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The Yoga Tantras and the Social Context of Their Transmission to Tibet

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Abstract

The *Compendium of Principles* (*Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṃgraha-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra*, *De bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi de kho na nyid bsdus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po 'i mdo*) represents a watershed in the development of Indian Buddhist tantra and also played a central role in the transmission of tantric Buddhism from India to Tibet. This paper will briefly look at the emergence in India of tantric Buddhist practices involving deity yoga and wrathful deities and activities, with a focus on the *Compendium of Principles* and its provenance, the traditions that grew up around it, and the cultural context in which the practices developed. The main section of this paper will examine the transmission of the *Compendium of Principles* and its associated texts and meditative systems from India to Tibet and the Tibetan attitudes toward tantra that it reflects. It will pay particular attention to issues of patronage, proscription, and other socio-political factors during (1) the first transmission of Buddhism (*snga dar*) in the eighth and ninth centuries, (2) the period following the collapse of the Tibetan empire, (3) the early part of the second transmission of Buddhism (*phyi dar*) in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and (4) the later period of the subsequent role of the Yoga Tantras in Tibet.

Keywords:

Yoga Tantra; Tibet; *Tattvasaṃgraha*; Padmasambhava; *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*

瑜伽密續與其傳播至西藏的社會背景

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摘要

《佛說一切如來真實攝大乘現證三昧大教王經》代表印度佛教密續發展的分水嶺，同時在密教由印度傳至西藏的過程中扮演重要的角色。此篇文章著重於此經及其出處、當時所逐漸產生的修行之傳統發展及相關的文化脈絡，簡略地檢視有關本尊瑜伽、憤怒金剛與儀式的密教修行在印度之出現。此篇的重點在於檢視此經由印度到西藏的傳播及其相關的文本及禪修系統，並探討西藏人對此密續之態度，尤其是在不同時期的支持、排斥的狀況及其他社會政治因素，其不同時期包含 (1) 第八及第九世紀第一次佛教傳播之時期 (前弘期)、(2) 西藏王朝壞滅後之時期、(3) 在第十及十一世紀佛教的第二次傳播早期 (後弘期) 及 (4) 在十二世紀以後西藏瑜伽密續時期。

關鍵字：瑜伽密續、西藏、《金剛頂經》、蓮花生、《大乘觀想曼拏羅淨諸惡趣經》

Introduction¹

As the transmission of Buddhism from India to Tibet commenced on a large scale during the eighth century CE, the *Compendium of Principles* (*de kho na nyid bsdus pa, tattvasaṃgraha*)² and the tantric traditions associated with it in India formed the substance of mainstream tantric traditions in Tibet. These traditions, which came to be classified as Yoga Tantra, played a crucial role in the establishment (and reestablishment) of Buddhism in Tibet from the beginning of the first dissemination of Buddhism through the early phases of the second dissemination (late tenth and eleventh centuries). Even after later Indian traditions displaced them from the central position of importance in Tibet, these Yoga Tantra systems continued to be transmitted as influential and important tantric traditions.

After briefly locating Yoga Tantra traditions within their Indian cultural context, I will examine the translation and transmission of Yoga Tantra in Tibet against the backdrop of broader issues that reflect Tibetan attitudes toward tantra, including imperial support and proscription, the royal Vairocana cult, officially-sanctioned translation activity, and practices involving violence, subjugation, and sex. This analysis will focus primarily on two texts, the *Compendium of Principles* and the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*,³ during three historical periods: the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet, the period following the collapse of the Tibetan empire, and the beginning of the second dissemination of Buddhism. I will then

1 I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their many helpful suggestions and comments.

2 The Tibetan translation of this text in the Peking edition of the Kangyur is *De bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi de kho na nyid bsdus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo, Sarvathāgatattva saṃgrahanāmamahāyānasūtra*, P112 (217.1-283.2.2). The text in the Degé (*sde dge*) edition, vol. 84, 1b.1-142b.1, is available online from the Tibetan and Himalayan Library (including an electronic edition and scans): <http://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/canons/kt/catalog.php#cat=d/0481>.

There are two extant Sanskrit versions of the text. The first has several editions: a photographic reproduction in Lokesh Chandra and David Snellgrove, *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṅgraha: Facsimile Reproduction of a Tenth Century Sanskrit Manuscript from Nepal* (1981); a romanized Sanskrit version in Isshi Yamada, *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṅgraha nāma mahāyāna-sūtra: A Critical Edition Based on the Sanskrit Manuscript and Chinese and Tibetan Translations* (1981); and a devanagari version in Chandra (1987). There is also a critical edition produced from both of the extant manuscripts as well as Chinese and Tibetan translations. (Horiuchi 1983)

3 *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations, De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa zhes bya ba, Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorājasya tathāgatasya arhataḥ samyaksambuddhasya kalpanāma*, in The Tibetan Tripitaka: Peking Edition, ed. Daisetz T. Suzuki, P116 (Toh. 483), vol. 5.

briefly discuss Yoga Tantra traditions in Tibet during the twelfth through sixteenth centuries, and the persistent influence of Yoga Tantra to the present. In this investigation, I will draw on an extensive introduction to Yoga Tantra written by Bu ston Rinchen drup (1290-1364),⁴ the fourteenth-century figure whose activities ranged from translating Sanskrit texts into Tibetan to composing a corpus of texts on a variety of subjects that fill twenty-eight volumes, directing the construction of temples and their artwork, and assembling and redacting the Tibetan canon of translations of Buddhist texts. I will also draw on the *Testament of Wa*, one of the earliest Tibetan historiographic works on the first dissemination of Buddhism.⁵

Yoga Tantra in India

Buddhist tantra emerged in India as an independent, self-consciously distinct tradition during the latter part of the seventh century with the composition/compilation of the *Compendium of Principles*. Before discussing its importance, I will present an argument for dating this text to the end of the seventh century.

Provenance of the *Compendium of Principles*

The earliest reference to the *Compendium of Principles* is found in the Chinese biography of Vajrabodhi (Jingangzhi, 671-741), a south Indian tantric master who arrived in China in 720 CE and who, along with his disciple Amoghavajra (Bukong Jingang, 705-774), was the central figure in transmitting the *Compendium of Principles* and related traditions from India to China. According to Vajrabodhi's biography, he received teachings on the *Compendium of Principles* in 700 CE in south India from Nāgabodhi.⁶ Sino-Japanese traditions relate that Nāgabodhi was a disciple of Nāgārjuna.⁷ Moreover, Chinese traditions relate that the *Compendium of Principles* appeared in this world when a *bhadanta* (perhaps Nāgārjuna)⁸ took it from the Iron

4 Bu ston, *Ship* (1990, 1a.1-92b.2).

5 Wangdu and Diemberger (2000).

6 Hodge (1995, 66).

7 Hodge (1995, 66). The fourteenth-century Tibetan scholar Bu ston records an oral tradition that also explains the lineage as passing through Nāgārjuna and Nāgabodhi: *de'i gdam rgyud dang mthun par rgyal po indra bhū ti che chung gsum la brgyud nas/ klu sgrub/ klu byang/...la brgyud par kha cig 'chad do/* (Bu ston, *Ship*, 1990, 61a.4-61a.5).

8 Charles Orzech relates that the Chinese disciples of Amoghavajra identify the *bhadanta* as Nāgārjuna, and present the lineage passing from him to Nāgabodhi and then to Vajrabodhi himself (Orzech 1995, 314). Although this Nāgārjuna is often identified as the same person as the second-century Nāgārjuna who is the central figure in the Madhyamaka philosophical school, this is an error. Here it refers to the tantric Nāgārjuna, whose full name is sometimes given as Nāgārjunagarbha and who authored several tantric commentaries preserved in the Tibetan canon.

