *saṃsāra*. Yet, according to the Vajrayāna teachings, it is definitely possible to fully eradicate these latent tendencies in one brief lifetime of this degenerate[184] era if one relies on the blessings of the guru, compared with three great aeons in the sutra way (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009). This is of course, contingent on having unwavering faith and devotion in the guru. The blessings derived from the Guru Yoga practice is what fuels the generation (development) and completion stage practices. Therefore, the Guru Yoga is the essence of Vajrayāna Buddhist practice.

In this paper, the actual Guru Yoga practice will be briefly described in terms of its generic outline based on selected Guru Yoga liturgical texts from the Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu and Gelug traditions. To provide inspiration to practitioners on the efficacy of the Guru Yoga practice, we will illustrate poignant stories of lesser known gurus and their corresponding guru-disciple (Skt: *guru-śiṣya*) relationships, from the gender perspective.

The guru-disciple relationship is arguably the most challenging and misunderstood part of Vajrayāna Buddhism whereby heedlessness can result in downfalls in practice. Therefore, we have included a section on the application of guru devotion in a practitioner's dealings with one's guru(s) inspired by Aśvaghoṣa's *Fifty Stanzas on Guru Devotion* from checking a guru to avoiding blind faith and downfalls – discussed in tandem with real-life issues of practitioners of both Himalayan and non-Himalayan origin.

Although the Guru Yoga technique appears straightforward, it is one of the most difficult practices for many Vajrayāna Buddhists, especially amongst non-traditional Buddhists. Practitioners of non-Himalayan origin often grapple with the strong emphasis on seeing one's spiritual teacher or guru as a buddha. This is where the mental and physical conflicts occur, especially amongst practitioners who are western-educated who find it most difficult to practice guru devotion. Practitioners try to juggle seeing one's guru as a buddha and are at the

[184] The five degenerations are the degenerations of mind, lifespan, sentient beings, times and view

same time confronted with many weaknesses (seeming or actual) of their spiritual teachers. Contemporary practitioners, especially from the West are troubled by the contradictions and face an uphill battle trying to come to terms with teachers who do not conform to the norms of ethical behaviour expected of a spiritual guide. In this paper, we have tried to reconcile this conflict by uncovering the wisdom of great masters of the past and present whose timeless advice is still of relevance in the twenty-first century Buddhism.

Who is a Guru?

The concept of a spiritual teacher or guide (Skt: *guru*; Tib: *lama*) is a difficult one to grasp for many Vajrayāna Buddhists. Generally, anyone or anything can be a guru. More specifically, someone who has the power to dispel the darkness of ignorance in one's mindstream is a guru. A traditional story from India can perhaps shed some light on the characteristics and function of a guru.

Avaduthipada was a *mahāsiddha* of India who elucidated the concept of guru so beautifully through his unconventional observation of six ordinary people and animals whom he regarded as his gurus. This may sound strange but the fact that he included animals expands the concept of teacher to embrace anyone who is capable of triggering insights and realisations, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Mahāsiddha Avaduthipada first observed Kapila who was longing for her lover – from her, he learnt the perils of attachment; second, he observed a heron who could swoop prey twice as big to its detriment – from the bird, he learnt the perils of greed and the joy of letting go; third, he observed a hunter who waits and waits for days for a deer focusing so intently. Mahāsiddha Avaduthipada reckoned that if a meditator can focus in a similar way, he would make great progress – from the hunter he learnt the importance of concentration. Fourth, as soon as baby snakes are hatched, the mother snake leaves them. From the snake, he learnt the joy of solitude, i.e. the happiness of leaving behind objects of attachment. Fifth, an arrow-maker was single-pointedly fixated on making his arrow that he didn't notice a king and his one-thousand-strong retinue of soldiers. From this arrow maker, he learnt that firm focus is the basis of meditation. Lastly, the *mahāsiddha* once noticed a beautiful girl wearing many bangles. One day, many guests came and she had to cook for them. The guests were so tired that

they fell asleep. Not wanting to disturb them, she took out all of her prized bangles so that they don't make any noise. From this woman, Avadhutipada learnt the value of silence.

From this story, Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche (2018) summarises that a guru is someone who inspires one to develop good qualities. Based on one's perspective, a guru can be anyone or anything – animate or inanimate – that helps a practitioner to gain insights. More specifically, a guru can be analysed from its Sanskrit roots, i.e. Gu (darkness) and Ru (one who destroys it) or in Tibetan La (unsurpassable) and Ma (mother). Therefore, "anyone who has the ability or potential to destroy even an ounce of ignorance in oneself is a Guru. In Tibetan, anyone who embodies unsurpassable wisdom and heavily embodies compassion is a Lama" (Jetsun Khandro, 2018). Therefore, the title '*lama*' is reserved only for those who fit the above criteria and not a generic term for monks[185] as is erroneously the case in Southeast Asia.

Guru in Sanskrit denotes something 'weighty' or 'heavy'. Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche explained that "just as gold is the heaviest and most precious of metals, the guru is the most weighty and most precious of all beings, because of his [or her] inconceivable and flawless qualities" (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 52). The guru is of paramount importance because he or she "...awakens the Buddha from within our heart" (Jetsun Khandro, 2018). To further illustrate this point, we quote Nāropa who once asked his guru Tilopa, "Who is your teacher?" Tilopa replied, "Someone who allows you to develop way beyond what you think your capacity is– is a Guru" (Jetsun Khandro, 2018). Therefore, a guru is truly a spiritual friend who is concerned with the personal spiritual development of his/her student.

In the Vajrayāna path, the role of authentic spiritual masters or gurus (Tib: *lama*) is extremely important because they are conduits which transmit teachings from awakened teachers to disciples in an unending line of transmission or lineage. The importance of a guru is

[185] The generic or rather, colloquial Tibetan term for nuns is usually 'Ani' is also not accurate. According to Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, "...we feel it is not suitable as an address for nuns who nowadays are learned and disciplined as well as devoted to practice. Therefore both HH the Gyalwang Drukpa, head of the Drukpa lineage, and HH the Gyalwang Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyu lineage, have decided that nuns should henceforth be addressed as 'Tsunma' which is both respectful and accurate" (Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, March 2015).

best explained by Kadampa Geshe Potowa, a lineage lama of the Lam Rim, as thus:

> Even to learn worldly crafts, things we can understand by seeing them with our eyes, we need a teacher to show us. So how is it possible that we, who have just come from the lower realms and are entering a path where we have never been before, could travel it without a guide? (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 6)

As mentioned in the introduction, Guru Yoga is the crux of Vajrayāna practice. Success in Vajrayāna practice is highly contingent upon developing faith and devotion in the guru. Yet, the idea of faith and devotion is highly misunderstood as being mutually exclusive qualities when they are in fact, interrelated. In Tibetan, the conjoined terms *moe gue* (མོས་གུས་) perfectly explains the concept of faith and devotion:

> The term *moe* or longing faith has the connotation of being 'awestruck' i.e. "to look at someone so filled with good qualities; one who truly embodies the qualities of the Buddha". *Gue* on the other hand, is humility, i.e. one's ego is brought to a state of humbleness when one comes into the presence of such great teachers. One is so inspired to learn from such great masters. This experience has to be further nurtured. Therefore, nurturing the '*moe gue*' (མོས་གུས་) leads to '*yid chod*'[186] (ཡིད་ཆོད་), i.e. learning the dharma. If one has truly nurtured the dharma and practices the dharma well, then the natural outcome is *yid chod*. Yid refers to the conceptual a.k.a. chit-chatting mind and *chod* means to cut. Therefore, faith and devotion means the power to cut through the unceasing chatter of the neurotic mind. (Jetsun Khandro, 2018)

With reference to the above quote, a guru is essentially one who is able to subjugate one's ego. A disciple is one who is "open to be able to experience the humbling of the ego and cessation of the neurotic mind of endless chatter". The one who can bring about the *moe gue* and *yid chod* is the Guru (Jetsun Khandro, 2018).

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[186] Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche was apparently not referring to *yid ches* (ཡིད་ཆེས་) which means belief/conviction/trust/confidence which even the authors initially thought.

The guru-disciple relationship is another grossly misunderstood idea. To appreciate what entails a proper guru-disciple relationship, one must understand the three types of gurus viz. outer, inner and secret gurus. Outer gurus are all kinds of physical teachers who transmit genuine dharma to their students. The outer guru is indispensable in every stage of one's practice. As Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche advised,

> Until we reach that point, if we seriously wish to transform ourselves, we should never be overconfident and rely solely on our own methods and our own experience. The path can only be trodden by ourselves, using our own effort, yet even so we can never dispense with the advice of an experienced guide. To give that guidance is the role of the spiritual teacher. (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999)

The outer guru's responsibility is to send the student to the inner guru. A guru-disciple relationship was never meant to be a clingy bond as the Buddha clearly elucidated in the second Noble Truth that desire is the root of suffering. Two old Tibetan adages aptly summarise this point, "When you carry the outer Guru for far too long, then the corpse of the Guru starts to smell" and "Deities and lovers always look good from a distance". Therefore, a good guru and worthy student always encourage one another to be independent of each other (Jetsun Khandro, 2018). They are never meant to be attached to one another.

The inner guru refers to the path, i.e. the practice. One's practice has the power to subdue ego-clinging and its corresponding afflictive emotions. Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche cautions "that a student can make the mistake of falling in love with the inner guru, meaning that we remain as students forever (to be a student is a very cosy place to be)". As a student, one gets the best of both worlds. Either *saṃsāra* or nirvana, a student traverses back and forth between both, thereby forever remaining as a student; "love to practice falling in love with the concept of being a Buddhist, focusing primarily on externalities and very little on training the mind" (Jetsun Khandro, 2018). Therefore, Rinpoche advises that it is important to find the inner wisdom to progress from the external path to the secret guru.

There is another way to explain the inner guru. According to Chokling Rinpoche, the inner guru is one who transmits Vajrayāna empowerments and explains the meaning of the *tantras*, and how to implement the tantric teachings in our lives. Chokling Rinpoche

explains that the outer guru transmits the instructions for preliminary practice and general dharma.

There are also differences in the connotations of secret guru. Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche explains it as the recognition of one's own primordial or true nature of mind. Chokling Rinpoche expounds another perspective using the term 'innermost guru' as "the one who gives us the pointing-out instruction, who brings us face to face with the naked state of non-dual awareness, so that we realise it in actuality within our own experience. In this way, the guru awakens the buddha from within our heart" (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 18). Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche further adds that:

> On the innermost level, the Three Jewels are all gathered within the lama, or guru: his body is the Sangha, his speech is the Dharma, and his mind is the Buddha. He is like a wishfulfilling jewel, the unerring union of all sources of refuge, his absolute nature beyond the intellectual mind. To remember the guru is the same as thinking of all the buddhas. This is why, if we rely on him [or her] totally, just this in itself will embrace the entire meaning and purpose of refuge. (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999)

Therefore, the actual meaning of the term 'guru' is "the extremely subtle primordial mind of *dharmakāya*, the absolute guru" (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 337). Lama Zopa says that "the *dharmakāya* is of the essence of infinite compassion and manifests in myriad ways to guide sentient beings just as the sun must shine through a magnifying glass to burn dry grass" (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 352). This is an important point because ordinary sentient beings lack the karma of seeing the buddhas directly and therefore connect with the dharma through intermediaries which manifest in the form of human gurus. Therefore, the outer guru is none other than the manifestation of the buddhas' *dharmakāya*. If we fail to see this point, then we will fall into the trap of thinking that "a guru is simply someone from whom we have received teachings and won't be able to figure out how all the deities are manifestations of him [or her]" (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, pp. 338-339) and will start to discriminate between one guru and another and become attached to one and fearful of others. This brings us to the next problem.

Often times, Vajrayāna practitioners harbour fears when taking teachings from multiple gurus. Many are afraid of receiving dharma instructions from different teachers. These fears are understandable as a practitioner may get confused by having many teachers. Nonetheless,

it is important to note that Bodhisattva Norzang attended to two hundred and fifty-two whilst Lama Atisha had more than one hundred gurus. Both didn't see any conflict in their devotion to each of their numerous gurus. The fear stems from the confusion between a *lama* (guru) and a *tsawa'i lama* (root guru). Lama Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche provided a clear and concise explanation on the difference between a guru and a root guru. Rinpoche explained that a root guru is someone who conduces to your realization, i.e. someone who points out one's Buddha nature and as a consequence, one recognises it. For example, Milarepa told Gampopa, "Go and practice and if one day you meet this old beggar, you will see me as a living Buddha" (Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, 2019). What this essentially means is that only after practicing and attaining realizations can one say that the teacher who introduced you to the true nature of mind is your root guru. Therefore, not every guru is a root guru.

Strictly speaking, Lama Zopa Rinpoche said that "the *guru* in guru yoga means our present gurus, who guide us to enlightenment by teaching us the alphabet, giving us commentaries, oral transmissions, tantric initiations, vows and personal advice". If the practitioner understands that all these gurus "are the embodiments of the *dharmakāya*, the absolute guru, the transcendental wisdom of nondual bliss and voidness", there would be absolutely no conflict in the mind when practicing Guru Yoga (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 337). Then, all fears connected to having more than one teacher would naturally dissipate.

Finding an Authentic Teacher

Now that one understands who a guru is and the importance of following one, it is imperative that a student finds an authentic teacher. A student's duty is to examine the teacher's qualities through learning about his [or her] life and teachings (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999). Lama Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche quoted a Tibetan proverb, "to not examine a guru is like drinking poison; to not examine a student is like falling into an abyss". For the student, the poison metaphor suggests that a wrong guru will "kill your liberation path". For the guru, it is said that there is no enemy to a guru worse than a *samaya*[187]-breaker because it results

[187] A vow, covenant or words of honour with one's teacher

in lowering of the guru's realisations and shortening of the guru's lifespan, hence the metaphor of falling into an abyss (Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, 2019).

If one has a very strong connection with one's teacher (Tib. *tendrel*), then one may experience some signs which affirm the close connection with the teacher, e.g. very strong and deep yearning faith. Anyhow, the student should not be unduly worried if strong signs as these do not occur. In fact, many do not even experience this. How then will one find a guru? The *Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion* (Tib: *Lama Nga-chu-pa*) explains that in general, "In order for the words of honour of neither guru nor disciple to degenerate, there must be a mutual examination beforehand (to determine if each can) brave a guru-disciple relationship."

Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche advised practitioners to be wise in three ways, viz. 1) in finding an authentic teacher, 2) in attending to the guru perfectly, and 3) in realizing the instructions through diligent practice. Panchen Losang Chökyi Gyaltsen taught that "If you cherish yourself, don't follow just anyone you happen to meet, like a dog seeking food in the street. Examine well the lama who reveals the holy Dharma, then follow him with respect" (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 26). For example, Lama Atisha, upon arriving in Suvarnabhumi[188] with the intent to study under Lama Serlingpa (Suvarnadvipi) after undergoing thirteen months of perilous journey across the seas did not immediately rush to take teachings but thoroughly checked his future guru's qualities, practices and teachings even though Lama Serlingpa was renowned as a learned and great bodhisattva. Therefore, not to select a guru based on reputation is a great teaching displayed by Lama Atisha.

Nonetheless, too much checking can also be a hindrance to one's dharma practice as there is a danger that nothing will get accomplished in this precious lifetime. Once a disciple said to his teacher, "I want to check you as a lama for many years"; the lama replied, "I also want to check you as a disciple for many years" (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, pp. 27-28) and then nothing happened! The idea is to use one's innate wisdom or common sense while finding an authentic teacher.

The *Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion* and the *White Lotus* sutra outline the qualities one should look for in a teacher. One is advised not to accept a guru who lacks compassion, morality or discipline, i.e. uncontrolled in senses. Anger, maliciousness, possessiveness,

[188] Present-day Sumatera, Indonesia

arrogance and pride in one's knowledge and uncontrollable desires are red flags to look out for. Geshe Potowa cautioned students to avoid teachers who are abusive and who discourage disciples. Desirable qualities include stability in one's actions, kindness in speech, loving kindness, compassion, wisdom, patience, honesty and integrity. A potential teacher should be observed over a period of time to determine if a teacher conceals his/her shortcomings or is being pretentious of possessing qualities which he/she lacks. Additional qualities to look out for would be a guru who is learned in the scriptures, who has deeply internalized oral instructions and not merely paying lip service to the teachings; is a living embodiment of the teachings and who has attained realisations on the path – emptiness and *bodhicitta*. If these qualities are difficult to discern, then at the very least, one should find a teacher who has more good qualities than oneself (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 36).

Students also have a part to play in fostering a solid and meaningful guru-disciple relationship. The Buddha is quoted in the *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras* describing the qualities of a good disciple as one who is impartial, intelligent and yearns for dharma. A student should be able to bear hardships in bringing one's practice to fruition:

> One who is lazy and cannot bear even small hardships cannot accomplish the Dharma taught by the guru. When a disciple who has great will to achieve enlightenment in one brief lifetime, like the great Milarepa, and whose mind and body are both strong and able to bear hardships of hunger, thirst, heat and cold meets a perfect guru, such a disciple can achieve enlightenment in one brief lifetime. (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, pp. 47-48)

Guru Devotion

After careful scrutiny of the characteristics of the authentic guru, one is then ready to enter into a guru-disciple relationship. Therefore, one must learn how to relate to one's guru for any meaningful interaction to take place. This is where the practice of guru devotion comes into the picture. Two ingredients are essential for the successful generation of guru devotion; first, one's deep faith in a spiritual guide or guru and second – the blessings of the guru itself.