Stūpa in south India.⁹ Thus, if Vajrabodhi received teachings on the *Compendium of Principles* in 700 CE from Nāgabodhi, some version of the text must have existed at that time. Since Nāgabodhi received instruction from Nāgārjuna, we can locate at least an early version of the *Compendium of Principles* in the last quarter of the seventh century. Furthermore, the Chinese materials point to south India as the place the *Compendium of Principles* was compiled/composed.

What this early version of the *Compendium of Principles* might have looked like is in no way certain, and it is probable that the text underwent changes during the process of compilation/composition. The earliest datable text related to the *Compendium of Principles* is Vajrabodhi's *Recitation Sūtra Extracted from the Vajroṣṇīṣa*¹⁰ Yoga, produced in 723 and extant in Chinese.¹¹ This text, in four fascicles, is Vajrabodhi's introduction to the *Compendium of Principles* and summary of its central practices, and also includes a brief description of a larger system of eighteen tantras of which the *Compendium of Principles* was the most prominent member.¹² While it is not a translation proper, it does, however, include many passages that correspond verbatim to sections of the first chapter of the extant Sanskrit edition.¹³ Thus we have textual evidence of parts of what either were or would become the first chapter of the *Compendium of Principles* existing in 723 (and which were based on teachings Vajrabodhi received in 700).

The next phase of development of the *Compendium of Principles* locates the tantra in something close to its present form in the middle of the eighth century. After Vajrabodhi's death, his disciple Amoghavajra traveled back to south India, where he stayed between 743 and 746.¹⁴ Amoghavajra then returned to China, and in 753 he translated the first chapter of the *Compendium of Principles*, using a manuscript of the tantra he had obtained in south India.¹⁵ This text is thought to represent a later and more developed version of the *Compendium of Principles* than the one Vajrabodhi received at the beginning of the eighth century.¹⁶

9 Orzech (1995, 314). If Nāgārjuna is indeed the first human in the lineage, this further supports the argument that the *Compendium of Principles* first appeared in the last quarter of the seventh century, since Vajrabodhi would then be the third human in the lineage and he is said to have received teachings on the tantra around 700 CE, and thus the previous two people in the lineage necessarily preceded him by at least a few years.

10 The Chinese *ingang ding* has until recently been reconstructed as *vajraśekhara*; however, following Ronald Davidson, I am using the reconstructed Sanskrit *vajroṣṇīṣa* (Davidson, forthcoming, 6).

11 *Jin gang ding yu jia zhong lia chu bian song jing*, T 866; Todaro (1985, 11); Hodge (1995, 66).

12 *Jin gang ding yu jia* (Hodge 1995, 66; Todaro 1985, 11).

13 Todaro (1985, 11).

14 Hodge (1995, 66).

15 Hodge (1995, 66). Amoghavajra's translation is T 865: *Jin gang ding yi qie ru lai zhen shi she da xian zheng da jiao wang jing* (Todaro 1985, 10).

16 Hodge (1995, 66).

Sometime between Amoghavajra's return to China from south India in 746 and 771¹⁷ he wrote the *Indications of the Goals of the Eighteen Assemblies of the Yoga of the Vajroṣṇīṣa Scripture*,¹⁸ a summary of the contents of the eighteen tantric texts that comprise the Vajroṣṇīṣa Yoga cycle. The *Compendium of Principles* is the first and preeminent member of this eighteen-text cycle, which represented the latest developments in Indian Buddhist tantra as Amoghavajra found them in south India between 743 and 746. The centrality and importance of the *Compendium of Principles* is evidenced by the fact that roughly half of Amoghavajra's presentation of the Vajroṣṇīṣa canon is a summary of the *Compendium of Principles*, while the second half of the text consists of his summaries of the other seventeen texts.¹⁹ Amoghavajra describes the four sections of the *Compendium of Principles* much as they appear in the extant complete versions of the tantra (Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese); furthermore, he briefly describes additional material that suggests he was familiar with the contents of the Supplement (*rgyud phyi ma, uttara-tantra*) and Second Supplement (*rgyud phyi ma'i phyi ma, uttarottara-tantra*) of the complete versions of the tantra as we have them today, although his text of the *Compendium of Principles* might have contained these elements in earlier stages of their development.²⁰ Thus by the middle of the eighth century in south India a version of the *Compendium of Principles* existed that at the least contained elements from all the sections of the final version of the tantra as we have it today.

When we look at the *Compendium of Principles* in north India, we find a similar situation in terms of the date the text likely took its final form. The tantric exegete Buddhaguhya also refers to material in all five sections of the tantra – the four sections plus the fifth section consisting of the Supplement and Second Supplement – in his commentary on the *Compendium of Principles*,²¹ although the way he refers to them suggests that they might have represented a cycle of independent texts rather than a single organic text.²² Thus, since Buddhaguhya flourished during the middle of the eighth century and was a resident of Nālandā Monastery in northeastern India, we can conclude that by the middle of the eighth century something containing all the elements found in the final version of the *Compendium of Principles* existed in northeastern India as well as in south India.

17 Giebel (1995, 18:109).

18 *Jin gang ding jing yu jia shi ba hui zhi gui*, T 869 (Giebel 1995, 18:107).

19 Giebel (1995, 18:112).

20 Giebel (1995, 18:163-164, n. 155).

21 Todaro (1985, 29). He draws this information from “Tantrārthāvatāra o Chūshin to shita Kongōchōkyō no Kenkyū, I” and “Tantrārthāvatāra o Chūshin to shita Kongōchōkyō no Kenkyū, II” (Takeo Kitamura 1970, 7(6):14-15 and 1971, 8:3, 6, 11, 19) and so forth. Further research into Buddhaguhya's text – checking the passages he quotes from the *Compendium of Principles* against the text of the tantra itself and so forth – is necessary to determine more precisely the development of the *Compendium of Principles*.

22 Stephen Hodge, personal communication, 14 April 2002. This requires further investigation.

Importance of the *Compendium of Principles*

The *Compendium of Principles* marks a watershed in the development of Indian Buddhist tantra for a number of reasons; I will briefly discuss a few of these here.²³ The *Compendium of Principles* is the *locus classicus* of two of the three foundational narratives of Buddhist tantra. The first of these recasts Śākyamuni's enlightenment in tantric terms: he attains Buddhahood through the process of the five manifest enlightenments (*mngon byang lnga, pañcābhisambodhi*). This presents the unique tantric practice of deity yoga – meditatively reconstructing oneself as an enlightened being – with a clarity and detail previously unseen in a tantra. It combines earlier practices such as meditation on the nature of the mind and the use of mantras with the innovation of visualizing oneself as a Buddha, within a system in which ritual has moved to the center of the liberative process.

In doing so, the *Compendium of Principles* makes a self-conscious declaration of tantra as a new and distinct tradition while also claiming authority as authentic Buddhist tradition. Not only did Śākyamuni become enlightened through the unique *tantric* practice of the five manifest enlightenments, but he was unable to achieve the ultimate spiritual attainment through any means *except* this tantric procedure. This establishes a distinct identity for tantra vis-à-vis earlier forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism while also staking its claim to authenticity.

The second foundational tantric myth presented in the *Compendium of Principles* is the narrative of the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi's subjugation of Maheśvara. Here, we find the wrathful form of a Buddhist deity implementing the “liberation through slaying” ritual ideology for dealing with one's enemies (or competitors) and others inimical to Buddhism. This myth reflects not only internal influences but also external pressures Buddhism faced in seventh- and eighth-century India following the breakup of the Gupta empire, such as a decentralized and fragmented socio-political environment dominated by militarism, a decline in patronage for Buddhist monastic institutions, and the rise of Śaivite sects (against which Buddhist monasteries were in direct competition) employing a rhetoric of violence.²⁴

The Maheśvara subjugation narrative also appears in several tantras that develop after the *Compendium of Principles*. The transformations this narrative undergoes in texts such as the *Secret Nucleus*²⁵ reveal a stronger antinomian and anti-institutional bent. This tendency is also

23 For a longer discussion of the innovations in and importance of the *Compendium of Principles*, see Weinberger (2003, chap.3). This is available online (although without the author's permission) at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/12125697/Weinberger-Steven-The-Significance-of-Yoga-Tantra-and-the-Compendium-of-Principles-Within-Tantric-Buddhism-in-India-and-Tibet>.

24 This discussion is summarized from Davidson (2002, chap. 2 and 3).

25 *Secret Nucleus Tantra, Gsang ba'i snying po de kho na nyid nges pa, Guhyagarbhatat tvaviniścaya*, in *The mtshams brag manuscript of the rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, vol. 20 (wa), 152.6-218.7 (1982); Tb.417, <http://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/canons/ngb/ngbcat.php#cat=tb/04>17>.

expressed in the increased centrality of violence in these tantras, which in later classification systems are included under the rubrics of Mahāyoga and Yoginī Tantra, and in the increased centrality of sexo-yogic practices which, although found in an extremely rudimentary form in the *Compendium of Principles*, do not involve yogic physiology or the manipulation of subtle energies and are tangential to the main thrust of the tantra.

The Category “Yoga Tantra”

The *Compendium of Principles* also served as the center of a constellation of tantras arrayed around it that formed the first coherent Buddhist tantric system to develop in India. This system came to be known as Yoga Tantra and included a number of texts, some of which were more closely associated than others. However, it is important to note that the earliest known classification systems of tantra texts in India did not develop at the same time as the early tantras themselves. Texts now classified as tantras began to be produced at the beginning of the seventh century, but the first known Indian doxographical discussions of tantra did not appear until the middle of the eighth century in northern India. Furthermore, this practice of organizing tantras into doxographical categories seems to represent a regional development specific to north India, since south Indian traditions of approximately the same period did not categorize the tantras.²⁶ Thus, it appears that for more than one hundred years tantras were not classified or stratified.

The earliest extant tantric doxographical discussions are by the mid- to late eighth-century northern Indian exegetes Buddhaguhya²⁷ and Vilāsavajra (aka Varabodhi).²⁸ It is important to note that there are differences in the categories these two authors present. In addition, a number of doxographical strategies were subsequently employed in India to organize tantric texts into affiliated traditions.²⁹ One of the later systems that developed was the fourfold categorization of Action Tantra (*bya rgyud*, *kriyā-tantra*), Performance Tantra (*spyod rgyud*, *caryā-tantra*),³⁰ Yoga Tantra (*rnal 'byor rgyud*, *yoga-tantra*), and Highest Yoga Tantra (*bla med rnal 'byor rgyud* or *bla med rgyud*, *anuttara-yoga-tantra* or *anuttara-tantra*). This fourfold doxography, however, did not enter Tibet until the latter half of the tenth century, and therefore in all

26 I am referring here to Chinese translations and traditions stemming from Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra.

27 Buddhaguhya, *Rnam par snang mdzad mngon par byang chub pa rnam par sprul pa'i byin gyis brlabs kyi rgyud chen po'i bshad pa*, **Vairocanābhisambodhivikurvitādhiṣṭhānamahātantrabh āṣya*, P3490 (Toh. 2663A), vol. 77, 231.2.3-231.3.1.

28 Davidson (1981, 15).

29 Yukei Matsunaga identifies several Indian categorization schemes for tantra, including fivefold and sevenfold doxographies in addition to the threefold and fourfold systems (de Jong 1984, 93).

30 This category is also referred to as Upa-Tantra (or Upa-yoga), Upāya-Tantra, and Ubhaya-Tantra (*gnyis ka'i rgyud*; Snellgrove 1988, 1357).

probability reflects later Indian developments.³¹ It is the one of the two dominant doxographical schemes employed in Tibet,³² and is followed largely by the Sarma (*gsar ma*) traditions that originate in the second dissemination of Buddhism.

Thus, when I use the term “Yoga Tantra” this should be understood as the group of texts in constellation around the *Compendium of Principles* that by the ninth or tenth century in India were categorized as the third class in the fourfold doxographical scheme that was adopted by the Sarma schools in Tibet. While this reflects some later Indian categorization schemes, it does *not* reflect all Indian (or even all Tibetan) systematizations, and the category term “Yoga Tantra” was not employed until at least fifty years after the earliest version of the *Compendium of Principles* appeared in India.

Aside from the *Compendium of Principles*, one of the most important of the tantras classified under the rubric of Yoga Tantra is the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*, in which both the frame-story and much of the focus is on practices to benefit the deceased. Thus, this tantra revolves around a complete system of tantric funerary rites. Additionally, the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* contains six maṇḍalas directed toward the practical aims of controlling forces responsible for various maladies and misfortunes. The development of practical rites in India likely was fueled at least in part by the increasing economic difficulties Buddhist monastic institutions experienced, since entry into the field of death rites and other worldly rites served the needs of lay patrons and undoubtedly increased revenue for monasteries. This focus on practical rites accounts for at least some of the popularity of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* in India, as measured by the number of commentaries and ritual texts on the tantra.³³

Yoga Tantra During the First Dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet

During the eighth century, the Tibetan empire was expanding and unified the vast area now thought of as the Tibetan cultural region. It exercised its considerable power military and imperial power throughout central Asia and in its relations with China. In this context, several features of tantric Buddhism made it attractive to the emperor Tri Songdetsen (khri srong lde

31 In this regard, David Snellgrove mentions Kaṇha’s commentary on the Hevajra Tantra, which discusses the series Kriyā Tantra, Caryā Tantra, Yoga Tantra, and Anuttarayoga Tantra. He tentatively dates this text to the ninth century, although he says that it might well be later (Snellgrove 1988, 1383).

32 The other widespread doxographical scheme is the nine-vehicle system that encompasses both non-tantric and tantric forms of Buddhism; this system is employed in the Nyingma (*rnying ma*) traditions, which trace their origins to the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet.

33 Seventeen commentaries appear in Tibetan translation, and Bu ston indicates that an additional four texts are also related to the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*.

btsan, r. 755/56-797)³⁴ and members of his court, who adopted it as the state religion. The motivation behind this appears to be pragmatic as well as spiritual, since political and social considerations played an important role (although, as I will discuss below, concerns about various aspects of tantric Buddhism also lead the ruling elite to attempt to strictly control its promulgation and practice).

Royal Vairocana Cult

One of the central manifestations of the interest of the king and the aristocracy in tantra was the development of a royal Vairocana cult, which suited the pre-existing Tibetan conception of a divine kingship and of which there is a substantial body of architectural and art-historical evidence. One of the strongest pieces of evidence in this regard is Samyé (*bsam yas*), Tibet's first monastery, constructed and consecrated (c. 779) during the reign of Tri Songdetsen. Samyé occupies an important place in the Tibetan psyche, as its consecration is taken as the defining event in the conversion of Tibet to Buddhism.³⁵

Samyé is an extensive complex that consists of many buildings arranged as a maṇḍala, at the center of which is the three-storey main temple. The iconography of this central temple – the focal point of the Samyé maṇḍala – reflects the importance of Vairocana. According to various versions of the *Testament of Wa*, the third storey housed a maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana, the central maṇḍala of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*. Moreover, Vairocana was the central deity on the second floor, while on the ground floor Śākyamuni, who might have represented the emanation-body form of Vairocana, occupied the central position.³⁶

As Kapstein points out, Vairocana is the pivotal tantric figure at Samyé (although other deities not related to Vairocana are also represented throughout the complex), a pattern repeated