Guru devotion is the heart of the Guru Yoga and all other Vajrayāna practices from the preliminary practices starting right up to Dzogchen/Mahāmudrā – in fact it is the very practice itself. In Guru Yoga, we pray and direct our devotion towards the master who arouses in us the greatest feeling of devotion. The qualities of devotion are respect, yearning, and ardent faith. Devotion is not blind faith to any teacher, but a deep faith and conviction that the guru can lead one across the ocean of *saṃsāra* to the shore of enlightenment. An authentic guru is thought to be "the embodiment unifying all wisdom, compassion and power of an Awakened Being". The rationale for this assertion is that "all fully awakened beings abide inseparably in the expanse of Primordial Awareness, and all are in essence one" (Powers, 2007, p. 311). This is why in the Vajrayāna path, one's guru is regarded as an enlightened being and must be treated and respected as such:

> The guru embodies the goal of the path – fully developed compassion and wisdom – and should be viewed as a buddha. But this abstract consideration is only the first step; one must also recognise that the exalted qualities of buddhas are present in one's own mind. Thus one trains in the understanding that the guru, meditational deity, and oneself are one. (Powers, 2007, p. 314)

Not only do disciples train in viewing their gurus as fully awakened deities, the disciples are also training to view themselves as deities in the sense that one is aware that "the mind of the guru is by nature empty, as is one's own mind. Both are indistinguishable in nature from the mind of a Buddha." (Powers, 2007, p. 313). Therefore, one should generate respect and serve the guru just as how Sadaprarudita[189] attended his spiritual master, by offering the guru food, clothes, bedding, seats, medicine, and other necessary requisites, even at the risk of one's own life.

The basis of the relationship between a student and a guru is devotion. Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche explained that "the gateway to devotion is gratitude. True devotion is when one's ego is humbled and the neurotic mind ceases". Rinpoche cautioned that other types of experiences of 'devotion' – for example, feel good, love etc. are mere emotions, not much different from a romantic relationship – hence are counter-productive and even dangerous. There is no greater expression

[189] Bodhisattva Always Crying

of gratitude than to take the teachings to heart and transform one's actions, speech and mind into wholesomeness (Jetsun Khandro, 2018).

The Vajrayāna teachings often mention that the guru is far kinder than the buddhas because we have missed the opportunity to receive teachings from all past buddhas who have manifested in this world. The guru is the missing link which connects us to the buddhadharma. As Lama Zopa Rinpoche explains:

> Only our present gurus are actually revealing to us the methods to achieve liberation from *saṃsāra* and enlightenment. Only our gurus are granting us ordinations, the bodhisattva and tantric vows, and commentaries on sutra and tantra. Therefore they are more precious than all the infinite buddhas. (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 348)

> We should regard the virtuous friend as more precious than the tathagatas. Why? Even though buddhas are very compassionate and skillful beings, without the self-condition of the guru, the buddhas' actions cannot enter the mental continuum of the sentient beings, who are the objects to be subdued. (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 240)

Dzogchen teachings expound that "the wisdom mind of the master can actually be realised, not simply through study and practice, but through an uncontrived and heartfelt devotion" (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 14). The origin story of the Longchen Nyingtik[190] teachings best illustrates this point. Jigme Lingpa[191] aroused overwhelming faith and devotion in Longchen Rabjam (1308-1363)[192] merely by reading the great master's teachings. On three occasions during a three-year retreat in the Chimphu caves, near Samye, Jigme Lingpa had a vision of the great master's wisdom body and received the blessings of his body, speech, and wisdom mind. This happened although the guru and

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[190] The cycle of Longchen Nyingtik, "The Heart Essence of Infinite Expanse," a collection of tantras and *sādhana*s, was discovered by Jigme Lingpa as a mind treasure (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999).

[191] Jigme Lingpa (1729-1798) was a tertön (discoverer of concealed dharma teachings) of the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism and the promulgator of the Longchen Nyingthik, the heart essence of the teachings of Longchenpa. Jigme Lingpa also wrote a nine-volume history of the Nyingma Vajrayāna, among other works.

[192] Longchen Rabjam synthesized and clarified the Dzogchen teachings in a series of brilliant writings (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999)

disciple lived about four hundred years apart from each other! The encounter awakened the highest realization of Dzogpa-chenpo and empowered Jigme Lingpa to transmit the Longchen Nyingtik teachings (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, pp. 14-15). Jigme Lingpa later became renowned as a great *lama* who attained high realisations and learning not with much study, but through his deep meditation and devotion to Longchen Rabjam. This was affirmed by the great master himself in his later work the *Treasury of Precious Qualities* when he said, "the supreme disciple is the one with supreme devotion". Therefore, guru devotion is not contingent upon intellectual understanding or logical reasoning. This does not mean that one does not need to study. This essentially means that one must place emphasis on purifying negative karma and accumulating merit in order for realisations to occur and the most powerful way to do this is through guru devotion.

Although Jigme Lingpa had a vision of his guru and received all the blessings of the lineage, he is the exception rather than the norm. For ordinary practitioners, a human guru is very important. In today's world, dharma can be obtained through books and online materials very easily. Therefore, some practitioners have the idea that a guru is dispensable since many teachings are already translated and accessible through print material, YouTube etc. However, the level of interaction and guidance that a human guru can offer a student along the journey to enlightenment is not to be found in any book or online material:

> Reading a book about how to eliminate ego may be interesting, but you will never be in awe of that book, and anyway, books are entirely open to your own interpretation. A book cannot talk or react to you, whereas the guru can and will stir up your ego so that eventually it will be eliminated altogether. Whether this is achieved wrathfully or gently doesn't matter, but in the end this is what the guru is there to do, and this is why guru devotion is so important. (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 18)

There is also the misconception that the very idea of guru devotion is a dubious one, conjured up by Tibetan *lama*s to gain personal benefit. In actuality, literature on guru devotion can be traced back to ancient Indian literature, e.g. *Laying Out of Stalks Sutra* and *Essence of the Earth Sutra*. We can also discern the importance of guru devotion from the biographies and liberation stories of Indianand Tibetan scholars and yogis like that of Nāropa and Milarepa (Gyatso, 2009; Zopa Rinpoche, 2009). At the end of the day, the best validation of the authenticity of

the guru devotion practice is from one's own personal meditative experience. Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche skilfully articulated the stages of guru devotion experience in Figure 1 below:

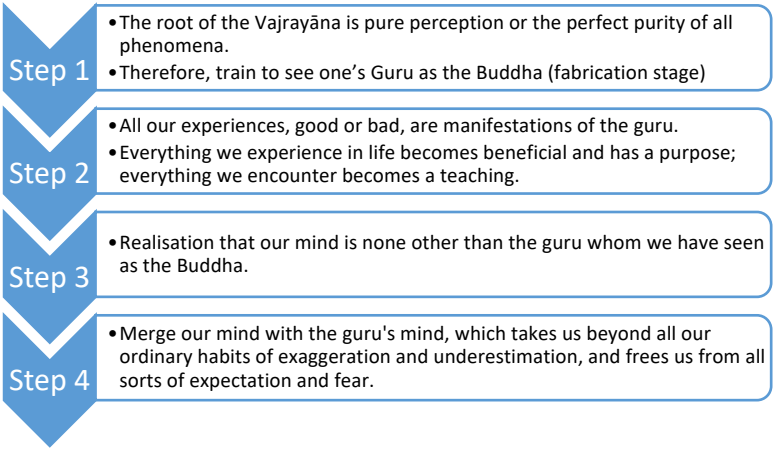

Figure 1: Stages of Guru Devotion (Source: Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche (cited in Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 18)

The benefits of guru devotion are boundless. When there is a strong bond between a compassionate and wise teacher and a disciple who has great faith, devotion and diligence, "it is as if the sun's rays were suddenly concentrated through a magnifying glass and focused onto dry grass, causing it to burst into flames at once" (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 31) – referring to the burning up of ego-clinging and its associated afflictive emotions. The benefit a student receives from guru devotion practice has a direct relationship with the intensity of one's devotion. True devotion which stems "from the core of one's heart or from the marrow of our bones" (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 48) as it is traditionally articulated, is the principal seed of enlightenment as it dispels obstacles in one's practice and conduces in gaining realisations on the path. To quote Guru Rinpoche:

> Complete devotion brings complete blessing;
> Absence of doubts brings complete success. (Guru Rinpoche, as cited in Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 47)

Historical Perspective of Guru-Disciple Relationship in Vajrayāna Buddhism

There are many inspiring stories related to guru-disciple relationships in India and Tibet since two millennia. Iconic examples of guru devotion of male masters such as Nāropa's devotion to his guru, Tilopa[193] and Milarepa to his guru, Marpa are all too well known. To balance the narrative, in this paper, we briefly explore the lesser-known guru-disciple relationships of past female masters in Vajrayāna Buddhism. Although there were numerous highly accomplished female masters, their stories are seldom told due to androcentric scholarship in traditional Buddhist biographies.

We begin with Yeshé Tsogyal (777-837 C.E), who was a Tibetan princess born into the Kharchen family. Yeshé Tsogyal is believed to be the first Tibetan to attain Buddhahood (Changchub & Nyingpo, 2002). She accomplished complete enlightenment and was responsible for preserving the rarest dharma teachings. She was a heart disciple of Guru Padmasambhava. Her biography records that her pure devotion to her guru was at all times unshakable and unimpaired, culminating in her receiving all the attainments:

> All the teachings of the Buddha were present in the precious Master Padmasambhava. He was like a vessel filled to overflowing. And after I had served him in the three ways pleasing to a teacher, all that he possessed he gave to me, the woman Yeshe Tsogyal. He poured it out as from one vase into another. (Changchub & Nyingpo, 2002)

Yeshé Tsogyal embodied all the qualities of a true and genuine disciple who accomplished all the stages of the path by practicing whatever was said and advised by Guru Padmasambhava, thus forever remembered as a heart disciple of the second Buddha of Tibet:

> In the supreme body of a woman you have gained accomplishment;
> Your mind itself is Lord; request him for empowerment and blessing.
> There is no other regent of the Lotus Guru. (Changchub & Nyingpo, 2002)

[193] Tilopa (988-1069 CE), Indian master, enlightened being and famous tantric adept, forefather and lineage master of the Kagyu School of Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism (Guenther, 1999).

Inspired by Yeshé Tsogyal's deep devotion to her guru, her disciples revered her as much as Guru Rinpoche and wailed in great sorrow when she was about to leave her earthly body. Yeshé Tsogyal's students were Tashi Khyidren, Kalasiddhi, Shelkar Dorje Tso, Lodro Kyi and a host of nuns of the monasteries that Tsogyal founded and supported not to mention countless monks, laymen and laywomen. Even after attaining enlightenment, Yeshé Tsogyal never abandoned her guru. Her unwavering devotion to her guru at all times is a shining example of a guru-disciple relationship which transcends time and space:

> I, your mother, the enlightened Yeshé Tsogyal,
> Perfectly accomplished through my pure devotion,
> Held in the Teacher's loving mercy,
> Have gone to him, my Master Padmasambhava.
> Therefore do not grieve, but offer prayers. (Changchub & Nyingpo, 2002, pp. 202-203)

Yeshé Tsogyal promised all her disciples that they are destined to receive supreme attainments (Skt: *siddhi*) if they accomplish unwavering devotion to her, their guru:

> Pray to me and you will truly see my face.
> To those with unalloyed devotion, I will give the siddhi that they wish,
> From now until the final future generation. (Changchub & Nyingpo, 2002, pp. 202-203)

Yeshé Tsogyal's final counsel, as recorded in her biography deeply emphasises on Guru Yoga. Before departing for the pureland of Orgyan, she summarised the entire path to enlightenment in several stanzas, one of which is selected here to demonstrate her strong emphasis on Guru Yoga as the sole and most profound path to enlightenment:

> With devotion take the four empowerments – you, all gathered here.
> Raise your voices, call on Tsogyal – call me by my name
> Request the four empowerments,
> Mingling your minds with mine inseparably.
> And in your sessions practice thought-free meditation. (Changchub & Nyingpo, 2002, p. 204)

The great *ḍākinī*, Mother Prajñāpāramitā herself, Yeshé Tsogyal, lived until age two hundred and eleven, bringing immense benefit to the people of Tibet, leaving behind a circle of great enlightened disciples, both male and female. Yeshé Tsogyal is remembered in history as a key figure in the introduction and consolidation of Buddhist teachings in Tibet. She also concealed numerous dharma treasures which she herself penned down for future treasure revealers (Tib: *terton*) to discover. There has not been any female guru quite like Yeshé Tsogyal since then.

Tashi Khyidren or the Lady of Mon, was an outstanding disciple of Yeshé Tsogyal who hailed from present-day Bhutan. She was one of two closest disciples[194] of Yeshé Tsogyal who passed into the pure realm of Orgyan with her Guru. At the age of thirteen she met her future guru Yeshé Tsogyal meditating in the Nering Drak Cave and was awestruck by the *yogini* that she started bringing milk and honey as offerings for the great master. Yeshé Tsogyal asked permission from her father to take her as her disciple. It is recorded that because of her deep devotion to her guru, Tashi Khyidren received great blessings from Yeshé Tsogyal and remained inseparable from her guru, in life as well as beyond:

> With her right hand, Yeshe Tsogyal transformed Tashi Khyidren into a blue utpala lotus with eight petals marked with the syllables *Hung* and *Phat*, and dissolved into the right side of Yeshe Tsogyal's heart. (Changchub & Nyingpo, 2002, p. 198)

Kalasiddhi, from, Nepal was also a heart disciple of Yeshé Tsogyal and disciple of Mandarava. Abandoned at the cremation ground with her mother's corpse, she was found by the great *yogini* Mandarava who brought her up and transmitted secret practices to her. Such was the great compassion of Mandarava. Kalasiddhi followed the advice of her guru and practiced diligently and attained the enlightenment of an Insight holder (Skt: *Vidyadhara*). Kalasiddhi was also a disciple of Guru Padmasambhava. Kalasiddhi herself became a guru and transferred her lineage to a farmer's son who became the great Master Vajrahunkara.

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[194] The other heart disciple, Kalasiddhi also passed into the pure realm of Orgyan with Yeshé Tsogyal and Tashi Khyidren (Changchub & Nyingpo, 2002)

Sukhasiddhi, who hailed from a very poor family in West Kashmir, India was another great yogini and lineage guru. She was abandoned by her husband and children for giving the family's last container of rice to a famished beggar during the great famine of her time. Without a roof over her head, Sukhasiddhi wandered around until she reached Oḍḍiyāna. Through her diligence, she became a very successful businesswoman, brewing rice wine and opening a restaurant. She had heard that a famous yogi, the Mahāsiddha Virupa lived partway up the mountain, and so she sent him offerings of her best rice beer with one of his woman disciples, Avadhuti-ma on a daily basis. Virupa enjoyed the beer and wanted to know who his benefactor was and sent Sukhasiddhi an invitation to visit him. She went to see the great siddha with large offerings of beer and meat. Virupa then bestowed initiation whereby she immediately manifested as a wisdom *ḍākinī* in mind and body and took the name of Sukhasiddhi, i.e. 'she who has accomplished great bliss' (Simmer-Brown, 2002).

Upon receiving empowerment and instruction from Virupa, Sukhasiddhi, then a sixty-one-year-old, attained full enlightenment that very evening. Sukhasiddhi later realised Mahāmudrā, i.e. attained enlightenment and became a master of Hevajra Tantra and one of the teachers of Tilopa (Karma Drubgyu Thargay Ling, 2012). Sukhasiddhi, together with Jetsün Niguma, Rahula, Maitripa and Vajrasapana were among the root gurus of Khyungpo Naljor, founder of the Shangpa Kagyu tradition:

> Among my four principal spiritual masters, Niguma, Rahula, the hidden yogi [probably Métripa], and Sukhasiddhi, the kindest was Sukhasiddhi.
>
> ~ Khyungpo Naljor

Sukhasiddhi had transmitted to Khyungpo Naljor "the four empowerments of body, speech and mind, and the union of all three – into the Six Doctrines of Sukhasiddhi, which are similar to the Six Doctrines of Niguma" (Kalu Rinpoche, 1986, p. 107). Khyungpo Naljor's deep devotion to his guru was based on his recollection of her great kindness:

> Her first great kindness was the bestowal of many transmissions. Her later great kindness was to be my secret consort and to grant me every empowerment. Her final great kindness was to give me directions for giving empowerment, along with profound instruction in meditation

> ... Moreover, she said she would remain inseparable from me throughout India and Tibet, a very great kindness, and that meditators in future generations would gain accomplishment by experiential cultivation of this secret meditation she taught. ("The Collection of Shangpa Masters' Biographies", pp. 56-57)

There are of course, countless great female masters whose guru-disciple relationships are worthy of mention but in the interest of space, we could not elaborate on them in this short paper. Nonetheless, the female masters' stories of guru devotion presented here are a testimony that anyone, regardless of gender can attain enlightenment if they practice the path single-pointedly as advised by their gurus and maintain deep devotion to their gurus.

Relating to a Guru

Guru Yoga practice dictates that a practitioner learns to see one's guru as a buddha. Jetsun Milarepa explained the rationale behind this requirement: "Try to see your guru in his actual aspect of *dharmakāya*. If you can, you will receive all blessings and inspiration effortlessly." Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche said, "When you spontaneously, constantly, see the guru as a buddha, you have the realization of guru devotion" (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 340).

Seeing one's guru as a buddha is not an easy feat to accomplish yet it is absolutely necessary according to the Vajrayāna teachings. At first, the devotion is somewhat fabricated and feels very artificial. Gradually, as one progresses in the daily Guru Yoga practice, one's devotion will only serve to become stronger.

Guru Yoga practice is to remember the guru's kindness and not to criticise or worse still, slander the guru. It is said that "when there is no devotion in your heart, your mind is dry and empty, like a hot desert where nothing grows (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 376). Gampopa quoting *The Mother of the Victorious One Perfection of Wisdom* said, "You should persistently, repeatedly, and constantly revere spiritual masters. Be very generous with them and cherish them. Furthermore, one should avoid wrong view toward the skilful actions of spiritual masters. Instead, one should respect them highly" (Gampopa, 1998, p. 74) and not dictate terms to the guru:

> What is the one thing that spoils the relationship between a guru and a disciple? It is politically correct behaviour, i.e. when a guru begins to conform to the demands of the students. (Jetsun Khandro, 2018)

Revering spiritual masters is to view them as enlightened beings. Being generous to one's guru entails making offerings. Lama Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche said that the best gift to the Guru is to put the teachings into practice – the supreme offering; to serve the Guru with one's body, speech and mind is the medium offering and the lowest offering is material offering towards one's guru's activities and teachings. Jetsun Milarepa accomplished the supreme offering by attaining enlightenment, which is in fact the fulfilment of the very purpose of a guru coming into this world (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999).

The third aspect of relating to a guru according to Gampopa is to avoid wrong views towards the spiritual master. Since gurus are human and bound to have imperfections, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo in his Lam Rim teachings advised practitioners to maintain pure perception – to focus on the positive attributes rather than the faults of the guru – "If we are able to look at the guru only from the side of his qualities and never allow the thought of faults in the guru to arise, we will achieve enlightenment in one lifetime" (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 18). It is indeed difficult to find an authentic guru. But once one has found such a guru, one needs to protect one's spiritual link with the guru carefully as "we would protect our very eyes" (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 57).

What if my Guru does not have the qualities of a Buddha?

The most common problem of contemporary Vajrayāna Buddhists especially the western-educated is the constant struggle to see the guru as a buddha. There is a real need to address this difficulty and how to relate to gurus who have inflicted pain and suffering onto students, whether intentionally or unintentionally or whose misdeeds have been exposed in public or whose actions contravene the laws of the land and international legislation. Therefore, what to do when one is unable to see one's Guru as a buddha or worse still, when a Guru displays Māra-like qualities?

Firstly, if one does not have an issue with the guru and one is merely experiencing difficulty in viewing the guru as a buddha – if the realisation of the Guru is higher, albeit slightly than ours, we can still benefit. Moreover, Vajrayāna depends on pure perception. Think that

one's teacher is the embodiment of the Triple Gem and Bodhisattvas, i.e. all the objects of refuge. We receive blessings as if the entire merit field has blessed us. As we gain benefit, we develop realisations. As our practice develops, we are fully free to seek higher realised masters along our path so long as we do not disparage our previous gurus. Lama Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche said, "A guru-disciple relationship is not like a marriage". As the Tibetan saying goes, "Follow whichever guru who is the best" – follow whoever has the highest realisations (Chokyi Nyima, 2009). One is not obliged to stick to one guru for life, especially if one has a conflict with one's guru's actions and speech.

Second, if a student is faced with a sticky situation in relation to one's guru, then the yardstick for guidance must always be based on the Buddha's teaching – "As ordinary disciples, it is more skillful for us to devote ourselves to the virtuous friend in accordance with the teachings" (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 296). Although tantric teachings dictate that a student must maintain pure perception of the guru regardless of the guru's actions, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama opines that students should be more discerning and check the guru's advice or instructions in light of the Buddha's teachings:

> It is frequently said that the essence of the training in guru yoga is to cultivate the art of seeing everything the guru does as perfect. Personally, I myself do not like this to be taken too far... it very easily turns to poison for both the guru and the disciple. Therefore, whenever I teach this practice, I always advocate that the tradition of "every action seen as perfect" not be stressed. Should the guru manifest unDharmic qualities or give teachings contradicting the dharma, the instruction on seeing the spiritual master as perfect must give way to reason and Dharma wisdom... This was said by the Buddha himself.[195] (Dalai Lama, 1994, pp. 72-73)

A guru-disciple relationship must always be based on the dharma. If it is anything else, then all the problems between teachers and students will arise. Therefore, one has to exercise utmost caution in one's relationship with a guru and understand deeply the true meaning of devotion. A practitioner should strive to traverse the three gurus progressively and not be stuck with the outer. If one is stuck at the outer

[195] Referring to the Kalama Sutta whereby the Buddha stated that..."Accept my teachings only after examining them as an analyst buys gold. Accept nothing out of mere faith in me."

guru, it will become attachment, a fan club of sorts and a cause for further pain and suffering (Jetsun Khandro, 2018).

The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion explains that if a guru asks a student to commit an action which is contradictory to the dharma and which will incur heavy negative karma, the student is not obliged to follow the guru's instruction. However, the student must respectfully provide the reason for not being able to adhere to the instructions:

> Without generating anger or heresy and thus creating obstacles that destroy your own liberation and enlightenment and with guru devotion, skilfully try to get permission from the guru not to do the heavy negative actions that you cannot transform into virtue. (Fifth Dalai Lama, as cited in Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 296)

Guru Yoga – the Technique

The Vajrayāna teachings tell us that the most essential practice for awakening and arousing wisdom is the Guru Yoga, i.e. "the quickest, most effective method for attaining enlightenment and is the one path in which all other paths are complete." (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 18). Often described as the essence of the eighty-four thousand teachings of the Buddha, Guru Yoga is arguably the easiest technique to practice and yet the most profound. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama summarised the mechanics of Guru Yoga as follows:

> Guru yoga is not just a practice where one visualises a deity and then makes seven-limbed offerings, but rather it is where one views one's own root guru as a real buddha from the depths of one's heart. Having cultivated such an attitude and strong faith, one then engages in actually pleasing the guru by following his advice. It is through such a method that one should try to achieve a transference of the guru's realizations to one's own mental continuum. Such a practice is called guru yoga. (Gyatso, 2009, p. 8)

Spiritual practice is a personal journey. Once one has found a qualified spiritual teacher or guru, one then takes teachings and proceeds to put these teachings into practice, bearing in mind that all teachings have the sole purpose of eliminating ego-clinging in the practitioner's mind. As discussed earlier, the outer guru merely points to the inner guru which is one's true nature of mind (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999). More specifically, Lama Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche outlined a

twofold purpose of the Guru Yoga practice. The first is to conduce the student to recognise the natural state or true nature mind and second, to allow for the recognition of the true nature of mind to recur (Chokyi Nyima, 2019); which is echoed by Khenpo Gangshar:

> Sustain this, the immediate and direct ordinary mind, nakedly and devoid of all contrivance; empty awareness, both clear and uncompounded. Get to know this as the actual mind of your glorious guru. (Khenpo Gangshar, 2015, p. 19)

As Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche said, "Guru Yoga practice inspires me the most, and brings me in touch with my deepest nature" (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 19). This is the essence of the Guru Yoga practice.

As mentioned throughout the paper, the actual technique of Guru Yoga revolves around arousing an uncontrived and heartfelt devotion for the Guru – to see one's guru as a buddha. Guru devotion is the basis of Guru Yoga in all schools of Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism:

> In the Kagyu lineage, for example, one of the main practices is called "Carrying Devotion to the Guru along the Path," and in their pith instructions the greatest emphasis is laid on fervent devotion. The same holds true for the Sakya and Nyingma lineages as well. (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 30)

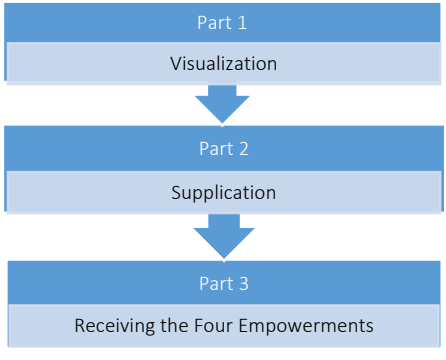

Figure 2: Sequence of Guru Yoga Practice. (Source: Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 31)

The visualisation section of the Guru Yoga corresponds to the deity yoga [196] in Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism which is generally

[196] The deity yoga practice in tantric or Vajrayāna Buddhism is the distinguishing factor between tantric and sutric practices in Buddhism (Wangmo, 2016).

divided into two, the generation stage (Skt: *utpattikrama,* Tib: *skyes-rim)* and completion stage (Skt: *sampannakrama,* Tib: *dzogs-rim*). Deity yoga is a tantric practice whereby a practitioner meditates on a tutelary deity (Skt: *iṣṭadevatā*; Tib: *yidam*) and subsequently, develops the very attributes – the body, speech and mind of the enlightened deity. Since pure perception is a basic tenet in tantric practice, the generation stage is essentially aimed at recognizing "all appearances as the deity, all sounds as mantra, and all thoughts as the *dharmakāya*" (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 59).

In the Vajrayāna, the deity yoga practice integrates both the wisdom and method (*bodhicitta*) within the continuum of a single mind. The unification of wisdom and method in tantric practice makes enlightenment in a single lifetime a possibility. The resultant effect of deity yoga practice is that through the accumulation of merit, one actualises the form bodies[197] of a buddha while the accumulation of wisdom actualises the truth body (Skt: *dharmakāya*, Tib: *chos-sku*) or simply, one's true nature of mind or primordial nature (Wangmo, 2016).[198]

> A similar concept is employed in the Guru Yoga whereby a practitioner meditates on the guru-deity and subsequently merges one's mind with the guru's, hence the epithet, Guru Yoga. One fervently prays to the guru which culminates in the attainment of the pure illusory body and the meaning clear light, the factors that lead the practitioners to the resultant Buddhahood. (Gyatso, 2009, p. 12)

[197] Skt: *rupakayā*, which refers to the illusory body (Skt: *sambhogakayā*) and emanation body (Skt: *nirmanakayā*).

[198] (Powers, 2007, p. 130)

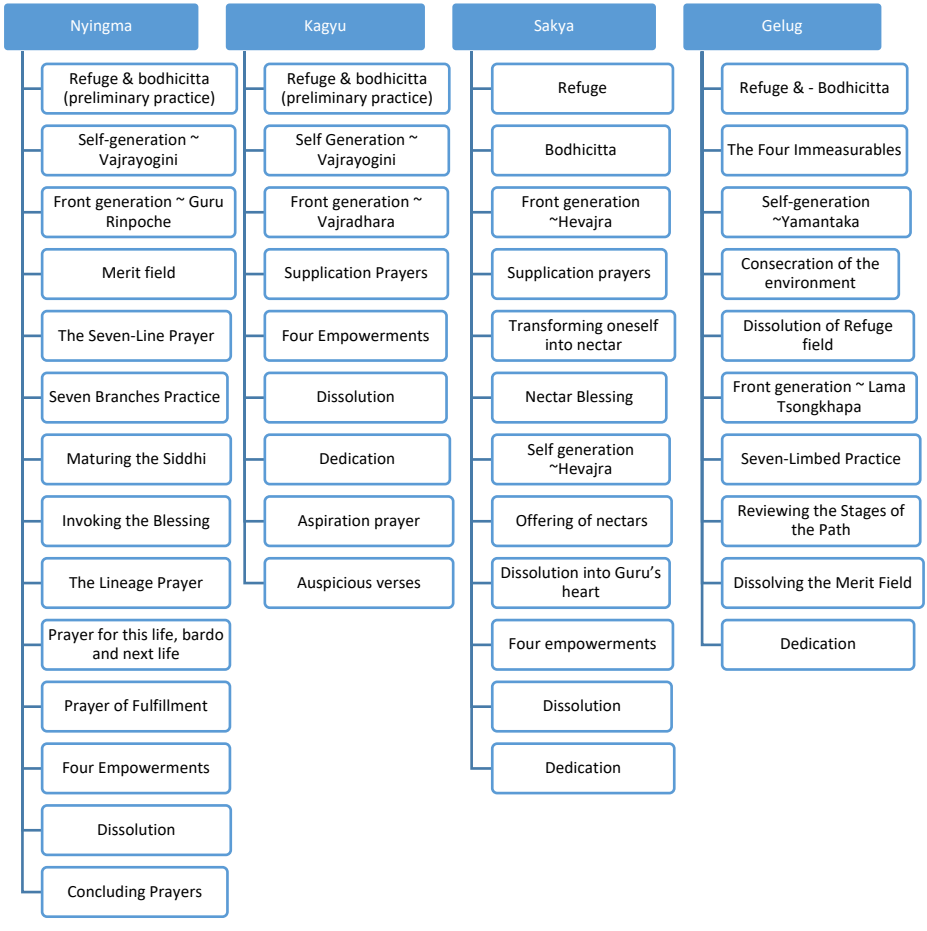

Figure 3: Comparison of the Basic Guru Yoga Framework for the Four Major Schools of Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism (Source: Personal research, 2019)

All Vajrayāna Buddhist practices begin with taking refuge and generating the mind of enlightenment for all sentient beings– bodhicitta. As seen in Figure 3, the refuge and *bodhicitta* are in all the Guru Yoga liturgical texts (Skt: *sādhana*).[199] One then visualises oneself as the deity, i.e. self-generation which is done to eliminate the thought of ordinariness and to be in a state of bliss and emptiness. Self-generation conduces the mind to deeply manifest one's own primordial

[199] For the Nyingma and Kagyu *sādhana*s, since the texts selected are a part of the preliminary practice, the refuge and *bodhicitta* are separate practices at the beginning of the preliminaries.

nature which is latent in one's own mental continuum. Generally but not necessarily, the self-generation deity in the Nyingma and Kagyu is Vajrayogini; Hevajra in Sakya and in the Lama Chöpa of the Gelug tradition, it is Yamantaka.

The guru is usually visualised in the aspect of either Buddha Vajradhara in the Kagyu tradition; Guru Padmasambhava, Samantabhadra or Longchen Rabjampa in the Nyingma tradition and Hevajra as in the Sakya tradition. Lama Tsongkhapa takes centre stage in the Lama Chöpa Guru Yoga practice which uniquely integrates the three deities – Guhyasamaja, Yamantaka, and Heruka (Gyatso, 2009, p. 12). Regardless of which deity one visualises, the most important thing to remember at all times is that they are identical in nature – the meditational deity is inseparable from the guru; hence the term guru-deity is used, especially in the Lama Chöpa text. Therefore, the gist of Guru Yoga is to deeply appreciate that "all the buddhas are of one taste in the *dharmakāya*. The *dharmakāya* is the absolute guru, and this is all the buddhas" (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 336).

Therefore, when visualising the guru-deity, one should in actuality, be relating it to the absolute guru, the *dharmakāya* which is in essence, no different from our primordial nature or true nature of mind (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009). Remaining fixated on the outer or relative guru is not the point of the Guru Yoga practice.

If one has several different gurus and finds it difficult to practice Guru Yoga, it will be helpful to see that all gurus are in essence one with the visualised deity, e.g. Vajradhara. The same rationale is applied to a guru who has already passed away:

> By looking at your gurus as one in essence you can generate the same strong devotion for other gurus as you feel for the guru for whom you feel the greatest devotion. They are simply different manifestations, but otherwise the same. (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 343)

Apart from visualising the guru-deity, sometimes, the entire merit field which consists of a retinue of buddhas, dharma texts, the *saṃgha*, lineage gurus, *bodhisattvas*, *ḍāka*s, *ḍākinī*s, dharma protectors, heroes and heroines etc. are visualised; as pure and perfect, i.e. "they appear yet they are empty, like reflections of the moon in water." (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 37). Again, one must visualise all the pantheon of deities as inseparable from one's guru:

> Consider that, outwardly, the guru is the union of the Three Jewels: his body is the Sangha, his speech the Dharma, and his mind the Buddha. Inwardly, he embodies the three roots: his body is the lama (guru), his speech the yidam (deva), and his mind the khandro (*ḍākinī*). Secretly, the guru is the union of the three kayas: his body is the *nirmanakayā*, his speech the *sambhogakayā*, and his mind the *dharmakāya*. The guru is also the union of all deities, for there is not a single deity who is not the display of the Lotus-born Guru. (Zopa Rinpoche, 1999, p. 49)

The second section of the Guru Yoga practice is the supplication to the guru and/or the merit field. One also makes offerings to the guru and the entire merit field which is in essence, of one taste with the guru. The supplication prayers differ according to text and lineage but the general idea is to generate deep faith in and receive the blessings of the guru.

The third and final section of the practice is where the practitioner receives the four empowerments viz. i) Vase or Body empowerment to plant the seed of *nirmanakayā*; ii) Speech empowerment to plant the seed of *sambhogakayā*; iii) Mind empowerment to plant the seed of *dharmakāya* and the iv) Body, speech and mind empowerment to plant the seed of *svabhavīkakāya*. The word empowerment (Skt: *abhiṣeka*; Tib: *wang*) means that one is empowered to practice deity yoga. The empowerment is received from a qualified guru in a tantric ceremony. The four empowerments are received in the form of light rays[200] blessings from the guru's forehead, throat, heart centre and all the three places all at once which represent the guru's body, speech, mind and wisdom respectively in order to dispel the practitioner's obscurations of actions, speech, thoughts and inherent wisdom (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999). The purpose of the four empowerments in the Guru Yoga is:

> ... to maintain the stream of blessings of the empowerment and to renew its power, we need to receive the four empowerments over and over again by ourselves, through the practice of Guru Yoga. This is in fact the most essential part of the Guru Yoga practice. (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, p. 63)

To conclude, the Vajrayāna teachings say that when one has the experience that "all the buddhas are the guru and all the gurus are the

[200] White, red, blue and all three colours respectively

Buddha" (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 378), one has the realization of guru devotion.