34 Kapstein (2000, xvii).

35 Kapstein (2000, 60).

36 Kapstein (2000, 61). Hugh Richardson discusses Vairocana images in the earliest temples in Tibet, which are attributed to the seventh-century rule of Songtsen Gampo (*srong btsan sgampo*), as well as in temples constructed during the eighth century (Richardson 1998, 177-179). We also find the continued presence of Sarvavid Vairocana in the Nyingma (*nying ma*) School, which traces its roots to the traditions of the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet. I learned from Khenpo Dorjé Trashi (mkhan po rdo rje bkra shis), a prominent scholar from the Nyingma Śrī Simha Institute of Dzokchen (*rdzogs chen*) Monastery in Kham, eastern Tibet, that the Nyingma school still has a Sarvavid Vairocana ritual tradition. They refer to it as the “Purification of Bad Transmigrations Rite” (*ngan song sbyong chog*, **durgati-[pari]śodhana-vidhi*), rather than as the “Sarvavid Rite” (*kun rig gi cho ga*, **sarvavid-vidhi*), the convention employed in the Sarma schools, founded largely on the traditions of the second dissemination of Buddhism. Khenpo Dorjé stated that, since contemporary Nyingma traditions have the ritual, historically they must also have had a tantra whence the ritual came.

at other temples in central Tibet dating to the latter part of the empire or early post-dynastic period.³⁷ Amy Heller has also demonstrated the existence of several stone relief images of Vairocana in eastern Tibet dating to the early ninth century.³⁸ Kapstein also cites Vairocana images from Buddhist cave-temples in Anxi Yulin and Dunhuang to illustrate his argument that the Vairocana cult “was widely promulgated with imperial support.”³⁹ This Vairocana cult undoubtedly drew on tantric texts in which Vairocana is the central deity, such as the *Compendium of Principles*, the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*, and the *Manifest Enlightenment of Vairocana*.⁴⁰

Kapstein presents a compelling formulation of the impetus behind the installment and support of this royal Vairocana cult in imperial Tibet.⁴¹ During the late eighth and early ninth centuries, Buddhism was the one cultural form that tied together the disparate regions of Asia. As tantric Buddhism continued to develop in India, it quickly spread to China, Khotan, Nepal, and many other locales in central Asia. Thus, the Tibetan adoption of the Vairocana cult provided a common language to express imperial Tibetan power to its neighbors in China, India, and central Asia. Moreover, by making the Tibetan king and his empire homologous to Vairocana and his maṇḍala, royal authority could be further asserted on the basis of this relationship – an important consideration for an administration governing an empire spread across central Asia.

Buddhaghya and Tibet

The translation and transmission of texts and the practices associated with them formed the foundation for the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet. A discussion of Yoga Tantra texts circulating in Tibet during the first dissemination of Buddhism must include Buddhaghya,⁴² who was perhaps the most prominent and prolific of the early Indian monastic tantric exegetes. He was a monk from central India (perhaps Varāṇasī) who resided at the great monastic university of Nālandā in northeastern India during the middle of the eighth century. A student of Buddhajñānapāda, he wrote commentaries and practical instructions on central early

37 Kapstein (2000, 61).

38 Heller (1997, 96-103).

39 Kapstein (2000, 63).

40 *Rnam par snang mdzad chen po mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa rnam par sprul pa byin gyis rlob pa shin tu rgyas pa mdo sde'i dbang po'i rgyal po zhes bya ba'i chos kyi rnam grangs*, *Mahāvairocanābhisambodhivikurvitādhiṣṭhāna-vaipulyasūtreन्द्रarāja-nāma-dharmaparyāya*, tr. Śīlendrabodhi and Dpal brtsegs, P126 (Toh. 494), vol. 5, 240.3.2–284.3.1.

41 This discussion is drawn from Kapstein (2000, 59-61).

42 There is some uncertainty over the identification of this figure, since early Tibetan texts list his name as Buddhagupta rather than Buddhaghya. For a brief discussion of this issue, see Kapstein (2000, 62-63).

tantras such as the *Compendium of Principles*, the *Manifest Enlightenment of Vairocana* (later classified as Performance⁴³ or Dual Tantra),⁴⁴ the *Questions of Subāhu Tantra*⁴⁵ (later classified as Action Tantra),⁴⁶ and the *Concentration Continuation Tantra*⁴⁷ (later classified as Action Tantra).

Several of these works were translated into Tibetan during the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet and are included in the *Denkar Palace Catalogue* (*dkar chag ldan dkar ma*),⁴⁸ which lists the titles and, for commentarial literature, authors of texts translated during the first propagation of Buddhism in Tibet. This catalogue for the most part records officially sanctioned translations and is the earliest extant catalogue of Tibetan translations. Although the *Denkar Palace Catalogue* was completed during the early part of the ninth century by the translators Peltsek (*dpal brtsegs*), Namkhé Nyingpo (*nam mkha'i snying po*), and Lü Wangpo (*klu'i dbang po*),⁴⁹ the catalogue likely was begun towards the end of the eighth century.⁵⁰

While Buddhaguhya represents the early Indian tantric commentator par excellence – and several of his works were translated into Tibetan during the first dissemination of Buddhism – he is also an important and influential figure in the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet during the height of its dynastic period for another reason: he had direct contact with Tibetans, and in particular, with members of the Tibetan court. Traditional accounts relate that while Buddhaguhya was in retreat in western Tibet in the environs of Mount Kailash, his fame as a tantric master reached central Tibet, and the emperor Tri Songdetsen sent his emissaries to invite Buddhaguhya to central Tibet.

Although Buddhaguhya declined the invitation, he sent a letter of advice to Tri Songdetsen and the Tibetan people.⁵¹ In addition, Buddhaguhya sent his *Entry into the Meaning of the Tantra*⁵² and other tantric commentaries to central Tibet.⁵³ The *Entry into the Meaning of the*

43 *spyod rgyud, caryā-tantra*.

44 *gnysis ka'i rgyud, ubhaya-tantra*.

45 *Dpung bzang gis zhus pa zhes bya ba'i rgyud, Subāhupariṣṭchānāmatantra*, P428, vol. 9.

46 *bya rgyud, kriyā-tantra*.

47 *Bsam gtan gyi phyi ma rim par phye ba, Dhyānottarapaṭalakrama*, P430, vol. 9.

48 This text is also known by the alternative title *Lhan kar ma* (Adelheid Herrmann-Pfandt, 2002, 134).

49 Herrmann-Pfandt dates the *Denkar Palace Catalogue* to 812 CE, but states that additions were made until at least 830 (Herrmann-Pfandt 2002, 135).

50 Snellgrove (1987, 440-441); Kapstein (2000, 62-63).

51 Snellgrove discusses this letter, and translates a portion of it (1987, 446-450). For an introduction to and complete translation of the letter in German, see Dietz (1984, 79-84 and 359-399). I am grateful to Professor Bill McDonald of the German Department, University of Virginia, for translating Dietz's article into English.

52 Buddhaguhya, *Rgyud kyi don la 'jug pa, Tantrārthāvatāra*, P3324 (Toh. 2501), vol. 70, 33.1.1-73.4.7.

53 Bu ston, *Ship* (1990, 68b.2-68b.3).

Tantra is an exposition on the *Compendium of Principles* and includes esoteric instructions (*man ngag, upadeśa*) on the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, which in addition to being the central practice of the *Compendium of Principles* is also the prototype of early tantric maṇḍalas. We see the importance of Buddhaguhya's influence on the early transmission of Buddhism in Tibet not just in his interaction with members of the court but also in his tantric commentaries translated during that period. When we look at the *Denkar Palace Catalogue* of officially sanctioned translations, we find only six tantric commentaries,⁵⁴ and Buddhaguhya is identified as the author of four of these texts.⁵⁵ Although there were tantric texts translated outside of official translation bureaus during the early period (as I will discuss below), Buddhaguhya's impact on Tibetan Buddhism – perhaps attributable to his personal contact with emissaries of the court – is undeniable.