Post-Meditation Guru Yoga

The practice of Guru Yoga does not end when one gets off the meditation cushion. In fact, the sitting meditation is training ground to practice Guru Yoga at all times. To sustain one's meditative experience on guru devotion, one must train in remembering the guru at all times otherwise the experience will degenerate and may even disappear altogether (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009). Therefore, in ordinary circumstances, one visualises one's guru above the crown of one's head. Whether one is walking, sitting, eating, working; one must maintain mindfulness of the guru at the crown of the head at all times. Similarly, when experiencing favourable circumstance, one must be grateful to the guru (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999). Instead of freaking out when unfavourable circumstances arise, one should pray to the guru unwaveringly and solely rely on the guru for inspiration, instead of oscillating between one deity and another:

> … if we have money problems, we may try to solve them with Jambhala practice, if we face obstacles and difficulties we may invoke the help of Mahakala, or if we lack wisdom we may pray to Manjushri. This shows how weak our devotion is, because whatever it is we lack, we need only look to one source for help and guidance: the guru. (Dzongsar Khyentse, as cited in Dilgo Khyentse, 1999, pp. 18-19)

One can also make offerings to the guru when eating, drinking or enjoying pleasant sense objects such as music, beautiful flowers etc.:

> All the sense objects we enjoy are also manifestations of the *dharmakāya*, the absolute guru, the transcendental wisdom of nondual bliss and voidness. Everything we do becomes guru yoga practice. Living our life in this way is the way to become enlightened in one brief lifetime of a degenerate time. (Zopa Rinpoche, 2009, p. 360)

Before we fall asleep at night, one can visualise the guru in one's heart centre emanating infinite light rays filling up the entire room and universe and then these light rays are reabsorbed into one's heart centre. When one awakens in the morning, one can visualise the guru emerging

from one's heart and taking his/her place above the crown of one's head. Thus, everything we do twenty-four hours a day becomes Guru Yoga practice (Dilgo Khyentse, 1999). Most importantly at the moment of death, one is to blend one's mind with the mind of the guru – the actual meaning of Guru Yoga, 'union with the nature of the guru'.

Conclusion

This paper discussed at length the profound practice of Guru Yoga as a foundational technique of Vajrayāna Buddhism. We have tried to demonstrate that the Guru Yoga practice is the essence of all Vajrayāna practices and stressed its great importance as a path to enlightenment. Throughout the paper, we have emphasised the importance of guru devotion as the crux of the Guru Yoga. If one practices Guru Yoga with great sincerity one is bound to attain the fruition of the Buddhist path. The Guru Yoga practice entails no danger and has the efficacy to purify obstacles and generate great blessings. When one deeply understands through one's own experience, one's mind is the *dharmakāya* and when one's mind merges with the guru's, the fruition of the Guru Yoga practice is attained.

We have tried our level best to explain the Guru Yoga through the words of past and present masters and should there be still any errors in this work, it is entirely ours and any benefit which the reader may gain is all through the blessings of the gurus. We conclude our compilation with a prayer to our gurus for the benefit of all sentient beings,

> By the merits of our sincere efforts,
> May we attain the state of guru-buddha,
> And may we establish all sentient beings without exception
> in that very state, instantaneously and easily

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The Vajrayāna Light Body: The Interface of Biophysics and Tradition

Asa Hershoff

The development of a light body or rainbow body (‘ja’ lus) within the human organism is a central goal in the advanced practice of Vajrayāna. Tradition demonstrates that carrying on the practice of mantra, visualization, prayer, yidam identification and devotion, are effective paths to the accomplishment of this extraordinary goal. Additionally, cross cultural studies show that this possibility is inherent in all of the world’s major religious and spiritual traditions. However, within Buddhist textual and oral traditions, discussion or explanation of how this extraordinary transformation takes place is minimal, even in Buddhist terminology. And until recently there has been no physiological or biological explanation for such phenomena, or the stages of its creation. Yet current strides in the fields of human biophotonism, cellular microtubules and quantum behavior, such as Orch OR theory, shed new light on the reality of this process. For the contemporary Vajrayanist, East or West, understanding the breakthrough science regarding the role of light within the human body has many advantages. It can validate and provide confidence in traditional practices and provide a better internal monitoring for this endeavor. And for non-practitioners or investigators, understanding the rationale of these methods will provide a better understanding of the entire scope of the human journey, and reify the value of spiritual traditions altogether, beyond solely ethical or faith-based benefits. This

paper outlines the interface of Vajrayāna and the relevant scientific discoveries regarding the body of light. It offers a sound theory for the structural nature of a fully operational five-element light or rainbow body.

When Science Meets Spirit

The human condition carries almost unlimited opportunities in terms of activity, social interactions, relationships, work, learning, distracting interests, in what we are born with, and in how we develop. Yet, as Buddhists point out so poignantly, there are also the extreme limits of morbidity, mortality and the constant threat of the unexpected – the impermanent nature of all phenomena (Kalu Rinpoche, 1986). However, there is a far lesser known, yet far more profound possibility: The intentional formation of a light-based body during this very lifetime. Although we have some biological analogies in the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly, or the growth of a new being inside the female womb, the change from a cellular metabolism to a being of light is so remarkable that it might be considered the most precious promise of a human birth. Here our humble purpose is to see if we can begin to unravel this riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma, by looking at how the extraordinary convergence of quantum physics and biology (Arndt, Juffmann & Vedral, 2009) can enlighten our search. To inform the exploration of these three arenas (biology, biophysics and Buddhist practice), a highly readable summary of the intersection of the first two can be found in *Life on the Edge: The Coming of Age of Quantum Biology* (McFadden & Al-Khalili, 2014).

Light Body Defined

In spite of increased attention in recent years, there is certainly no standardised definition for Light Body. But while it does defy easy characterisation, we can summarise its essential nature, based on living traditions in which this is a stated end-goal.

- The Light (Tib. ö-lü) or Rainbow Body (Tib. ja-lü) is constructed of an overall quantum photonic or energetic field, with a coherent structure and complex anatomy, for which we have no examples in the natural world.

- As a vehicle for a renewed consciousness, the "mind" intrinsic to such a form goes far beyond the consciousness of the human personality with which we are so familiar.
- It transcends the biological life-death cycle, a vehicle for ongoing conscious experience, whose duration may correspond to solar or cosmic cycles.
- Appropriate to its photonic anatomy, Light Body has unique capacities, powers and functions analogous to, but far exceeding, cellular forms of existence.
- Unlike our material form, it is not a given, but must be developed in very specific ways.
- Due to the inherent difficulties in transforming from a carbon-oxygen based entity to a electromagnetic one, its occurrence is accordingly rare.

Even with such an outline in hand, there are many unanswered questions. For example, since creating a Rainbow Body is a long-term goal, its development must occur in stages, so that we may indeed meet (or experience) light-bodies-in-the-making. These percentages or stages of development are not clearly defined, even in traditional spiritual paths. We can continue to explore the discoveries within the fledgling sciences of biophysics, quantum field theory and biophotonism, weighing them with the results of traditional forms of inner work and inner transformation. Because we are asking the right questions, answers will inevitably arise.

Cross Cultural Light

It is clear that the development of a body composed of light is a panglobal and trans-cultural phenomena. Even casual research demonstrates that many religions, past and present, had clear pathways to the creation of a luminous vehicle of consciousness. This manifests in the art and writings of Christian, Alchemical, Japanese Shingon, Greek, Egyptian, Gnostic, Manichean, Kaballistic and Zoroastrian traditions, which would take several large tomes to catalogue and compare. In spite of the unique importance of Light or Rainbow Body, research in this area – both scientific and socioanthropologic – is indeed rare (Applebaum, 2001; Kapstein, 2004). Yet its existence is known by dozens of names in various cultures. These can be translated as the Divine Body (Shaivism), Immortal Body (Daoism), Supracelestial

Body (Sufism), Resurrection Body (Christian), Karast or Luminous Body (Ancient Egyptian), Kesdjan Body (Gurdjieffian), Golden Body (Alchemical) and of course the Light Body (LB) or Rainbow Body of Vajrayāna Buddhism. Some are hidden or no longer extant, while others remain living traditions. Of these, Vajrayāna has been the most widely accessible, with its global network of dharma centers and an extensive body of literature, largely because of the Tibetan diaspora (Field, 1992). Less widely practiced, in spite of the immense popularity of yoga, is the Indian Shaivite tradition, an advanced tantric system of Light Body formation with similar roots to Vajrayāna (Willis, 2017). Daoist NeiGong and NeiDan is another highly sophisticated form of LB technology whose secretive nature has made it almost completely unavailable until recently (Mitchell, 2016).

We must also recognise that all spiritual paths, by necessity, have a freely available exoteric set of teachings, alongside a highly restricted esoteric corpus of practice. One provides an ethical, ritualised and psychological base for the guidance of the general public. The other is restricted to a smaller number of those who wish to become adepts, engaging in rigorous, radically transformative methods (Davidson, 2004). Scientific investigation has been limited through a lack of this understanding, in not seeking out those whose inner development could be an appropriate subject of research.

Within the vast Vajrayāna tradition, there are numerous detailed discussions and methodologies of Rainbow Body creation, from ancient times to the present, with many translated into Western languages and with new retellings for a modern audience (Chenagtsang, 2014; Yangonpa, 2013). We also have the historical examples of many great practitioners who have achieved this results. Apart from these references to past masters, several recent books have appeared validating the existence of Rainbow Body, not just as historical myth, but witnessed in the modern era (Gyatso, 2009; Norbu, 2012; Tiso, 2016). Here we are discussing general principles, and there is no attempt to differentiate between the various subtle ways that Rainbow Body is achieved, such as whether it manifests during life or only at death, or takes the form of a complete dissolution of the physical form, as opposed to shrinking down to a child-like size (Guinness, 2018).

Why Science?

With the extensive knowledge contained within Vajrayāna and other traditions, why bring in science or physics? The potent fact that Rainbow Body phenomena have not been reported for Western practitioners over the last half century is very telling. There may be problems involving cultural, linguistic and psychological obstacles, including a lack of monastic facilities or the complexity of modern life. But the fact remains that the entire corpus of Vajrayāna teachings are structured for an 11th century mindset, belief system and cultural matrix. It seems logical that the architecture of the modern Western mind is so strikingly different than this Oriental import, that an entirely new paradigm is required. A number of modern, younger teachers, brought up in Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal or Indian communities of Tibetans, have attempted to translate this medieval system into a modern idiom. However, these strategies are more trans-cultural reformations or psychological re-tellings, rather than a paradigm shift (Ponlop, 2016). Concurrently, the extensive mindfulness movement has merely stripped away the vast majority of Buddhist principles and practices as a solution to its complexity and depth, only relating to Theravadin types of Buddhist practice (Carmody, 2009). And the Buddhist Psychology of today borrows influences and ideas, but like mindfulness approaches, does not venture anywhere near Vajrayāna and its core of creation and completion practices (De Silva, 2014).

Moreover, it has been shown repeatedly that when individuals understand *why* they are performing a task, performance and outcomes improve dramatically. Biophysics has begun to explain how the nervous system and brain process information, from the perspective of light (photons) and quantum energy fields (Ho, 2003). And the Primo Vascular System (PVS) has become the prime candidate for the traditional energy channels or *tsa*, including a possible transmission of biophotons i.e. light particles (Soh, 2004). These begin to come close to explaining familiar Vajrayāna practices, such as mantra-recitation, *tsa lung* (wind-channels), *yidam* (self-deity) visualization and *tummo* (inner heat). Having a rational and accurate understanding of what happens during inner work provides an additional level of guidance and confidence in both the practice and the goal. This is not an intellectualised or a distanced approach. On the contrary, it may help a practitioner make the intuitive, living connection that is the real touchstone of Vajrayāna meditation. Interestingly, hundreds of research

papers are available on the relation of biophotons and biophysics to both acupunture meridians and therapy, and Qi Gong meditation (Soh, Kang, & Ryu, 2013; QiGong, 2019). Largely China-based, they are "light-years" (pun intended) ahead of such investigations in Western countries. Fortunately, the relationship to Vajrayāna is easily inferred, as direct studies of Vajrayāna (or other) meditators in regard to biophysics are extremely rare (Pagliaro, 2017; Van Wijk, 2006). This is an unfortunate omission, as such research would not only aid our understanding of Buddhist meditation, but also be a unique opportunity for researchers to explore the unknown frontiers of inner light.

The Nature of Light

Our material universe is made up of some 118 different atoms, some of which are radioactive, about 60 present in the human body, and six elements which constitute 99% of our mass (Composition, 2019). All atoms are constructed of thirteen basic atomic particles, including protons, electrons and neutrons. Yet there are only four known energetic forces, including gravity. Of these, the electromagnetic force of the light-wave photon particle, is the real glue that binds all life together, the energy currency of reality as we know it. Light is the ultimate source of all life on earth, turned into matter by the photosynthesis of plants, which then nourishes the chain of all living things. Yet for all of life's drama, from the perspective of the photon itself there is no mass, no distance, no time and it does not need a medium through which to travel. Very importantly, photons are the carriers of packets of information of every kind. The particle wave of the photon gives us visible light, but also the entire spectrum of electromagnetism: radio waves, x-rays, gamma rays and so on. Coherent light is a special case, these fields of photons have the same wavelength and frequency, and an organizing effect on biological life.

The Light of Cells

Photons were first discovered in 1922, but it was Alfred Popp who first measured the light that all living cells emit, though at 1000 times below the level that the naked eye can detect (Bischof, 2005). Created in the mitochondria, this light is stored in the DNA and appears to be the messenger for an entire range of cellular activity including division and

regeneration (Cohen & Popp, 2003). It is also a crucial way in which cells communicate with each other, for such processes as white blood cell activation and immune defense (Prasad, Rossi, Lamponi, Pospíšil, & Foletti, 2014).

Output of light that can be detected from the body varies considerably, based on a number of factors. More the activity, the more free radicals are produced, and the more photons are released. But they are not merely a by-product of life processes, as was originally thought. When fewer photons are emitted, it means more are absorbed into cells and atomic structures within the body. A meditator that shows less photon emission after a calming practice does not indicate that there are less free radicals (Van Wijk, Koch, Bosman, & Van Wijk, 2006). It may instead mean that they are using photons in order to create cellular and physiological change. In a future science of meditation, we may differentiate between forms of inner training: one that generates and accumulates biophotons, and one that utilizes and diminishes available light. As a corroboration, the more primitive, or crystalline and structured a living object is, the more biophotons it emits. The human body, for example, puts out far fewer photons than a simple leaf. And when an adept dissolve into Light Body at death, the hair and nails, the crystalline parts of the body, may be left behind. The nails and hair may not have enough biophoton accumulating ability to achieve the transformation possible for other cells.

Cells interact, or speak to each other over distances via electromagnetic fields. But cells also have "eyes," in the form of their light-detecting *centriole*, which can see the position of other nearby cells (Salari, 2011). Photon intensity obviously varies in different parts of the body, being particularly active in the face and head, and has been shown to follow diurnal cycles, not related to body temperature, but to the inner metabolism (Kobayashi, Kikuchi, & Okamura, 2009). There is also the phenomena in our body of quantum tunneling. It now provides an explanation of why enzymes in the body can accelerate certain metabolic processes by a factor of 1000. In this process photons "teleport" from one area to another, suddenly disappearing and appearing without having to move through space.

Channels of Light

With Light Body as the end goal of Vajrayāna practice, the transformation of human bioenergy becomes essential. At the core of this process are the body's subtle energy channels, known as *tsa* (Tibetan), *nadi* (Sanskrit), or *jing-luo* (Chinese). These were assumed to be non-material inner pathways, composed of magnetic fields or some kind of, as yet unknown, invisible guidance system. Situ Rinpoche had suggested that meditation on the *tsas* is like mowing tall grass, our focused visualization creating fresh pathways (personal communication, 1987). Indeed, the material or non-material basis of the channels caused considerable controversy even in old Tibet (Gyatso, 2015). That has changed with the discovery of the Primo Vascular System (PVS). The North Korean researcher, Kim Bong-Ham revealed this microscopic network of vessels (which came to be known as Bongham ducts) some 30 years ago, but it was not verified due to a lack of precision instrumentation at the time (Soh, Kang, & Ryu, 2013). Now this matrix of channels, which is a system independent of lymph vessels or the vascular or nervous systems, has been the subject of intense study. Today it is considered to represent the internal channels of acupunture meridians (Bai et al, 2011). Pervading the entire body – skin, heart, lungs, intestines, inside lymph vessels, within organs – it follows the course of nerves and travels inside the brain, its ventricles and even the central channel of the spinal cord (Soh, 2009).

These channels transport amino acids, neurotransmitters, hormones, hyaluronic acid, nucleotides, lymphocytes and even stem cells (Pawitan, 2018). Equally fascinating are the mysterious *sanal cells* (Soh, Nam, & Choi, 2012) that are involved with regeneration of tissue and creation of new cells. These may prove to be the traditional psychic drops, the *tiglé* (Tib.) or *bindu* (Skt.) of Vajrayāna anatomy. Nodes within the channels (Bongham corpuscles or PVS nodes) are present at acupuncture points and seem to have a regulatory effect on nearby organs and tissues. When Vajrayāna texts describe a clearing of the channels, are these nodes involved? And are they part of the "karmic winds" that are said to circulate in the tsa, resulting in our unique perception of the world?

In any case, these vessels qualify ideally for the internal energy channels discussed for thousands of years by Vajrayāna, yogic and Daoist traditions (Baker, 2019; Yangonpa, 2017). As part of the Chinese meridian system, such channels are known to transmit

electrical signals and magnetic fields. But there is now ample research demonstrating that these channels also act as optical fibers for the transfer of infrared and visible wavelengths of light (Pokorný, Martan, & Foletti, 2012). Thus there is communication of quantum information through photons emitted by the DNA within sanal cells (Ogay, 2006) in these traditional channels (Soh, 2004).

There is also a second pathway of energy flow, different but equally important. The fascia of the body, the elastic connective tissue that forms a sheath over every muscle, organ, cavity and sinew, including the nerves and brain, is known to have piezoelectric properties, making it is a source of bioelectricity (Yang, 2015). Stretching, compressing or merely moving muscles, fascia or bone, generates a flow of electrons. We also know that biophotons and sounds waves are generated by movement that can be conducted along contiguous layers and paths of fascia (Bordoni, 2018). This impacts our understanding of the various systems of Tibetan trulkhor (yogic exercises) which seek variously to "release the knots," "pull and straighten the channels," "spread through the channels," and so on (Taranatha, c. 1600).

The Illuminated Brain

Communication in the brain occurs through well known systems of bioelectrical and chemical transmission. Nerve impulses send information through electrochemical signals – waves of ionic depolarization. From there, the ends of nerve cells, the linking *dendrites,* branch out like fantastic trees, with as many as ten thousand connections to neighboring never cell endings. They pass their messages on to these adjacent neurones via neurotransmitters, seven main ones (like glutamine, seratonin and dopamine) and over 100 minor players (Neuro, 2019). But it would seem biologically impossible for this many discrete chemical messengers to be effective in such a microscopic space, surrounded by billions of other similar dendrites. Tang (2014) points out that this theory of neuronal signaling "does not provide a reasonable explanation for higher brain functions, such as perception, learning, memory, emotion and consciousness itself." Nor does this exclusively biochemical model help in our investigation into Light Body formation.

Biophotons to the Rescue

There are a number of ways that light transmission resolves these problems, and opens the door to new possibilities. The human brain is actually a nexus of both the generation and remote inflow of biophoton and electromagnetic energies. Biophotons are now known to be a major form of signaling in the brain, involved with everything from memory formation, to neuroplasticity, to neurotransmitter release itself (Salari, 2011). Firstly, biophotons are generated in the cell's powerhouse, the mitochondria, and then transferred as coherent, organized light by microtubules, which act like electric relay systems, with nerve cell DNA acting as a storage system (Pokorný, Martan, & Foletti, 2012). Additionally, quantum information (atomic-sized) travels as coherent light along the fatty coatings of the nerves – the myelin sheaths (Zarkeshian, Kumar, Tuszynski, Barclay, & Simon, 2018). This makes for a fiber-optic-like information transmission within the brain. Moreover, biophotons also pervade the entire brain through the ubiquitous Primo Vascular System, as outlined earlier (Soh, Nam, & Choi, 2012), conducting light information packets or *qualia.* Finally, photons also travel in the cerebrospinal fluid (CFS), that magic elixir that bathes the brain, and accumulates in its fluid-filled hollows, the ventricles. This confluence of factors may relate to consciousness itself, as we shall discuss.

The central actor in this luminous drama seems to be the thalamus area. The brain constantly creates the CSF which circulates through the four ventricles that enclose it, traveling all the way down the central channel of the spinal cord. Galen, the famed physician of ancient Rome, considered this to be the seat of the soul, and this idea remained in Western thought for over a thousand years (Zappaterra, 2012). Even though it is 99% water, the CSF is rich in proteins, ions, lipids, hormones, cholesterol, glucose, and is home to many neurotransmitters and hundreds of other signaling factors. This fluid actually bathes the pineal (third eye) and other nearby structures, where they interface with secretions like melatonin and DMT (dimethyltryptamine) the so-called "spirit molecule" (Strassman, 2001). This highly complex fluid transports all these neuroregenerative and neuroprotective factors and is known to be important in the sleep-wake cycles, appetite control and brain injury repair and regeneration (Zappaterra, 2012). It is in this setting that remarkable biophoton activity occurs.

All this would be academic, except for the fact that Dotta (2012) demonstrated that visualizing a bright light in a dark room causes not only the expected increase in brain wave activity, but also produces a significant burst in photon activity in the right hemisphere (in this particular research study.) This light is coherent, supporting the *Bókkon's hypothesis* that visual imagery is strongly correlated with UPE (ultraweak photon emission), commensurate with brain activity (EEG). Bokken himself posits that cells store high amounts of biophotons, but not as random light. His theory indicates that actual biophysical (biophoton) pictures can be formed in the retina and elsewhere (Bokkon, Salari, Tuszynski, & Anta, 2010). The implications are profound for the intense visualizations, and internal body focus of Vajrayāna creation stage practices. It also shows the importance of these phenomena in completion stage practices, like *tögyal* (leap over) or *tummo* (inner heat). This also is the setting for the appearance of consciousness experience altogether.

Colored Light

Biophotons occur in the entire range of visible light, from near infrared to near ultraviolet. It has yet to be determined what different functions the various color frequencies of light might have, what different kinds of information they might carry, or how neurons respond to different wavelengths. However, a major discovery was the fact that a majority of biophotons tend toward the red end of the spectrum. Previously it was not clear what differences in brain function are responsible for making humans more intelligent than other animals. In cross-species comparisons, it has been shown that the more red-shift in the biophoton emission profile, the more intelligent the species. From bullfrogs to rats, to monkeys, to humans, the more advanced creatures produce more near infrared biophotons (Wang, Wang, Li, Xiao & Daia, 2016). There are significant implications, since methods of Rainbow Body formation in Tibetan, Daoist and Yogic traditions typically involve visualisation and activation of the Fire Element. These solar energy and inner thermal reactions are intentionally generated in the navel or pelvic region, traveling upwards and through the body's energy channels to the center of the cerebrum.

The Entangled Mind

Quantum entanglement is a phenomenon whereby atoms, photons and other basic particles become bonded together and synchronised in a certain way. While physicists have known of this striking reality for decades, the struggle has been to show how this entanglement occurs in living, *biological* systems, not just in sophisticated laboratory settings. It was already known that microbes, plants and animals affect each other's growth patterns and health merely through proximity, with no physical or chemical contact. But a recent breakthrough study demonstrates that photon entanglement does indeed take place in complex groups of plant tissue (Shi, Kumar, & Lee, 2017). Considerable empirical research also shows that humans communicate with each other at remote distances (Radin, 2006), even affecting each other's brainwaves. But the mechanism for this action was hypothetical. With the biophoton entanglement process we have a solid rationale for how this occurs. Further, once phot0ns are entangled, they remain that way and influence each other, even if separated by thousands of miles. Photons "live" for .13 of a second on average, but if unimpeded, will go on for billions of years, theoretically far beyond the current 13.8 billion year-old age of our universe.

While this has vast implications in terms of human to human interaction, it has particular interest for Vajrayāna and other spiritual lineages. The process of connecting to a spiritual master or mentor is a ritualized empowerment, whereby there is a direct transmission to the students. This process gives them formal permission to perform meditation practices involving specific deities using visualization and mantric operations. But it is also considered to impart the "seed" of enlightenment and the development of a future Light Body to the student. This "wave of grace" (Tib. jin-lab) resides within, to be watered and nourished by regular practice. Quantum entanglement suggests that this is not merely symbolic or psychological, but a direct biophotonic transmission. Through the empowerment process the student is related to the teacher and teachings – and the unknown quantum fields that relate to Vajrayāna deities, pure lands, and enlightened lineage masters of the past – from that day forward.

This also puts a new spin on samaya (Tib. dam-tsik), the sacred bond between student and master, and one's connection to meditational deities (yidams), protectors, dakinis and lineage gurus. This bond is considered to be a sacred link, not allowed to either lapse or be shattered

by negligence or negative actions. Conversely, healthy samaya guarantees a certain level of spiritual maturation and accomplishment. As Kalu Rinpoche (1989) slyly stated in his last letter to our 3-year meditation group on Saltspring Island, "You have done very well. You have stayed inside the retreat!" In other words, keeping one's promise, and maintaining one's quantum entanglement was more important than how effective or transforming the actual practice might be. Being forever energetically and photonically linked to beings of a higher consciousness is a distinct advantage for the spiritual traveler, and a cornerstone of Vajrayāna *guru-yoga*.

Biophotonic Consciousness

Consciousness is nick-named "the hard problem" in neuroscientific and philosophical circles (Akopov, 2013; Chalmers, 2000). For science, the understanding of awareness has remained elusive, with evolving and revolving theories and models. However, the merging of concepts within spirituality and biophysics begins to provide a meaningful solution. As far back as 1944, the famous quantum physicist Edwin Shrödinger proposed that the solution to life and consciousness itself must lie in the world of quantum (1967). Indeed, from the seeker's perspective, it offers more than just an explanation, but a solid framework for deepening one's approach and meditative experience.

While hundreds of explanations for consciousness exist from a mystical, philosophical, neurological and phenomenological perspective, a dozen or more now posit a biophysics approach. Penrose has been a pioneer in seeking a "missing science of consciousness" in the world of biophysics. Decades ago, Karl Pribram posited that the brain holds information in a holonic or holographic way. This means it spreads these qualia (small packets) of information in fractal patterns that cover large regions of brain. The quantum hologram theory is particularly enticing because it depicts the brain as a local connection point or interface, linked to vast network of non-personal photonic awareness that exists outside the physical body. Pribram's holonic brain theory (2013), Penrose & Hammeroff's Orch-OR theory (2017), Bohm's explicate and implicate order (1980), and Sheldrake's morphogenetic fields (2012) have contributed to the exciting discussion.

Endogenous Light Nexus Theory

In spite of advances, mainstream biophysics and biophoton science has ignored the relationship between one's own organised photonic fields and the larger world. Yet at every step of the way in Buddhist tantra, from initial empowerment, through deity yoga to the Six Dharmas and Tögyal, one is dependent on outer forces and input from high level fields of consciousness. In every Vajrayāna lineage, major and minor, this merging of outer and inner forces is held as essential to any progress on the path. This is reflected in the familiar symbol of the human skull cup filled with nectar (Skt. amrita; Tib. dutsi), representing the merging of the outer world and its contents (sentient beings) dissolving into their original "pure" nature of the five elements and the five pure lights.

The Endogenous Light Nexus Theory addresses this issue, at the same time providing a model that fits with the textual tradition and the narrative experience of enlightened masters of Vajrayāna. Basically, in this model the holographic interface created in the brain is seen to act as a "receiving set" for the expression of consciousness, just as a television, radio or computer receives transmissions from an external signal or broadcast – AM, FM, TV or wi-fi. This happens when photons emitted from cells in the brain and accumulated via the PVS are guided to the surfaces of the brain's fluid-filled ventricular spaces. Here the photons interact with the beating cilia that line those ventricles. *Cilia* in the ventricles are in the form of millions of microscopic hairs that, like the cells in the retina of the eye and the centrioles in each cell, can sense light. By definition they are neurophotonic (Salari, 2011). Photons are then guided by the beat-timing of the cilia, forming interference patterns in the ventricles surrounding the thalamus. This creates an interface or "nexus," an actual holographic matrix of light. This is the receiver that allows us to experience the global fields of light-consciousness that pervades the universe. The purpose of this entire neurophotonic array is to provide an interface of consciousness between mind and what has been termed original mind, natural mind, cosmic mind or Buddha mind. Our problem is that our access to this greater field of consciousness is normally quite limited. In essence, we are experiencing Buddha mind at a "low resolution." (Simanonok, 2008).

The Powers of Light

There are numerous descriptive lists of powers and capabilities that result from spiritual accomplishment (Skt. siddhi, Tib. *ngö-drup*), tied to Light Body formation. We can draw on numerous Buddhist sources found in Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayāna literature, while Shaivite texts have similar catalogs of the gifts of the enlightened state. Likewise, Daoist sources describe these possibilities, usually emphasizing longevity and immortality. Clearly there is no definitive or standard list, and the powers indicated below are merely suggestive. Notably, these abilities are congruent with possessing a "anatomical" body formed of light. A photonic form would be free to travel in time, be in several places at once (bilocation), be capable of invisibility or possess the power of flight, as well as having prescience (precognition) and a broad insight into the causes and effects of people's words and deeds (telepathy). Below are examples of Vajrayāna qualities gleamed from the traditional *Eight Ordinary Accomplishments* ("Eight Ordinary", 2018), the *Six Supercognitions* ("Six Super", 2018) and the comprehensive collection of the *Twenty-One Sets of Immaculate Qualities* (Kangyur Rinpoche, 2011).

> Clairvoyance: The divine eye (Tib. lha'i mik) with the ability to see at a distance, microscopically, beyond the visible light spectrum or into the ultimate nature of matter.
> Clairaudience: Hearing at any distance, hearing subsonic or suprasonic sounds, or understanding all languages.
> Telepathy: Knowing the minds of others, as well as one's own and others past lives.
> Invisibility: Being beyond human perception, or manifesting in or out of perfectibility.
> Motility: Travel to celestial realms (starry locations of transformed photonic beings and superconscious entities), instant physical travel, teleportation and flying through the air.
> Transformation: Miraculous manipulation of form i.e. turning one object into another.

While these numerous abilities sound like the stuff of science fiction, they are plausible if one posits a form that has the unique capabilities of light, made coherent and controllable. Having a photon-structured form would account for having "inexhaustible nourishment" ("Eight Ordinary", 2018) and the many other super human abilities.

While one might think this is "spiritual marketing," exaggerations, or narratives simply meant to inspire prospective or active practitioners, there is also every reason to believe that these are factual and actual descriptions. Certainly, the concept of miracles is a broad one, beyond our current discussion. But the diversity of sources indicate that these are not miraculous events, but the results of specific, carefully executed practices that conform to our emerging knowledge of biophysics and biophotonic transformation.

Conclusion

Laboratories worldwide are in a mad race involving photon science in order to make quantum computing devices a practical reality. Medically, biophotonic science has developed radically new diagnostic instrumentation for seeing the inner light of health and disease. Acupunture and QiGong-based research have made startling revelations about the channels of the body, and their circulation of photonic light and electrical signal transmission. Biophoton science and biophysics continues to unravel mysteries of organic life. The traditional energy channels of the body are now seen as tangible conduits for transmission of information-filled light packets. Moreover, morphic resonance and holographic theory bring us closer to understanding how the brain is a creator, but also a receptor of luminous consciousness. All this portends a new era of increased understanding and more productive practice for students of Vajrayāna, East and West alike. Through integrating the discoveries and concepts of biophysics, we can begin to apply to them to various aspects of the Vajrayāna methodology, and the ultimate goal of Light Body formation. Future papers will discuss how these new truths can create a theoretical framework for the formation of a Light Body template in *creation stage* yidam practice, and the ultimate implosion and dissolution of cellular structure in Inner Heat and other *completion stage* methods. The future bodes well for illuminating the samsaric context we inhabit, a realm that may often seem inherently dark. Similar to Buddhist teachings on the ultimate nature of reality (Mahamudra or Dzokchen), photonic science indicates that the underlying radiance of experience, and the non-finite consciousness that accompanies this light, is as near as the present moment.

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Aesthetic Techniques as Skillful Means

Edward Alexander

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche remarked in his 1974 letter for the inaugural summer program at the Naropa Institute, "in meditative art, the artist embodies the viewer as well as the creator of the works. Vision is not separate from operation, and there is no fear of being clumsy or failing to achieve his aspiration" (Trungpa, 2008). In offering this remark about a possible synthesis of vision – or experience – and operation – or practice – Trungpa Rinpoche was invoking the Vajrayāna principle of wisdom's unity with skillful means. David Gordon Write, for example, has similarly remarked of the distinctly tantric approach to practice that, "one might characterize the range of Tantric uses of … templates and media as a continuum extending from 'doing' to 'knowing'" (White, 2000, p. 12). White's statement could be said to apply equally well to the practices and techniques of the 20th century avant-garde, which the art historian Clement Greenberg famously defined as the autotelic effort to "creat(e) something valid solely on its own terms" (Greenberg, 1939/1961, p.6). Greenberg based this formulation on his broader understanding of the avant-garde as being founded on the act of incorporating the technical means of aesthetic production into the very content and subject matter of art. Structurally, then, Greenberg's understanding mirrors the fusion of *upāya* and *prajñā* that is constitutive of the Vajrayāna or "path of means" approach to Buddhist practice. Though emerging from disparate historical contexts, western aesthetic and Buddhist yogic

traditions both crystalised, in ways that would prove decisive for their subsequent development, around the principle of fusing technique with experience.

The correspondence between western art's 20th century turn toward a praxeological conception of aesthetic production and the approach of the 'resultant vehicle' of secret mantra was to prove more than a formal analogy, though, when in the final decades of the 20th century these two traditions began to directly encounter one another in both Europe and North America. While the role – and, indeed, abuses – of the counterculture in the formation of what would become known as "Buddhist modernism" has been well documented by scholars such as David L. McMahan and Donald J. Lopez Jr., the deeper conceptual and experiential wellsprings of Buddhist tantra's affinity with the advanced techniques of western art have at times been occluded by the cultural and institutional trappings that preserve tradition while also curtailing mutual intelligibility and understanding across different cultural and sociohistorical contexts. Though the risk of trivialising the profound means and aims of Vajrayāna practice in the name of merely 'aestheticising' adoptions of the outward forms of Buddhist culture remains a possibility of any cross-cultural encounter, the opposite extreme is less frequently remarked upon: that of rejecting out-of-hand the genuinely spiritual aims and methods of western artists as somehow unworthy of the same degree of philosophical consideration practitioners demand for Vajrayāna Buddhism on the grounds that any and all adoptions of the Buddhist view by cultural 'outsiders' are likely to be Orientalist misappropriations. But as Trungpa Rinpoche saw, contemporary aesthetic culture was precisely the site at which the practical and experiential dimensions of the Vajrayāna tradition could meet and interface with the realities of modern, secular, post-industrial society. Taking the correspondence between the understandings of the central role of technique within both Western art and Asian tantra as a point of departure, this paper aims both to provide some broader historical context for why America's first accredited Buddhist-oriented institution of higher learning became, among other things, one of the few final outposts of the 20th century avant-garde. I hope thereby to show why coming to terms with the Vajrayāna and avant-garde's entangled histories may be necessary for the preservation and development of both traditions in our increasingly globalised contemporary world.