Funerary Cults

Another important aspect of the Yoga Tantras that made them attractive to the pro-Buddhist faction of the ruling elite during the first period of transmission of Buddhism to Tibet was undoubtedly their utility in death rites. As Kapstein has shown, mortuary rites were an important part of pre-Buddhist Tibetan culture. The rites for deceased monarchs were of particular importance and required a specialized clergy to perform them. These rites, which reflect a well-developed system of beliefs concerning death and the deceased,⁵⁶ were referred to as Bön (*bon*), a complex term frequently used to refer to pre-Buddhist religion as a whole as well as to a contemporary Tibetan religious form that claims descent from such (although historically it can only be dated to around the tenth or eleventh century). One of the few things we know with any certainty about the pre-Buddhist Bön was that it was responsible for performing the mortuary rites for deceased Tibetan kings.

While the *Compendium of Principles* has only a brief passage on drawing beings in bad transmigrations out of their unfortunate circumstances and sending them to a happy rebirth, death and practices related to it are of central importance in the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*. The frame-story of this tantra revolves around the death of a long-life god named Vimalamaṇiprabha and his rebirth in a hell, and funerary rites that the Buddha teaches to Vimalamaṇiprabha's cohort Indra to extract the fallen god from his unfortunate circumstances. Many of the rites in the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* are geared toward purifying bad karma and their resultant bad rebirths.

Because of its focus on death and rituals pertaining thereto, the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* was particularly well suited to the cultural environment of eighth- and ninth-

54 Herrmann-Pfandt (2002, 146). Kapstein indicates that there are only four tantric commentaries in the *Denkar Palace Catalogue* (Kapstein 2000, 63).

55 Kapstein (2000, 63).

56 Kapstein (2000, 5).

century Tibet, and especially that of the imperial court. We find evidence indicating its actual adoption in an early Tibetan Dunhuang text concerning death, in which a god modeled on Vimalamañiprabha and having a similar name appears.⁵⁷

Moreover, the last section of the *Testament of Wa* concerns the adoption of Buddhist funerary rites as a replacement for Bön rites, with the catalyzing event being the funeral of the ruler Tri Songdetsen.⁵⁸ This certainly marked a watershed in the conversion of Tibet to Buddhism, as the funeral of a deceased king (and by extension the funerals of other aristocrats) was of utmost importance in Tibet.⁵⁹ The *Testament of Wa*'s account of Tri Songdetsen's funeral mentions that the Vajradhātu Mañḍala was constructed as part of the funeral proceedings,⁶⁰ which explicitly links the *Compendium of Principles* with royal mortuary rites.

The account specifies that Buddhist monks performed the actual funeral in dependence upon the **Devaputra Vimāla Sūtra (lha'i bu dri ma med pa'i mdo)*.⁶¹ This title likely refers to the god (*devaputra*) Vimalamañiprabha, whose death provides the occasion for the teaching of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*. Therefore, it seems likely that the funeral of Tri Songdetsen was based on death rites from the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* or on a text closely related to it.

The *Testament of Wa* manuscript (31a) has a supralinear note in the margin above the title: *Lha'i bu dri ma med pa'i mdo*, that reads *gtsug tor dri med kyi gzungs* (the reconstructed Sanskrit of this would be **Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇī*). While Wangdu and Diemberger take this to be a second text used in the funeral rites,⁶² it may be an alternate title or further identification of the first text. This title suggests a connection with two *dhāraṇī* texts that may be related to the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*, both of which are titled *The Superior Stainless Dhāraṇī* (*'Phags pa dri ma med pa zhes bya ba'i gzungs, Ārya-vimāla-nāma-dhāraṇī*).⁶³ Both of these texts likely circulated in Tibet at the time of Tri Songdetsen's death and are ascribed

57 Kapstein (2000, 5-7).

58 Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, 10-11; 92-105).

59 For a brief discussion of the political import of the adoption of Buddhist funeral rites, see Bjerken (2005, 73(3):829).

60 Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, 103-104).

61 Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, 103). The asterisk (*) indicates that the Sanskrit is a reconstruction.

62 Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, 103).

63 *'Phags pa dri ma med pa zhes bya ba'i gzungs, Āryavimalanāmadhāraṇī*, translated by Jinamitra, Dānaśīla, and Ye shes sde (b. mid-eighth century), P156 (Toh. 517), listed in the *Denkar Palace Catalogue (Catalogue of the Nyingma Edition, vol. 2, 139)*; and *'Phags pa dri ma med pa zhes bya ba'i gzungs, Āryavimalanāmadhāraṇī*, same translators, Toh. 871 (text is not included in the Peking edition; *Catalogue of the Nyingma Edition, vol. 2, 415*).

to the first period of translation, a claim supported by their inclusion in the *Denkar Palace Catalogue*.⁶⁴

Slightly later, the *Testament of Wa* states that subsequent to Tri Songdetsen's death, funerals were performed in dependence upon the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* and in dependence upon the Sarvavid Vairocana Maṇḍala and Nine Crown Protuberances Maṇḍala.⁶⁵ These are the central maṇḍalas, respectively, of the earlier and later versions of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*. The later version was not translated into Tibetan until the thirteenth century, which raises important questions about the account in the *Testament of Wa*. One possibility is that the mention of the Nine Crown Protuberances Maṇḍala is a later interpolation (Sørensen dates the *Testament of Wa*'s entire section on funerary rites to the ninth century).⁶⁶ Another possibility is that a Nine Crown Protuberances Maṇḍala tradition (and

64 Bu ston also mentions a similarly titled *dhāraṇī* text from the early dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet that is connected with the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*:

The master Shāntigarbha composed the *Differentiation of the Parts of a Stūpa*; the *Rite of Constructing a Stūpa* – which relies on the *Vimala-dhāraṇī*; and the *Rite – Concordant with Yoga Tantra – of Achieving a Stūpa* in dependence upon the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations Tantra* (*slob dpon shāntiṃ garbhas/ mchod rten gyi cha rnam par dbye ba dang/ dri med kyi gzungs la brten pa'i mchod rten bya ba'i cho ga dang/ sbyong rgyud la brten nas mchod rten rnal 'byor rgyud dang mthun par sgrub pa'i cho ga mdzad*; Bu ston, *Ship* (1990, 70b.1-70b.2).

With regard to the third text, the *Catalogue of the Nyingma Edition*, vol. 4, 386 lists a text with a slightly variant title, *Mchod rten sgrub pa'i cho ga, Caitya-sādhana-vidhi*, P3476 (Toh. 2652), and indicates that the indices of the text in the Busto and Narthang editions relate that this is “from the *gtsug-tor dri-ma-med-kyi gzungs*. Yogatantra.” This is another possible connection between the *Vimala-dhāraṇī* and the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* that requires further investigation.

There is also a similarly titled text included in the *Collected Tantras of the Nyingmas*, the *Gtsug tor dri ma med pa sku gzugs mngon par bstan pa'i rgyud* (*The mTshams brag Manuscript of the rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, vol. 17 [tsa], 625.4-710.6, <http://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/canons/ngb/ngbcat.php#cat=tb/0399>). This tantra is included in the Anuyoga section of the Nyingma tantric canon; its translation is attributed to Rinchenchok, which places it in the first dissemination. Its content concerns various aspects of stūpas, just as Shāntigarbha's text does. Additionally, the homage is to Mahāvairocana, which links it to the Yoga Tantras and/or perhaps also to the earliest stratum of Mahāyoga. This might in fact be the tantra on which Shāntigarbha drew in formulating his ritual text on stūpas that is related to the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*. Further research into this text, and comparison with Shāntigarbha's ritual text, is necessary.

65 Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, 105).

66 Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, xv).

perhaps the later version of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* itself) circulated in Tibet before the extant translation of the tantra was made during the thirteenth century.

Whatever the case, it is clear from evidence such as dynastic-period Dunhuang texts that the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* was closely associated with rites for the deceased in late imperial Tibet. This was of particular importance in the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet, since the royal funerary cult (and, by extension, funerary cults in general) held a central place in Tibetan social and religious life. Thus, the availability of a specific and well-developed Buddhist ritual funerary apparatus that could replace the indigenous Bön cult was of utmost importance to Tri Songdetsen and the pro-Buddhist members of his court, and undoubtedly was instrumental in the Tibetan conversion to Buddhism. That such a cultus was already an essential part of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* tradition made this text one of the most important tantras of the early translation period.

Tibetan Suspicion of Tantra

It is important to bear in mind in this discussion that some factions of the imperial court were opposed to the adoption of Buddhism in Tibet. While the deployment of a royal Vairocana cult and Buddhist funerary rites made tantric Buddhism of great importance to Tri Songdetsen and the members of the ruling elite who supported Buddhism and promoted its adoption as the state religion, they also felt the need to tightly control the promulgation and practice of tantra. In discussing this ambivalence, I will focus on two topics: The translation of Yoga Tantra texts during the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet and Padmasambhava's interactions with the court during his journey to Tibet.

Translations of Yoga Tantra Texts

There are only four Yoga Tantras that we can say with any certainty were translated during the early period of the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet: the *Compendium of Principles*, the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*, the *Mode of the Perfection of Wisdom in 150 Stanzas*, and the *Litany of Names of Mañjuśrī*. I will discuss the first two of these texts here as illustrative of Tibetan attitudes toward tantra and the reception they gave it in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

As I briefly discussed earlier, the *Compendium of Principles* marks a decisive point in the development of Buddhist tantra in India. In discussing its transmission to Tibet, Bu ston cites imperial-period translations of this seminal tantra text but does not mention the translators' names.⁶⁷ Although the *Compendium of Principles* does not appear in the *Denkar Palace Catalogue* of officially authorized translations of the imperial period, there is textual evidence that supports Bu ston's assertion. The extant translation in the Peking edition of the Kangyur (*bka' 'gyur* – the translations of Buddha-voiced texts) states that, although the tantra has no

67 Bu ston, *Ship* (1990, 70a.5).

translation colophon, it is known as a translation by [the Indian] Paṇḍita Śraddhākaravarman and the Tibetan translator Rinchen Zangpo (rin chen bzang po, 958-1055 CE, active at the beginning of the later period of translation activity), and that it was revised in accordance with three different old translations of Indian versions of the text [that is, translations made during the first dissemination of Buddhism].⁶⁸ Thus, Bu ston indicates that although the extant Tibetan translation was made by Rinchen Zangpo (958-1055) and thus dates to the tenth or eleventh century, he revised his translation in consultation with three different translations of the *Compendium of Principles* that were made during the period of the first dissemination of Buddhism.

In addition, there is the case of Buddhaguhya's *Entry into the Meaning of the Tantra* discussed above, which was translated during the second half of the eighth century while this Indian master was in retreat in the western Himalayas.⁶⁹ The Tibetan ruler Tri Songdetsen sent emissaries to invite Buddhaguhya to central Tibet; he declined the invitation but composed the *Entry into the Meaning of the Tantra* and other tantric commentaries and sent them to central Tibet.⁷⁰ This exposition on the *Compendium of Principles* includes esoteric instructions (*man ngag, upadeśa*) on the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala, its central practice. It therefore seems likely that the *Compendium of Principles* – the text on which the *Entry into the Meaning of the Tantra* expounds – was not only available to the Tibetans (Buddhaguhya himself might well have been in possession of a Sanskrit manuscript while in retreat in the Himalayas), but also that there was a Tibetan translation at that time, since sending the Tibetan king a text of esoteric instructions for the *Compendium of Principles* and its central practice without the tantra itself being available would seem to make little sense.

Bu ston's comments on the early translation of the *Compendium of Principles* are notable for this passage on the editing involved in its initial translation:⁷¹

At that time, the parts of the root tantra the *Compendium of Principles* that set forth the collection of violent [or black magic] activities (*mngon spyod kyi las, *abhicāra-karma*)⁷² were left as is without being translated. The others [that is, the other parts of the *Compendium of Principles*] were thoroughly and completely translated.⁷³

68 rgyud 'di la 'gyur byang mi snang na'ang/ paṇḍā [sic] ta shraddhā lā [sic] ra warmma dang/ bod kyi lotstsha ba rin chen bzang pos bsgyur bar grags shing rgya dpe rnying 'gyur mi 'dra ba gsum bstun te zhus dag bsgrubs so/ (*Compendium of Principles*, P112, vol. 4, 283.2.1-283.2.2).

69 Bu ston, *Ship* (1990, 68a.7).

70 Bu ston, *Ship* (1990, 68b.2-68b.3).

71 de'i tshes rtsa ba'i rgyud de nyid bsdu pa/ mngon spyod kyi las tshogs ston pa rnams ma bsgyur bar skad sor bzhag tu bzhag/ gzhan rnams yongs su rdzogs par bsgyur ro/ (Bu ston 1990, 70a.5).

72 This term is difficult to translate. It connotes violence or even death wrought through ritual means, and therefore perhaps "black magic" renders it more accurately (albeit more freely).

73 There is a brief text titled *Violent [or Black Magic] Activities* (*Mngon spyod kyi las, *Abhicāra-*

Here we have an example – in the context of Yoga Tantra during the early period of Tibet’s conversion to Buddhism – of a frequently commented upon aversion towards certain types of tantric practices, particularly those involving ritual activities for coercive or violent (or even deadly) purposes.⁷⁴ As scholars such as Matthew Kapstein have pointed out, the wide dissemination of such practices would have been antithetical to the interests of the expanding Tibetan empire, which was at that time the dominant power in central Asia, since law and order was necessary to maintain such a sprawling domain and the practice of rituals for violent or deadly purposes was not conducive to social harmony and stability.⁷⁵ Thus, the ruling elite authorized and supported the translation of texts and practices promoting good moral behavior while proscribing practices associated with violence, destruction, and even murder. While they might well have desired the deployment of such practices for their own purposes, they certainly wanted to control and limit access to such ritual technologies. What is of particular importance is that this censorship was applied not only to the more antinomian tantric traditions that developed in India after the *Compendium of Principles* and came to be known as Mahāyoga, but also to the *Compendium of Principles* itself, the classic tantra of institutional Buddhism.

Bu ston also discusses a translation of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations Tantra* made during the first dissemination by the Indian master Śāntigarbha and the Tibetan translator Peltsek Rakṣita (dpal brtsegs rakṣi ta),⁷⁶ which Ma Rinchenchok (*rma rin chen mchog*) revised⁷⁷ with standardized terminology by the early part of the ninth century. This assertion is not contested: the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* is one of only a handful of tantras listed in the *Denkar Palace Catalogue*, and its commentary by Buddhaguhya also appears there. The

karma) in the Degé (*sde dge*), Choné (*co ne*), and Lhasa editions of the Kangyur. The text consists of a scant five lines of verse and has no title line or introduction. The body of the text appears to be instructions for performing violent/black magic activities. There is a brief closing section indicating the text title and identifying the translator team as the Indian scholar Śāntigarbha and the translator-monk Jayarakṣita (*rgya gar gyi mkhan po shāntiṃ garbha dang/ lots tsha ba bande dza ya rakṣitas bsgyur ba'o/*; Toh. 484, Karmapa Degé vol. 85, 191.7). Śāntigarbha and Jayarakṣita were active in Tibet during the eighth century (Śāntigarbha performed the consecration of Samyé Monastery c. 779) when, according to Bu ston, the *Compendium of Principles* was first translated. It is possible that this brief text *Violent Activities* represents the parts of the *Compendium of Principles* involving black magic that Bu ston says were not translated during the eighth century, although, as I will discuss below, it is more likely that it represents a similar section from the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*.