The Avant-Garde and Art's Trajectory in the West

To understand why the Vajrayāna and the avant-garde were so uncannily well-matched in the later 20th century, it is important to remember that "art" has not been a static or fixed category in western societies at least since the emergence of what Walter Benjamin has called the "secular cult of beauty" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 224) during the Renaissance. Only with the emergence of the humanistic schools of thought that would inspire the European Enlightenment and scientific revolutions did the modern western concept of "art" gain definition as a category distinct from religious iconography, craft, architecture, civic planning and so forth. This historical trajectory has defined art's development in the west, most prominently with the turn during the Romantic era away from regarding art as a means of representing the external world and toward an "expressivist" understanding wherein the artwork enables its maker to put forth the vital substance of her own inner life and consciousness. As David McMahan has argued, "the successors of the Romantic movement were among the most important influences in Buddhist modernism" (McMahan, 2008, p.11). Romanticism both advanced historically novel claims for consciousness' irreducibility to empirical methods of investigation and, as a corollary of this premise, assigned to the fine arts a central role in the experiential or first-person study of mind, coming to define aesthetics as what the German philosopher George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel called the "science of sensation, of feeling" (Hegel, 1975, p.1). Seen in this light, aesthetics came following the western Enlightenment to assume a role roughly analogous to that held by yoga, in the technical sense of the term as practico-experiential union, within Asian monastic and ascetic cultures. This premise is reinforced by M.H. Abrams' (1981) demonstration of the theological contemplative antecedents that shaped the formation of Kantian notions of aesthetic contemplation. The avant-garde in particular begins both as an extension of Romanticism's concern with finding new means of expressing the "inner life" of the mind, beyond industrialised societies' increasingly rationalised empiricist worldview, and equally with Romanticism's decline, as artists grew dissatisfied with available aesthetic techniques and sought to go beyond them.

At the turn of the 20th century, artists primarily in France, Germany and Italy discovered that the technical conventions of the art tradition – learned skills for producing the illusion of perspective, shape, color,

and so on – could yield transformative new experiential outcomes if placed in service of the act, process and event of making itself, rather than of represented content. Though the shift from thinking of art as a set of objects that imitate and tell stories about the external world to thinking of it as a range of practical actions that produce distinctive experiential situations was not made explicit until the Dada and Surrealist movements following the First World War, the initial wave of prewar "non-representational" art in movements like Cubism, German Expressionism and Futurism already made clear that the new art's processes did not refer to any subject matter external to that process itself. These works were not "about" anything other than what one experienced through one's receptive engagement. As it decoupled its technical means from the act of representation, art therefore increasingly came to resemble a contemplative practice. We should therefore be unsurprised to find artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, René Daumal and Antonin Artaud drawing upon various mystical traditions to explain what they were doing in their work. For American artists continuing the avant-garde project after World War II, Buddhism provided a major resource early on, with experimentalists such as the composer John Cage drawing upon the work of D.T. Suzuki and the Zen tradition in his development of chance-based methods of composition aimed at removing the compositional process from the artist's self-conscious control.

Such was the state of "art" in its distinctly modern Western secular manifestation at the time of the Vajrayāna's partial migration to the west with the beginnings of the Tibetan diaspora in the late 1940's and early 50's. As artists from these traditions encountered Vajrayāna lamas for the first time, the possibility for another radical historical transformation in the category of art became distinguishable. While it was nothing new for artists to be interested in mysticism, yoga, or even forms of ritual magic, the direct tutelary relationships with lineage holders that we find during this period *were* new, at least on the scale at which they became possible during the early 1970s. Previous cross-cultural exchanges had tended to occur through a mixture of autodidactic book learning and occasional participant-observation. What began to happen in the 1970s was lineage holders' direct transmission of elements of Vajrayāna view to student-practitioner-artists and those artists' subsequent translation of that view into aesthetic practice, in the latter term's modern and experimental sense. This development had two consequences. First, it supplied the Buddhist

tradition with an arsenal of new practical means of communicating the sutric and tantric view to students and audiences. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it greatly reinforced the soteriological import and reach of contemporary art practice that had arguably been an underlying if tacit impetus since the emergence of the modern concept of aesthetics during Romanticism by aligning artists' projects with an inherited body of oral and non-oral instruction from living lineage holders. I would like to provide a few examples of this phenomenon before offering concluding thoughts on its significance for both Vajrayāna Buddhism and Western art as forces shaping our contemporary world.

Poetry as a Practice of Cultivating Awareness and as Ritual

Possibly the most well-known American Buddhist poet, Allen Ginsberg first met his root guru Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche while requisitioning Trungpa Rinpoche's taxi for his ailing father, allegedly asking Trungpa Rinpoche "may I borrow your vehicle?" before turning to recite the "Vajra Guru" mantra to him. By the time Trungpa Rinpoche invited Ginsberg and Anne Waldman to found the Naropa Institute's poetics program in the summer of 1974, the fledgling school's roster of contributors read like a who's-who of the late American avant-garde, with performances and workshops being organized by John Cage, Meredith Monk, Diane DiPrima, Amiri Baraka, William Burroughs, Robert Creeley and many other prominent figures of the art and literary world convening upon the Institute's first summer workshops. Rather than citing one of Ginsberg's many experiments in spontaneous free verse from the early 70's onward, I would instead cite as exemplary his later treatise on poetics, entitled *Mind Writing Slogans* (Ginsberg, 1994). Drawing equally upon both Chekawa Yeshe Dorje's 12th century collection of *Lojong* aphorisms and the "ground, path and fruition" Dzogchen schema under which its three sections are grouped, Ginsberg's treatise assembles a collection of pithy quotations or "slogans" culled from both literary and Buddhist sources such as Ezra Pound, Louis Zukofsky, Basho, William Blake, Gelek Rinpoche and, most prominently, Trungpa Rinpoche himself. With his assemblage of slogans, Ginsberg provides a set of general precepts aiding in the process of poetic composition. Poetic composition as the slogans present it, though, consists not primarily in the production of elegant verses but in the ongoing moment-to-moment

cultivation of attention to the particulars of lived experience. This cultivated awareness becomes the aim and end of poetry itself, rather than the verbal artifacts that are now seen merely as its byproduct.

Anne Waldman's use of the Vajrayāna view in her poetic practice is most directly articulated in prose essays such as "'Fast Speaking Woman' and the Dakini Principle" (Waldman, 1975, p. 35) and "Poetry as Siddhi" (Waldman, 2001, p. 171). Waldman, who like Ginsburg received refuge and bodhisattva vows as well as tantric empowerments from Trungpa Rinpoche, built her poetics around a specifically oral and performance-based understanding of the poem as an enacted, ritual event. Poems such as "Fast Speaking Woman" and "Makeup on Empty Space" turn on the interplay between the aural patterning created through the repetition of key phrases and repetition's tendency to push semantic meanings toward non-signifying sheer sound. These works fuse the second-wave feminist interest in deconstructing the category of 'woman' with the anti-foundationalist ontology found in the Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness and dependent origination. Describing the convergences between her performance poetics and Buddhist tantra, Waldman treats the Sanskrit term *siddhi* as the "pivotal word" of her practice, defining *siddhi* as a "synaptical energy" (Waldman, 1996). Explaining that, "a tantric understanding of energy is related to the experience of contrast or extremes," Waldman remarks that poetic linguistic constructions allow one to explore the "contrast between self and other" (Waldman, 1996):

> … these descriptions that these Dharma texts were providing seemed to resonate with these other kinds of… writing practices and these writing experiments. This deceptive existence of you and other seems to rub together… consciousness and… the phenomenal world… how do you work with that? Interested in words, images and arrangements, various collidings that seem to come out of chaos, the sense of this unconditioned spark happening, and how you related to this experience can exist inside language itself, inside the minute particulars of individual words." (Waldman, 1996)

Waldman goes on to explain,

> … you might consider poetry as a kind of siddhi… the ability to use the existing energy of the universe may be where poetry touches on a play of duality, how you handle it, transcend it, feel the gap that arises, that interests me. (Waldman, 1996)

While Waldman's assertion that poetry itself might constitute a paranormal accomplishment or *siddhi* might at first raise some eyebrows, her general description of tantra as relying upon the experience of contrasts or polarities within the phenomenal world is echoed in Donald J. Lopez's remark that "the central motif in Buddhist tantra is duality, the relationship between opposites and the transformation of one into the other" (Lopez, 2019, p. 3). Given the centrality of poetic composition as a teaching method within the tantric tradition, from the *dohas* of Saraha through the songs of Milarepa to contemporary masters of *mahamudra* such as Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso, Waldman's claim that poetic experience bears some essential resemblance to the tantric worldview begins to seem less audacious than it might at first glance. Ginsberg and Waldman both share a conception of poetry as practice rather than product, with Waldman's more self-consciously ritualized understanding of poetry as oral performance treating words more as distinctive phenomenal events rather than as semantic bearers of meaning that convey the maker's personal experience.

Language as Experiential Event in Jackson Mac Low and John Giorno

This conception of words as energetic events rather than as bearers of meaning, which finds its traditional counterpart in the principles of mantra and seed syllable, also informs the work of the Buddhist avant-garde poet Jackson Mac Low. Mac Low drew upon John Cage's chance-based method of composition in order to write his poetry without relying on a set of self-conscious decisions made by his own authorial ego. In one such series of chance-based poems, the *Gathas*, Mac Low would take traditional mantric or scriptural verse units, break them up into their individual syllabic and phonemic units and then rearrange those units according to a process of generating random combinations (whether through a coin toss as in the case of the *I Ching* or other means such as computer-based number generators). Mac Low's *Mani Mani Gatha* (1975) uses as a source text the Chenrezig mantra ("Om Mani Padme Hum") whose initiation he had received from Kalu Rinpoche. Recombining the "A," "U," and "M" and other phonemes of the mantra into a chance-based combination would in turn yield a new, spontaneously-arisen sonic arrangement that both retained

something of the psycho-physical properties of the seed-syllables comprising the original mantra while also freeing those constituent parts from their fixed function within the mantric formula. One of Mac Low's more famous *gatha* pieces, *1st Milarepa Gatha* (1978), uses the Tibetan supplication, "Je Mila Zhadpa Dorje La Solwa Debso," as a source text, while the *Tara Gatha* (1968) draws upon the Tara mantra, "Om Tare Tutare Ture Soha." In Mac Low's transmutation of semantics into sound art, transmission and defamiliarization were seen to work together in concert.

Another avant-garde poet working on the borders between distinct media, John Giorno, met His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche on a trip to India in 1971, eventually recognizing Dudjom Rinpoche as his root guru. Influenced less by aleatory techniques than by William Burroughs and Brion Gysin's cut-up method of deliberately interrupting syntactical and grammatical structures (though, like Mac Low, interested in harnessing these techniques toward the Vajrayānic aim of transforming neurotic habitual structures of experience), the most salient formal feature of Giorno's work beginning with 1972's *Cancer In My Left Ball* is his splitting of individual lines into two columns. The two columns form the basis for simultaneous and overlapping recitations of the initial statement in order to produce the effect Marcus Boon describes as "a mind observing itself and its environment" (Boon, 2009, p. 70). Boon sees Giorno's effect of rendering thought ambient and peripheral to itself through spatial and temporal rearrangement in poems like "Vajra Kisses" (Giorno, 1973) as being a kind of textual equivalent to the maṇḍala principle, insofar as the poem, like the maṇḍala, becomes "a configuration of space, a pattern, around a Buddha-mind" (Boon, 2009, p. 70). The interruptions and echo effects through which Giorno's double column lines break up and rearrange a single descriptive or narrative statement – effects best experienced through Giorno's audio recordings of his work – both disrupt the audience's fixation on the thought process contained within that original statement and also yield new flashes of insight in the audience's mind. Repeated phrases appear by coincidence to 'comment upon' the very process of meaning construction they are witnessing. In this way, mental events, or *nam-tok*, come to be seen for the hallucinatory projections that they really are, in the process illustrating the inseparability of thought-as-content and awareness-as-space or environment.

Collaborations with Vajrayāna in Non-Literary Aesthetic Practices

However, much poetry may have been privileged as a genre and medium for cross-pollination with Vajrayāna view and practice, it was far from the only avant-garde art form being synthesized with Buddhist or tantric means. Theatre, for instance, had been drifting further away from dramatic narrative and towards a more purely ritual function since at least the early 1950s when Cage, Merce Cunningham and others were inspired by Antonin Artaud's manifesto *The Theatre and its Double* (1938) (itself inspired by Balinese ritual theatre) to stage the seminal multimedia performance *Theatre Piece No 1* (1952). In 1972, Trungpa Rinpoche began working with members of the experimental Open Theatre to produce a new set of theatre-based practices that would come to be known as Mudra Space Awareness. Drawing upon Trungpa Rinpoche's background performing *cham* dances as young monk in Tibet, the Mudra Space Awareness group used bodily action and movement as means of deepening practitioners' phenomenological attunement to the non-conceptual awareness distributed throughout the nervous system. Craig Warren Smith describes Mudra Space Awareness as being based on the principle that "any form of 'doing'… can be a vehicle for awareness of direct experience… by breaking everyday experience into its component parts, and then seeing how these component parts fit together, we can begin to appreciate the intrinsic nature of the activity" (Smith, 2005). Another early Naropa contributor and student of Trungpa Rinpoche, Barbara Dilley of Merce Cunningham's renowned dance group, likewise explored the relationship between embodied practice and non-conceptual awareness within the context of experimental dance in her book, *This Very Moment: Teaching, Thinking, Dancing* (Dilley, 2015). Projects like Mudra Space Awareness and Dilley's dance instruction harnessed the raw energy of event-based and improvisatory art while directing it towards more sustained practices of self-transformation whose underlying templates had been derived from the Vajrayāna view and path.

Developments After the 1970s: the Beuys/Dalai Lama Meeting and the "Art, Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy" Conference

Though the early activities at Naropa Institute during the institution's formative years in the 1970s were rarely matched by latter decades in terms of innovation and transformative potential, a couple of significant events in the encounter between the worlds of the Vajrayāna and the avant-garde warrant additional remark. A lengthier study of the historical forces influencing the relationship between these two traditions would require an extended analysis of the events surrounding and following the episode that transpired between the poet W.S. Merwin, his partner Dana Naone, and Trungpa Rinpoche during the 1975 Vajradhatu Seminary, documented in detail in Ed Sanders' *The Party* (Sanders, 1977). Though a full discussion of this complicated event in the history of American Buddhism is well beyond the scope of the present paper, the episode is instructive insofar as it dramatises many of the central issues and points of friction between, for instance, adherence to tradition and individual prerogatives of personal autonomy that are crucial to understanding the longer-term historical tendencies of post-industrial societies' relationship to the Vajrayāna. The events of the 1975 Vajradhatu Seminary and what the poet Tom Clark described as the ensuing "great Naropa poetry wars," (Clark, 1980) brought to a head the underlying antagonisms and contradictions between the necessary traditionalism of any authentic initiatory spiritual heritage and the individualism that has largely defined the modern social dispensation within which the avant-garde becomes intelligible as an idea and set of practices. The Merwin episode did not occur in a historical vacuum, however, but was broadly contemporaneous with the collapse of the postwar world economy in the 1970s energy crises that would lead to the rise of both post-Fordist modes of production and their accompanying neoliberal forms of governance in the Thatcher and Reagan years of the 1980s. The changes these economic upheavals brought about in the American culture of the 1960s and 70s cannot be understated. Moreover, a host of scandals surrounding charismatic leaders and their followers raised a specter in the American public imaginary whereby it became common to equate the term "guru" with "cult leader". These are just a couple of the historical developments, broadly construed, that would radically transform the cultural landscape of the United States such that by the

early 1980s both the avant-garde and "American Vajrayāna" found themselves on more tenuous ground, independently let alone in concert.

In light of these changes within American culture, it is perhaps unsurprising that my final examples should come from Europe. In 1982, the Fluxus artist and Vajrayāna practitioner Robert Filiou arranged a meeting in Paris between the Fluxus artist Joseph Beuys and Sogyal Rinpoche. This event in turn led to another meeting, in Bonn, West Germany later that year, between Beuys, his collaborator Louwrien Wijers, also a member of the Fluxus group, and the 14th Dalai Lama. The interviews from the meeting that Wijers conducted and subsequently published as a collection are a vivid testament to both the intimated affinities between the late 20th century avant-garde and Buddhist tantric practice, on the one hand, and the challenges that linguistic and conceptual translation present to arriving at a clear understanding of where exactly – if anywhere – these two historical streams might converge. As Chris Thompson describes the meeting, "Beuys and the Dalai Lama's short chat had been friendly, had touched upon some important questions, but its results seemed vague and inconclusive" (Thompson, 2011, p.xiii). Much of the inconclusiveness of the meeting seems to have stemmed from the disproportion between the utopian aspirations with which Beuys and Wijers arrived to the meeting and the relative inability to arrive at concrete mutual understandings of shared reference points.

This translational barrier is immediately apparent in the interview when Wijers attempts to locate a common principle between traditions in terms of the vexed category of "shamanism," a touchstone term in Beuys' work that Wijers explains she associates with the "meditative, ritualistic aspect… that has been represented in modern art performances" and sees as enabling contemporary avant-garde art performances to "hav[e] a therapeutic effect on the audience" (Wijers, 2019). Though perhaps cringe-worthy to 21st century ears better attuned to the abuses of the category of the "shaman" within western culture, Wijers' primary aim in invoking the term is to furnish a basic reference point for the inchoately sensed correspondence between contemporary art practice and Buddhist ritual methods. This intent is evident when, after being asked by the Dalai Lama if she is referring to *Bön po* and told by His Holiness' translator Jeffrey Hopkins that there is no precise equivalent term for Wijers' use of "shamanism," she remarks,

Wijers: This is modern art… the question comes from modern art..
Hopkins: modern art… so the painting has…
Wijers: Performances… we're talking about performances…
Hopkins: Drama…?
Wijers: No…
(Here His Holiness the Dalai Lama starts to laugh and says:)
His Holiness: Ha… ha… ha… ha…it's a subject in itself… ha… ha…
Wijers: I'm sorry to create such confusion…
Hopkins: So it is like a ritual performance…
Wijers: That's right… done by visual artists…
Hopkins: … and it has a healing effect on the audience…
Wijers: Yes… to initiate a healing process. (Wijers, 2019)

His Holiness goes on to explain in response to Wijers' question that inputs from the five sense consciousnesses have an immediate effect on the experiences of pleasure and pain within the sixth or mental consciousness. Sense perceptions – including those associated with aesthetic and/or ritual experiences – can therefore be relied upon in order to strengthen or augment certain kinds of reaction or receptivity within the mental consciousness. Such sensory inputs ultimately ought, His Holiness claims, to be transcended once the mental consciousness has reached a certain stage of development. His Holiness concludes,

> In order to develop a certain inner progress, the artist's thing is very much influential and harmful. I mean, helpful as well as harmful. It depends on the meaning the artist is conveying. Now, you see, certain art is made to have an impact on hatred, or anger, such things… and that is harmful. In any way, artists with their art, and with this ritual thing, have powerful means to give a message. (Wijers, 2019)

While His Holiness' explanation of aesthetic experience in terms of *Abhidharma* epistemology contains a kind of elegant lucidity, one also senses throughout the interviews the two parties comparing and attempting to locate analogies between concepts without necessarily arriving at any new syntheses between principles.

However, one interprets the immediate outcome of Beuys' initial meeting with the Dalai Lama, Thompson claims that the meeting's apparent nonstarter status nevertheless yielded important later developments in the entangled histories of the avant-garde and the Vajrayāna. This would seem to be borne out by Wijers' organization of

the 1990 Amsterdam conference on "Art, Science and Spirituality." Though unattended by Beuys and Filiou, who both passed away before the conference took place (the latter while in traditional three-year retreat in Dordogne), it was attended by an impressive cast of thinkers from a host of disciplines, including David Bohm, Ilya Prigogine, Francesco Varela, Marina Abramovic, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg and both Sogyal Rinpoche and the Dalai Lama. It is striking that the primary religious representatives at an international, interdisciplinary conference bringing together representatives from the fields of avant-garde art, science and economics were from the Vajrayāna tradition (the other religious representatives being the Christians Mother Tessa Bielecki and Raimon Panikkar). Described by Wijers as a 'mental sculpture', the event attests to the persistence beyond their earlier historical moment of those concerns about the integration of knowledge and experience that motivated the central place assigned to art and contemplative practice in the curriculum at Naropa Institute in the early 1970s. The event's subtitle – "from fragmentation to wholeness" – helps to illustrate how the dialogue between artists working within the western avant-garde tradition and Vajrayāna lineage holders was in many ways a leading edge of the broader effort at a rapprochement between discrete fields of investigation and practice such as art and science or political economy and psychology, so often invoked under the banner of 'interdisciplinarity.'

Conclusion

All of these examples remain relevant to us today insofar as they offer precedent and templates for what one might see as a best case scenario for a possible cross-cultural synthesis – or at least encounter – between modernity and Vajrayāna Buddhism. While much experimental Western art after the 1970s would turn away from that decade's abiding interest in locating contemplative practical means of transforming human consciousness in favor of more conceptual, sociological and expressly political aims, the work discussed here seeks to marshal the era's most advanced techniques of aesthetic composition in service of what must ultimately be regarded as soteriological aims fundamentally aligned with those of Buddhist practice. Tutelary relationships with lamas provided these artists with the traditional resources with which

to ground their experiments in ongoing personal projects of self-transformation, while these artists' creative means of communication and expression conversely provided Buddhist teachers like Trungpa Rinpoche with means of making the Dharma accessible to the sensibilities of individuals brought up in secular, technologically advanced societies. What made this possible at base, I have suggested, is the integration of practical technique with first-person or phenomenological experience that forms the basis of both aesthetic and Buddhist tantric approaches.

In many ways, the presence of an avant-garde proved essential in the initial transmission of the Dharma to the west by providing a cultural context that was receptive to the teachings. While cultural misappropriation is always a risk in cross-cultural encounters, avant-garde aesthetics inherently tend to preserve and respect the self-secrecy of esoteric Buddhism for the very reason that their implicit perspectives depend on the audience's own practical participation and competency. In the context of art's increasing abstraction from discursive and representational modes of communication, non-conceptual aesthetic appreciation itself comes to serve a function similar to that of initiation. To borrow from Trungpa Rinpoche's terminology, one must come to participate in the operation in order to share in the vision. Dharma teachers in the 21st century have continued this precedent: Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche has for example both produced and written about the spiritual efficacy of the abstract expressionist painting that he has pursued under the guidance of Yahne Le Toulmin, while Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche's cinematic work is well known. These contemporary examples suggest ongoing possibilities for relying on the legacy of experimental art as a means of bridging the gap between tradition and invention.

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Moving Being: Physical Exercise Systems from the Three Series of Dzogchen

Mé-tsal Wangmo & Ja'gyür Dorje

> Every human being is animated by moving patterns of energy – they are rich, vivid, and powerful. We can discover these subtle landscapes of energy within ourselves. We can experience their depth, and resonate with their vibrant harmonies. Meditating on the space of this resonance enables us to encounter dimensions of vitality that are extraordinary. Although these landscapes of internal energy were familiar territory to advanced Tibetan yogis and yoginis, they are by no means beyond our scope. Anyone who is seriously interested, and committed to an hour of daily physical exercise and meditation, can discover glimpses of the vast horizon of brilliance and presence. (Khandro Déchen, 2009)

This paper explores the physical exercise systems from the three series of Dzogchen – the Atiyoga teachings found predomi-nantly in the innermost Tantra of the Nyingma tradition. Buddhism is possibly unique as a world religion in having vehicles – yanas (Tib. *thegpa*) – a number of distinct and differing approaches to practice. A yana is a vehicle in the sense that it is used to get from one 'place' to another, and to be a valid yana it must have a base – a place to start, a path - something to practice, and a fruit – the result of following the path. The Nyingma school has nine yanas which are comprised of three Sutric vehicles: Shravakayana, Pratyékbuddhayana, and Bodhisattvayana, and also three outer Tantras and three inner Tantras. The outer tantras

are: Kriyatantra (Tantra of Activity)*;* Ubhayatantra or Caryatantra (Tantra of Engagement); and Yogatantra (Tantra of Unification). The inner tantras are: Mahayoga (Great Yoga); Anuyoga (Subsequent or Resultant Yoga)*;* and Atiyoga (The Great Completeness). From the perspective of the Atiyoga teachings these nine vehicles are often simplified to the three yanas of Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen – *mdo, rgyud,* and *sems*.

Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen

In Sutra the base is the knowledge that one is referentially addicted to form, the path abjures form and embraces emptiness, and the fruit is emptiness. The principle of the Sutric teachings is renunciation – avoiding the negative consequences of conflictive emotions by renouncing the situations which provoke them and cultivating compassion in the context of a peaceful mind. In Tantra the base is a knowledge and experience of emptiness, the path embraces form as empty appearance, and the fruit is the nondual state. The principle of the Tantric teachings is transformation – facilitating the naturally compassionate enjoyment of our experience by loosening the bonds of habitual concepts and transforming our conflictive emotions through the recognition of their essentially energetic nature. In Dzogchen the base is the nondual state, the path consists of methods by which one returns to the nondual state whenever it has been lost, and the fruit is the nondual state. The principle of the Dzogchen teachings is self-liberation – allowing our perceptual life to simply be *as it is* so that we experience the texture of reality directly. In the term 'self-liberation' – rangdröl – rang as it is employed in Dzogchen terminology means 'of-itself' as in without the intervention or assistance of anything else. So rangdröl means – *of itself it liberates itself* – the metaphor used in Dzogchen for self-liberation is of a snake uncoiling its own knots, returning to its natural condition. Dzogchen is usually translated as Great Perfection or 'utter totality' – it refers to our natural liberated condition, the state of innate realisation which is always there, in its utter totality and its great perfection, simply waiting to be uncovered. The term Dzogchen also incorporates the teachings aimed at discovering, and continuing in this natural primordial state of being.

The Dzogchen teachings were brought to Tibet by Padmasambhava, Vairotsana,[201] and Drimèd Shényèn. Vairotsana was a Tibetan translator, one of the 25 disciples of Padmasambhava and Yeshé Tsogyel who was sent to India to study with Shri Simha who secretly entrusted him with propagating Dzogchen in Tibet having instructed him to write the teachings on goat vellum in milk so that they could not be read without holding the vellum over a smoking fire.

Vairotsana also received transmission of Dzogchen at this time from Garab Dorje *(Pra-hé Vajra)*, as did Jampal Shenyen *(Manjushrimitra)*. Garab Dorje's renowned statement on Dzogchen is known as the *Tsig sum nèdèk* (Wyl. *tshig gsum gnad brdeg)* which translates as either 'Hitting the Essence in Three Phrases' or 'Three Phrases Striking the Vital Point' in which tshig means *phrase*, sum means *three*, and *nèdèk* means *hitting* or *striking.* The Tsig sum nèdèk was the final statement of Garab Dorje to Jampal Shényèn as his summation of Dzogchen.

The first phrase is **direct introduction** *(*Wyl. *ngo rang thog tu sprad)*. The practitioner is introduced by the lama to the nature of mind and immediately understands it. The practitioner is also given practices through which they understand the nature of mind.

The second phrase is **remaining without doubt** *(*Wyl. *thag gcig thog dug cad)*. These are practices to actualise what has been understood – through physical sensation that amplifies the living meaning at a level that does not divide body and mind. It is direct and without intellectual or physical doubts.

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[201] Vairotsana of Pagor *(spa gor be ro tsa na)* was a Tibetan translator who was one of the 25 disciples of Padmasambhava and Yeshé Tsogyel. He was sent to India to study with Shri Simha who taught him in secret. Shri Simha entrusted Vairotsana with propagating Dzogchen long-dé and men-ngag-dé in Tibet. Padmasambhava, Vairotsana, and Drimèd Shényèn were the three who brought Dzogchen to Tibet. Drimèd Shényèn received the transmission of Dzogchen from Shri Simha and Yeshé-mdo *(Jnanasutra).* He was also a student of Sangwa Sang-gyé *(Buddha-guhya).* He was invited to visit King Trisong Détsen. Drimèd Shényèn's chief disciples were Yudra Nyingpo, Sangtön Yeshé, Pang Gen Sangye Gönpo, Nyag Yeshé Zhön-nu, and Jomo Yeshé Drönma. Another especially renowned disciple was Pag Mipham Gönpo whose disciples attained the rainbow body for seven generations by means of the Dorje Zampa teachings *(Thunderbolt Bridge).*

The third phrase is **continuing in the state** *(*Wyl. *gdengs grol thog du 'cha')*. Remaining in the state means one integrates *rigpa* in every moment, whatever the experience. Any type of emotion can arise and be immediately integrated with *rigpa*. Everything that arises is naturally an ornament of *rigpa*.

The three series of Dzogchen

Jampal Shenyen then subdivided these teachings from Garab Dorje into the three series of Dzogchen: Sem-dé, Long dé and Me-ngak dé. These three series are three ways of presenting the teaching, each with its corresponding methods of practice including physical exercise systems of motile meditation. In Dzogchen sem-dé – the nature of mind series – the practitioner is introduced to the nature of Mind in order to have actual experience, this relates to the first phrase of Garab Dorje's Tsig sum Nèdèk – direct introduction. Dzogchen long-dé – the series of space, or vast expanse – refers to the primordial dimension of space which serves as a base for manifesting the clarity of the practitioner via the subtle body of the Tsa lung (Wyl. *rtsa rlung*) – the psychophysical energy system of winds and channels. Dzogchen long-dé relates to the second phrase of Garab Dorje's Tsig sum Nèdèk: remaining without doubt. This phrase pertains to long-dé sensation as despite any extant intellectual component of doubt, doubt will also always be a felt sensation. As will absence of doubt, absence of doubt here being absence of doubt in rigpa. Dzogchen men-ngag-dé – the essential series of implicit instructions relates to the third phrase of Garab Dorje's Tsig sum Nèdèk: continuing in the state – and is comprised of methods which are 'self-explanatory' in terms of rigpa.

The physical practice systems of Dzogchen are arguably of vital importance at this time – as they cut against the deification of the intellect and the resulting creation of a body/mind split, but outside of Chogyal Namkhai Norbu's (2008) system of Yantra Yoga they remain relatively unknown. The lineage of teachings which come from the pure vision gTérma (Wyl. *gter ma*)[202] of the 19th century Tibetan female

[202] gTérma is a phenomenon in which 'new' cycles of teaching and practice continually emerge in order that spiritual conventions never become fixed in terms of cultural ossification. There are different ways of categorising gTérma, the most prevalent taxonomy within the Nying ma Tradition gives Sa gTér Earth gTérma and Gong gTér Mind gTérma as the two categorises of gTérma which were

gTérton Aro Lingma[203] although based primarily in Dzogchen Long-dé also contain physical practices from sem-dé and men-ngag-dé.

Dzogchen sem-dé – the series of the nature of mind

The goal of Dzogchen sem-dé – the nature of mind series – is to distinguish conceptual mind from the Nature of Mind, *sem* from *sem nyid*[204] and to facilitate this Aro Lingma's gTérma has 11 *'phrul 'khor* exercises in which one moves between postures utilising respiration to coordinate the movement. The emphasis is on lung purification and galvanising the tsa lung. Tsa are spatial nerves which form a pattern that spreads throughout the body, the described pattern can be highly complex or extremely simple according to the particular Vajrayāna methodology involved.

Tsa are the means of connecting the evident corporeal body with the dynamic energy that animates the body. They are found in particular in the armpits, elbow pits, the palms of the hands, between the fingers, the soles of the feet, behind the knees, the inner thighs, the stomach, the neck, around the eyes, and in all areas described as erogenous zones. The lung are the subtle breath or spatial winds that flow in the tsa.

The sem-dé 'phrul 'khor are the most strenuous of the physical systems of the three series within this gTérma. These exercises form a bridge between Anuyoga and Atiyoga as here the principle of lung

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concealed by Padmasambhava and Yeshé Tsogyel. To this is added a category called dag-ngang gTér Pure Vision gTérma, an indeterminate category of gTérm which contains gTérmas which are both listed and unlisted in Padmasambhava and Yeshé Tsogyel's predictions. Dag-nang gTér are visionary teachings revealed by the long-ku Sambhogakaya manifestations of Padmasambhava and Yeshé Tsogyel in the sphere of vision as experienced by the gTértön.

[203] The female mahasiddha and gTértön Khyungchen Aro Lingma lived and practised in Southern Tibet from 1886–1923. The current lineage holders of her gTérma – the Aro gTér are Ngak'chang Rinpoche and Khandro Déchen. Ngak'chang Rinpoche (also known as gTértön Zértsal Lingpa) was recognised as the incarnation of Aro Yeshé – the son of Aro Lingma.

[204] In Dzogchen the term 'sem' is used as a contraction of the words 'sem-nyid' and also 'chang-chub-sem'. It is also used as a word for Dzogchen itself, as in mDo, rGyud, and sem *(Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen)*. Sem (*sems*) is conceptual mind – the mind that has the capacity to create delusion. Sem-nyid (*sems nyid)* is 'the nature of Mind' which is never affected by sem.

purification is based on the Atiyoga view of our beginningless enlightenment where the purification occurs through the practice of *nalma* – the exhaustion of concept, exhausting our neurotic involvement with thought as the definition of being. So, unlike the vajra posture practice from the Annutarayoga Tantras with which many are familiar, the practice of Vajra posture from the 11 sem-dé 'phrul 'khor exercises is not concerned with the attainment of a perfect position but focussed instead on the swift development of nalma through a highly specific method that links physical exhaustion with the exhaustion of clinging to referential concept. The 11 exercises also include phurba posture and spinning lotus.