74 For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Snellgrove (1987, part 5).

75 Kapstein (2000, 56-58).

76 The colophon of the translation in the Peking and Nartang editions of the Kangyur identifies the Tibetan translator as Rgyal ba 'tsho, that is, *Jayarakṣita (Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp 1992, 16:109). However, as van der Kuijp details, Tibetan scholars as early as the twelfth century questioned the identity of the translators (van der Kuijp 1992, 16:109-110).

77 Bu ston, *Ship* (1990, 70a.5-70a.6).

original translation can be located more precisely to the latter part of the eighth century, since Śāntigarbha performed the consecration of Samyé, Tibet's first monastery, around 779 CE and thus must have been in Tibet by that date, and also because Buddhaguhya was in contact with the Tibetan court at about the same time.

Bu ston's comments on the translation of this text offer further evidence regarding the bowdlerization of Yoga Tantra translations during the early period. Surprisingly, although the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations Tantra* is one of the few tantras translated under official sponsorship – as its inclusion in the *Denkar Palace Catalogue* indicates – this text also underwent some sanitization in the translation process. Bu ston presents in succession three opinions concerning the absence in the Tibetan translation of fierce or violent burnt-offering rites (*drag po 'i sbyin sreg*, **raudra-homa*) in the sections on the Universal Emperor (*'khor los bsgyur ba*, **cakravartin*) and the deity Blazing-like-Fire (*me ltar 'bar ba*, **analārka*),⁷⁸ the source of which appears to be a text on the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* by the Sakya hierarch Jetsün Drakpa Gyeltsen (rje btsun grags pa rgyal mtshan, 1147-1216):⁷⁹

1. The king and ministers were suspicious of tantric practitioners performing violent activities (*mngon spyod kyi las*, **abhicāra-karma*) and proscribed them, so [passages in the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations Tantra* presenting such rites] were not translated.⁸⁰
2. Such passages did not exist in the Indian text of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations Tantra* itself, since the translator [Ma Rinchenchok] later restored passages that had been cut for other tantras but did not do so for the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*.⁸¹
3. The Khotanese version of the text contains such passages.⁸²

Bu ston offers no comment on the relative merits of these positions, although according to van der Kuijp, Drakpa Gyeltsen's opinion is that the passages in question were indeed translated by the reviser but were not included in the official translation, and instead circulated as "inserts" used when the practices were performed.⁸³ There is support for this position in the Degé edition of the Kangyur, which includes a brief text of less than one folio side sandwiched between the two recensions of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations Tantra*. While there is no title

78 'di la 'khor los bsgyur ba dang me ltar 'bar ba 'i skabs kyi drag po 'i sbyin sreg med pa ni/ (Bu ston 1990, 70a.6-70a.7).

79 van der Kuijp (1992, 16:109 and 115-116).

80 rgyal blon gyis sngags pa rnam kyis mngon spyod kyi las byed du dogs nas bkag pas ma bsgyur ro/ /zhes kha cig zer la/ (Bu ston, *Ship*, 1990, 70a.7).

81 kha cig na re/ phyis kyi lotstshas gzhan la 'gyur chad bsabs kyang/ 'di la ma bsabs pas rgya dpe rang la med pa yin zer/ (Bu ston, *Ship*, 1990, 70a.7-70b.1).

82 kha cig li yul gyi dpe la drag po 'i sbyin sreg yod zer ro/ (Bu ston, *Ship*, 1990, 70b.1).

83 van der Kuijp (1992, 16:116).

line or homage at the beginning of the text, the title “Violent Activities” (*mngon spyod kyi las*) is given at the end of the text. Furthermore, van der Kuijp reports that in the Litang (*li thang*) edition of the Kangyur, part of the passage has been inserted into the colophon between the names of the translators and that of the reviser.⁸⁴

Therefore, it seems likely that a passage concerning ritual activities directed toward violent ends was left out of the original translation of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*. There is evidence from early Tibetan exegetical traditions of this tantra to support this assertion. Bu ston mentions a text by Ma Rinchenchok, who revised the translation of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*, called *Answering the Objections to the Purification of All Bad Transmigrations Tantra* (*sbyong rgyud kyi brgal lan*) – a text concerned with dispelling the contradictions of very difficult points of the tantra.⁸⁵ While to my knowledge this text is no longer extant, the fact that there were objections to the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*, and the fact that Rinchenchok, an influential figure in the early dissemination of Buddhism, felt it necessary to refute these objections, indicates first of all that at least certain aspects of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* met with opposition in imperial Tibet, and secondly that it was a tantra of significant importance and merited a response.

Whatever the case may be concerning the passages that were or were not left out of the translation of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* (and the evidence strongly suggests that passages were cut), what is significant for our discussion is the fact that these opinions concern official censorship in the translation of a Yoga Tantra. Along with the censorship involved in the translation of the *Compendium of Principles*, this is significant because it indicates that censorship of tantric texts and practices was an issue in Tibet during the eighth and early ninth centuries, and furthermore, that it was applied to Yoga Tantras as well as to the more radical and recently developed Mahāyoga tantras such as the *Secret Nucleus*. This reflects the concern over certain aspects of tantra held by the king and some of his ministers who, although pro-Buddhist, endeavored to control such practices while at the same time supporting tantra and promoting it for their own ends.

Padmasambhava’s Activities in Tibet

Padmasambhava is a legendary figure in Tibetan culture, known as Guru Rinpoché, the Indian tantric master who through his charisma and ritual skill established Buddhism in Tibet and served as tantric preceptor to Tri Songdetsen. In all accounts, his main activities focused on subduing local deities obstructing the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet, where he stayed for several years teaching tantric Buddhism – including to King Tri Songdetsen. Traditional accounts relate that the king, out of devotion to his master, “gave” Padmasambhava one of his wives as a tantric consort. This is none other than Yeshé Tsogyel (*ye shes mtsho rgyal*), also a

84 van der Kuijp (1992, 16:116). A comparison of the passages in the Litang and Degé Kangyurs is necessary to determine their relationship.

85 Bu ston, *Ship* (1990, 70b.3-70b.4).

legendary figure in Tibetan religious culture, who is revered as the transmitter of many lineages of religious doctrine and practice that she received from Padmasambhava. For the Nyingma School in particular, Padmasambhava has come to be the central figure in the dissemination of Buddhism from India to Tibet. He is a vital figure in Nyingma Mahāyoga traditions as well as Atiyoga traditions, and he is the progenitor of a vast corpus of visionary material he is believed to have concealed during the eighth century to be “rediscovered” later in Tibet, the so-called “treasure” (*gter ma*) traditions.⁸⁶

Sifting out the many layers of accretions in the accounts of Padmasambhava’s activities in Tibet is a difficult task that I will not attempt here. However, examining the earliest surviving Tibetan account of the activities of the eighth century, the *Testament of Wa (dba’ bzhed)*, is helpful in illuminating certain aspects of Padmasambhava’s activity and involvement in Tibet as well as Tibetan attitudes toward tantric practices. While the provenance of the *Testament of Wa* is complex, the earliest extant version is a revised version of a text that dates to around the eleventh century.⁸⁷ This account portrays Padmasambhava’s sojourn in Tibet as a brief one, focused on subduing – through violent practices – local deities antagonistic to the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet and performing some miracles involving water for irrigation purposes.⁸⁸

The ambivalence of the Tibetan court toward Buddhism, and especially toward tantra, can be seen in the *Testament of Wa* account. Throughout the narrative there are references to ministers opposed to Buddhism, so we must bear in mind the important socio-political aspects of the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet and its adoption as the court religion by the ruler Tri Songdetsen. In addition, the Tibetan world (then as now) was a world populated by unseen agents. Therefore, ritual efficacy in controlling these forces was of paramount importance, as was the corresponding threat of black magic for purposes counter to social stability and the interests of the court.