Dzogchen Long-dé – the series of space

The psycho-physical cycle of Dzogchen long-dé – the series of Space – are 111 sKu-mNyé exercises involving movement and sometimes sound. Here the view (Tib. *tawa*), shifts to experience within the *pervasive* tsa lung and the emphasis is on *presence of awareness in the dimension of sensation*. According to all systems of subtle energy within Tantra we speak of the three channels – solar, lunar, and central channels which run the length of the torso – the solar and lunar channels beginning below the navel and the central channel beginning in the pelvic floor. The central channel as it is experienced in Longdé is spoken of as the pervasive Tsa Lung – *kundral tsa lung* or *kuntu dralwa tsa lung* – a field of energy which is not strictly codified, it is the mapless dimension of reality, the space of our being not limited to the size of our body. It is dimensionless, with no limitation of time or space, and we only regard it as being in a certain position and alignment in order to relate with it. Within the sKu-mNyé teachings the nondual state is accessed via the central channel, and therefore the term becomes synonymous with the fruit of the path. The pervasive tsa lung therefore is an energy field which is independent of the physical body – but which is accessible via the physical body. It is extremely subtle and ephemeral and accessing this field requires ordinary perception to be shattered – the horizon of conventional reality to be exploded. This is the purpose of sKu-mNyé where the exercises manipulate the energy of the tsa-lung and create *Zap-Nyams:* profound sensory manifestations which arise from the nondual energy of the central channel. The word *sKu-mNyé*, loosely translated, means '*massage* of the *subtle body*', the tsa-lung

system. sKu-mNyé exercises exist in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism though their origins differ according to the Tantras from which they originate. The most well-known system in the west comes from the medical Tantras and is taught by Tarthang Tulku (1978a, 1978b). The emphasis here is on the medical and therapeutic benefits of the exercises but in the series of 111 Long-dé exercises from the Aro gTér the emphasis is on manipulating energy within the *pervasive* tsa-lung to create *zap-nyams*. The term *zap-nyam* is very specific to this practice and not to be confused with the commonly used word 'nyam' which describes those experiences which occur when the psychophysical elements begin to relax into their own condition in shi-né or lha-tong practice. In Sutric and Tantric Teachings nyams are not regarded as a valid or significant focus of practice. You are specifically instructed not to give them any importance as they are merely indicators that you are practising. It is important not to cultivate them, to make them ends in themselves, otherwise there is a tendency to get stuck in them, especially if they are blissful. Therefore, the practice in Sutra and Tantra involves letting go of nyams in the same way in which you let go of everything that arises. In the Dzogchen Sem dé Teachings, the idea is more or less the same, but the two fundamental Nyams are introduced. These are the Nyam of *Népa* (Emptiness), and the Nyam of *gYo-wa* ('that which moves', i.e. Form). In practice, one moves between the two in order to discover rigpa. In the Dzogchen Long dé Teachings however, the possibility of utilising Nyams as a method of practice becomes very important. sKu-mNyé creates the possibility of many different Nyams arising. When the energy in the Tsa-lung system is manipulated (by the structured choreography of the movements) Zap-nyams can be experienced. From the perspective of Dzogchen, nyams are directly linked with the natural condition of the nondual elements as they manifest within the space of the central channel. Within the context of sufficient meditative experience, nyams can be conducive to the possibility of realising rigpa, and therefore they are known as *zap-nyams*, or profound nyams. Zap-nyams are sensations which result from direct experience of the nondual energy of the central channel experienced as ‘rising up’ from ‘beneath’ one’s karmic vision and exploding its surface in an array of highly unusual and fabulously delicate yet vivid phenomena. sKu-mNyé stimulates the *tsa* and causes stagnant *lung* to move and when *lung* begins to move, people tend to come alive or wake up in surprising ways and when the energy in the tsa-lung system is manipulated, by the structured choreography of the

movements, zap-nyams can be experienced. The practice is to *find presence of awareness in the dimension of the zap-nyam*, thereby experiencing rigpa. The zap-nyams do not arise out of dualistic perception - they are free sensations which are not part of karmic vision or intellectual patterning. The 111 exercises are remarkably varied ranging from the physically gentle to the extremely athletic, some involving highly unusual co-ordination of opposing movements in which one part of the body is subject to tsud *(tsud)* –locking – and another is moving. It also uses contradictory circling movements. The main emphasis is on sensation. One enters into the qualities of the movements and finds the presence of awareness in the dimension of the sensation that arises.

The 111 exercises are divided into five sets of 21, according to five animal groups, corresponding to the five elements – the garuda (Tib. *khyung*, space eagle) corresponds with the space element, the eagle (Tib. *khalding*) with the air element, the tiger with fire, vulture with water, and lion with earth. The exercises are not particularly imitative of animal movements, although occasionally the similarity is apparent.

There are also a final six dragon exercises which combine all five elements. These are only taught when the other 105 exercises have been taken to a point where zap-nyams are *fluently* experienced and are practised by male/female couples who have reached this required level. The exercises are repeated 3, 7, 9, 21, 27, 42, 54 or 111 times, depending on the level of fitness. These repetitions are performed in sets of three with a period of time in the meditation posture between each set – lying on your back, legs just far enough apart for the insides of the thighs not to touch, arms out with hands slightly above the level of the shoulders, palms upward with fingers splayed open. This position allows the tsa to be less constricted, and enables the *lung* to travel unhindered through and beyond the body. This posture is maintained for approximately three times the duration of the exercise. sKu-mNyé is practised without clothing to allow the sensations in the *energetic atmosphere* around the body to be fully experienced. The energetic atmosphere is a region that ranges from about 6-18 inches beyond the body. There are two further active principles involved in the practice – gaze and circling of the head. The eyes are important in all Dzogchen systems and here the method of gazing disorients conceptual mind. The eyes are mainly wide open and *focussed in space* so that when the head moves, the gaze travels but the eyes remain still in their sockets, without snagging on objects that come into view and 'freeze-framing' them.

Freeze-framing is an attempt to establish reference points by allowing the eyes to move in order to fix on material forms. Here we allow the blur to exist as the context of referenceless space. This relates to Sèlwa (Wyl. *gsal ba*) the sign (Tib. *da*) of Clarity. Within the series of Dzogchen Long-dé are four aspects of practice related to the body and how it exists in space, known as *the four Da*.[205] These are indicative stances or psychophysical signs of the realised state and embodying the four Da gives access to the nondual state. In sKu-mNyé we train through the senses and the sense-fields rather than through trying to let go of thought, learning to *fix the senses* to keep the senses *unmoving* in relation to the external world. The head circling used is a very small movement of drawing a circle with the tip of the nose, this massages the numerous tsa in the neck that connect with the eyes and can open up a subtle dimension of visionary *experience.* The tongue is held in a *natural position*, suspended in the mouth, not touching top or bottom, and the mouth is kept slightly open. sKu-mNyé is a complete meditational practice in itself, which leads to realisation if a person has reached the requisite level of experience in terms of the four Naljors[206] and the four Ting-ngé-dzin.[207] As well as being a profound spiritual

[205] The four brda: 1. Sèlwa brda (*gsal ba brda*). Clarity - unobstructedness. The eyes are wide open and vision is integrated with rigpa. This relates to nè-pa. 2. Mithogpa brDa (*mi thogs pa brda*). Independence – no referential attachment to namthogs. The eyes are focused in space. This relates to mi-gYo-wa. 3. Déwa brDa (*bDe ba brDa*). Effulgent energetic sensation. The eyes are unmoving. This relates to nyam-nyid. 4. Yer'mèd brDa (*byer 'med brda*).

[206] The Four Naljors are the meditation practices of Dzogchen sem-dé: Shi-nè – remaining uninvolved, Lha-tong – further vision, Nyi'mèd – nondual, and Lhundrüp – spontaneity. Shi-nè is remaining uninvolved with the process of thought. Stable shi-nè is the condition in which thoughts no longer arise. Lha-tong is finding the presence of awareness in the movement of namthogs (that which arises in mind). Stable lha-tong is arrived at when one is not distracted into referentiality by the arising of namthogs. Nyi'mèd is shi-nè and lha-tong arising together; moving between stable shi-nè and stable lha-tong looking for what is the same in both (rigpa). Lhundrüp is integrating rigpa into every moment

[207] The four ting-ngé'dzin are the 'fruits' or 'results' of the Four naljors, the actual practice of Dzogchen sem-dé and are experiential states rather than practices. They are: Nè-pa – absence with presence, stable shi-nè; Mi-gYo-wa – unmoving, stable lha-tong; Nyam-nyid – the nature of the sem-nyams, the initial experience of rigpa in the context of formal sitting practice; Nyam-nyid is finding the one taste (ro-chig/ro gÇig) of the two sem-nyams (nè-pa and gYo-wa). Lhundrüp is

technique it is also leads to increased fitness and produces a strong sense of vitality and well-being. When combined with shi-né or visualisation practice it mitigates the tendency to withdraw concentration into the head by encouraging awareness of sensation in the body and in the *atmosphere* around the body, and there is a blurring of the boundaries in terms of where the body begins and ends. The practice is also invaluable during long periods of solitary retreat as it relaxes constricted joints, revitalising the practitioner by allowing them to continue in practice whilst breaking from sitting meditation thus leading to greater wakefulness and alertness.

Dzogchen men-ngag-dé – the series of implicit instruction

The cycle of exercises within Dzogchen men-ngag-dé – the series of implicit instruction – is A-tri. Implicit instruction, or *no word*, means that the meaning of the instruction is contained *within* the instruction and further meaning cannot be sought. Nothing is *hidden* within the words but one needs to be at the level of experience at which the words are understood in relation to direct experience, so there is little available explanation of these 13 a-tri exercises. They work with movement and sound to generate subtle, brief, yet startling nyams which explode the artificial continuity of alignment with one's spatio-temporal continuum. These are the least strenuous of the 3 categories of physical practices from the 3 series. In A-tri the principle is to generate startling nyams, such as hèdéwa, exploding the dualistic state, thus enabling remaining in the state of rigpa. Hèdéwa is the nyam of shock amazement, or vibrant shock – a nyam created in order to find presence of awareness in the dimension of sensation. When moving between nè-pa and gYo-wa and having difficulty in finding the one taste, hèdéwa can be used to establish the presence of rigpa. Hèdéwa is not rigpa itself but is a powerful state from which rigpa can be recognised.

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the mature experience of rigpa in which it is integrated with all the activities of everyday life.

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Khentrul Rinpoché Jamphel Lodrö has trained for more than thirty years with a variety of masters from all of the major traditions of Tibetan Buddhism in places such as Tashi Chothang Monastery, Dzamthang Tsangwa Monastery and Larung Gar in Eastern Tibet. Earning the title of Rimé Master and Specialist in the Profound Path of Vajra Yoga, Rinpoché has dedicated his life to propagating the Kalachakra teachings and promoting peace and harmony in this world. Author of more than seven books published through the Tibetan Buddhist Rimé Institute in Australia, he focuses on providing students with clear and comprehensive teachings for the practice of Kalachakra. In the last five years he has completed four world tours, where he has taught in more than thirty countries across Asia, Europe, Africa and the America.

Joe Flumerfelt is the president of the Dzokden Foundation, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the creation of educational materials for the study and practice of the Kalachakra Tantra. Having studied with many teachers such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Jetsun Khandro Rinpoché, Garchen Rinpoché, Lama Zopa Rinpoché and Alan Wallace. Joe has worked most closely with his main teacher, the Kalachakra Master, Khentrul Rinpoché Jamphel Lodrö. Together, they have authored more than seven books in English presenting all stages of the Buddhist path, ranging from the basics of meditation up to the advanced yogic practices of the Six Vajra Yogas. Joe is currently based

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Ian Baker is an anthropologist, art curator, and cultural historian and the author of seven books on Tibetan art history, traditional medicine, sacred geography, and Buddhist practice, including *The Heart of the World: A Journey to Tibet's Lost Paradise* and *Tibetan Yoga: Principles and Practices.* His published academic articles include *Embodying Enlightenment: Physical Culture in Dzogchen as revealed in Tibet's Lukhang Murals* (Asian Medicine 7 (2012): 225–264). His current research interests concern bodymind disciplines in Tantric Buddhism and their adaptations across cultures and traditions. He was lead curator of the Welcome Trust's 2015-2016 exhibition "Tibet's Secret Temple: Body, Mind and Meditation in Tantric Buddhism," and is currently affiliated with the Centre for the Social History of Health and Health Care (CSHHH) at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland.

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Richard K. Payne is Yehan Numata Professor of Japanese Buddhist Studies at the Institute of Buddhist Studies, Berkeley. His area of research is tantric Buddhist ritual, with particular focus on the homa both in the Shingon tradition of Japan and across the Buddhist cosmopolis. This research led to the publication of *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia* (edited collection, Wisdom Publica-tions), *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia* (Brill, 2010), jointly edited with

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Graham Lock has a BA in Chinese from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Sydney. From 1990 to 2008 he was a Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor at the City University of Hong Kong, where he taught courses and researched in linguistics, applied linguistics and second language education. He was also a student of Ven. Bhikkhu Saddhaloka for more than ten years, until the latter's passing in December 2013. With the Venerable, he studied a range of Chinese Buddhist texts, learning to translate them into English and to use reference works essential for elucidating the meanings of the texts. Upon taking early retirement in 2008, Dr. Lock was able to work more intensively on the Chinese texts, and together with Gary S. Linebarger, published *Chinese Buddhist Texts: An Introductory Reader* (Routledge, 2018).

Anthony Ho Waipan was a librarian at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University until 2017.

John Clarke is Curator of Himalayan and South East Asian Art at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. He specialises in the arts of Tibet, Nepal and of South East Asia. He obtained a PhD in 1995 at SOAS, University of London, on the subject of traditional metalworking in Tibet and has published widely on that subject and on other aspects of Tibetan art, religion and culture. He is the author of *Tibet, Caught in Time* (Garnet 1997), and *Himalayan Jewellery*, (V&A, 2004). He organised a symposium on Buddhist Sculpture at the V&A in 2010 and was the Lead Curator for the Robert H. N. Ho Family

Foundation Galleries of Buddhist Art that opened at the V&A in June 2017.

Ven. Tenzin Dadon (Sonam Wangmo) is a Bhutanese nun from Zhemgang. She received her *śrāmaṇerikā* (Tib. *getsulma*) ordination from HH the 14th Dalai Lama in Dharamsala in 1999. Tenzin spent 13 years (1993-2006) at Jamyang Choling Institute for Buddhist Dialectics (a non-sectarian nunnery institute) in Gharoh, Himachal Pradesh, India. She holds MA in Buddhist Studies from Delhi University in 2009 and the International Buddhist College (IBC), Thailand in 2016. In 2017, She completed her Doctor of Philosophy degree in Gender and Religion at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur focusing her anthropological thesis on nuns in Bhutan. Tsunma Tenzin is currently a Director of Education and Sangha Advisor to the Vajrayāna Buddhist Council of Malaysia (VBCM).

Ven. Karma Tashi Choedron (Savinder Kaur Gill) is a *śrāmaṇerikā* (Tib: *getsulma*), ordained by Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche in 2009. She is trained as a civil engineer and holds a PhD in Environment and Resource Studies from Mahidol University, Thailand. She did MA in Buddhist Studies from the International Buddhist College (IBC) in 2016. Tsunma is now pursuing a systematic Buddhist philosophy course in the Nalanda tradition under the auspices of Tibet House, Delhi, on a part-time basis. Tsunma Karma is part-time lecturer in Development Studies at the University of Nottingham, Kuala Lumpur, and she is currently a Sangha advisor to the Vajrayāna Buddhist Council of Malaysia (VBCM) and Religious Advisor to the Malaysian Buddhist Consultative Council (MBCC). Both authors have received the Outstanding Woman in Buddhism Award in recognition of their contributions to Buddhism and women by the Association for the Promotion of Status of Women in Thailand. They have co-authored two books titled, *I Can Be Enlightened Too* and *Two Gurus One Message* pending publication in the near future.

Asa Hershoff (Lama Jinpa) completed the traditional three-year retreat in 1989 under the auspices of His Eminence Kalu Rinpoche, later obtaining ordination as a ngakpa with Kunzang Dechen Lingpa in Arunachal Pradesh. During this time, he had the good fortune to learn directly from such great masters as Dilgo Khyentse, Ngoshul Khen, Jamgon Kontrul, the 16th Karmapa and many others. Specializing in

the practice of Chod, he has taught and translated many rare Tibetan texts related to Chod, terton Pegyal Lingpa and Nyangral Nyima Ozer's KaGye system. As a naturopathic physician practicing classical homeopathy for over 40 years, Asa is a pioneer in the Canadian holistic health movement, and a founder of the Canadian College of Naturoapathic Medicine, now in its thirtieth year. He is the author of three books published by Penguin/Random House with several additional forthcoming titles centered on the 5 Wisdoms. In recent years, Asa has integrated the ancient wisdom of Vajrayāna and the five elements with modern psychology and energy medicine, to create a transformative methodology for therapy, self-healing and spiritual growth. He currently spreads the knowledge of this comprehensive mind-body system through books, online and live trainings and personal mentorship.

Edward Alexander received his PhD in English literature from the University of California, Berkeley, in 2018 and is currently working as a lecturer in English literature at Yonphula Centenary College in eastern Bhutan. His research interests lie at the intersection of philosophical aesthetics, phenomenology, anthropological theories of practice and embodiment, and media theory. His dissertation examined the emergence of non-representational art in the 20th century by situating this cultural development within the context of avantgarde artists' fascination with the implements of ritual practice. He has published on the relevance of Buddhist conceptions of mind to the work of contemporary Chinese-American poet Mei-mei Berssenbrugge. He is a practicing Buddhist and former research affiliate of the Rangjung Yeshe Institute in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Mé-tsal Wangmo has been practising meditation for almost 40 years and has been an ordained Ngakma – go kar chang lo practitioner and disciple of Ngak'chang Rinpoche and Khandro Déchen (the lineage holders of the Aro gTér) since the 1990s. Mé-tsal has combined Buddhist practice with motherhood and careers in both education and health – having been headmistress of a school, and practised as a 5-element traditional acupuncturist. She now teaches Vajrayāna with her husband Ja'gyür Dorje as a teaching couple within the Aro gTér lineage, teaching publicly and having personal students in Britain, mainland Europe, and South America. She combines teaching Vajrayāna with practicing acupuncture, and working on various

research and writing projects pertaining to the non-monastic stream of Nyingma Vajrayāna. She has a particular interest in the history and practices of the Mahasiddha tradition.

Ja'gyür Dorje has also been an ordained disciple of Ngak'chang Rinpoche and Khandro Déchen since the 1990s and has combined teaching Vajrayāna with a career in education and IT. Ja'gyür has a particular interest in researching extant texts on the go kar chang lo'i dé and specialises in the physical practices of the Aro gTér. Ja'gyür and Mé-tsal's paper on the non-monastic sanghas was included in A Maṇḍala of 21st Century Perspectives - Proceedings of The International Conference on Tradition and Innovation in Vajrayāna Buddhism.