We see the concern with black magic in the *Testament of Wa* accounts concerning the Indian monastic Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava, who according to later Tibetan traditions are the two most important Indian Buddhist masters active in Tibet during the early part of the first dissemination. Although Tri Songdetsen had an interest in Buddhism, he hesitated for some time in extending an invitation to the monastic preceptor Śāntarakṣita for fear of opposition

86 Padmasambhava is believed to have hidden a large corpus of texts as treasures (*gter ma*) to be discovered at a future time when their spiritual impact would be of greatest benefit. Prominent examples of such treasure-texts are the various texts of the “Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State” cycles (the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead, Bar do thos grol*), the first of which was discovered by Karma Lingpa (*kar ma gling pa*) in the fourteenth/fifteenth century. Padmasambhava is thus the source of a multitude of texts, although the actual authorship of only a few texts is attributed to him.

87 Per K. Sørensen, preface to Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, xiv).

88 Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, 13). For a summary of the account of Padmasambhava’s activities in Tibet, see Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, 17-18).

among his ministers. Then, even after Śāntarakṣita arrived in Lhasa, the king was suspicious of black magic and evil spirits and so dispatched three ministers to interrogate the monk *for two months* before the king himself would meet with the Indian master.⁸⁹ Śāntarakṣita then expounded Buddhist doctrine to the king and others, but several natural disasters occurred: a royal palace flooded, a castle was struck by lightning and burned down, famine and epidemics affecting people and animals descended on Tibet, and so forth. Buddhism was blamed and, under mounting pressure from his ministers (and in all likelihood his own suspicions), Tri Songdetsen sent Śāntarakṣita back to Nepal whence he came.⁹⁰

Some time later, the king decided to issue a second invitation to Śāntarakṣita, who suggested that Padmasambhava also be invited. Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava, along with a Nepalese architect-geomancer, traveled to central Tibet. Along the way Padmasambhava performed various demon subjugations and water-related feats such as calming boiling springs through the performance of ritual. When they reached central Tibet and met Tri Songdetsen, Śāntarakṣita introduced Padmasambhava as a master of mantra capable of subduing all the local deities obstructing the establishment of Buddhism and pacifying the land of Tibet.⁹¹

The *Testament of Wa* account⁹² relates that Padmasambhava performed a mirror-divination to identify the obstructing deities, and then he performed a ritual to forcibly subdue these deities and bind them by oath into the service of Buddhism. After completing the ritual he informed the court that it would have to be performed twice more to complete the subjugation. The narrative then continues with Padmasambhava suggesting several water-technology and irrigation projects such as transforming sandy regions into meadows by causing springs to appear, and he performs one such water-related miracle.

At this point Tri Songdetsen became suspicious and suspended further performance of these rituals. Moreover, the Tibetan ruler then requested Padmasambhava to leave Tibet. Padmasambhava angrily decried the king's narrow-mindedness, jealousy, and fear that he would usurp Tri Songdetsen's political power, and then set out on his journey back to India. In the meantime, a meeting of the king and his counselors was convened, at which they decided that Padmasambhava must be killed to prevent him from bringing harm to Tibet. To accomplish this objective, the court dispatched a gang of twenty assassins. However, Padmasambhava intuited the plan and performed some *mudrā* that rendered the assassins catatonic (ironically, one of the types of practices found in the passages from the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* that by official order were not translated). He then continued his journey west.

In this, the earliest account of the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet, we see on the part of the Tibetan ruling elite both an interest in and great suspicion of Buddhism, and in particular a fear of tantric ritual technologies (including black magic practices) employed to control various forces, both human and non-human. Śāntarakṣita is invited, treated cautiously,

89 Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, 40-45).

90 Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, 46-47).

91 Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, 52-56).

92 Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, 57-59).

and sent away after various calamities befall central Tibet, only to be invited again. Because Padmasambhava is considered to be accomplished in wrathful practices of subjugation and the like, he is invited to Tibet to subdue local deities and other forces opposing Buddhism. However, the efficacy of his subjugation rites meets with such suspicion from the king and his ministers that Padmasambhava is also asked to leave Tibet, just as Śāntarakṣita had been. In a preemptive strike against the possibility that Padmasambhava would unleash his magic against Tibet, an attempt is made on his life.⁹³

It is important to remember that the king involved here is Tri Songdetsen, who adopted Buddhism as the religion of the court and was the first Tibetan ruler to support the dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet on a large scale. We are therefore dealing with a pro-Buddhist king, which makes these events all the more striking and illustrative of the Tibetan social landscape during the last half of the eighth and first half of the ninth century. We have seen the promotion of Buddhism (and particularly tantric traditions) by the Tibetan court and the utility of the royal Vairocana cult and Buddhist funerary rites (which displaced Bön rites) in furthering the court's aims. Given the accounts of government proscription of passages involving violent or black-magic type rituals in the translation of the *Compendium of Principles* and the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* – as well as the *Testament of Wa*'s portrayal of the socio-political climate of eighth-century Tibet – it is clear that the Tibetan ruling aristocracy was at once both strongly interested in and highly suspicious of certain aspects of tantric Buddhism. While it supported such traditions, it also actively sought to constrain and control them.

The Collapse of Imperial Tibet and the So-Called “Dark” Period

Royal patronage of Buddhism accelerated after the death of Tri Songdetsen at the end of the eighth century and reached its height during the reign of Relpachen (ral pa can, aka *khri gtsug lde btsan*, r. 813-838/41).⁹⁴ Upon his death, his elder brother Üdumtsen⁹⁵ (*'u'i dum btsan*, aka Lang Darma [glang dar ma], r. 838/41-842) ascended to the throne and, according to later Buddhist traditions, launched a persecution of Buddhism. Although Darma is vilified as a rabid anti-Buddhist, it is likely that this was not precisely the case. As Davidson and Kapstein have argued, Darma's policy shift toward Buddhism might have entailed the reduction or

93 Wangdu and Diemberger remark that Padmasambhava engaged in feats related to water and irrigation, and that he also suggested the employment of further irrigation technologies; since the control of water resources was of utmost political importance, it is perhaps not surprising that the Tibetan government felt threatened by Padmasambhava's activities. (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000, 14).

94 Kapstein (2000, xvii-xviii). For a discussion of the expenditures on Buddhism under Relpachen and Darma's response and its relation to the “suppression” of Buddhism at the same time in Tang China; see Davidson (2005, 64-65).

95 Kapstein (2000, 207 n. 44).

withdrawal of royal patronage rather than the full-scale persecution later Buddhist histories present.⁹⁶ Samten Karmay, drawing on the accounts in later Tibetan works, argues that under Relpachen Buddhist monks came to play a prominent role in secular affairs, and that he was assassinated in an intricate plot deployed by his brother Darma and ministers who opposed the clergy's entrenched position at the court.⁹⁷

In any case, with the assassination in 842 of Darma – purportedly by the Buddhist monk Pelgyi Dorjé (dpal gyi rdo rje) – the Tibetan empire began to disintegrate. This ushered in a period of political and social turmoil that would last for more than one hundred years, during which a series of clan-based uprisings in various regions unraveled the very fabric of Tibetan society.⁹⁸

The state of Buddhism during this so-called “dark” period is difficult to determine because there are few contemporary accounts concerning it. Later Buddhist histories present a bleak picture in which monastic Buddhism completely disappeared in central Tibet and was preserved only by a small number of monks who fled to the far northeastern region of Amdo (a mdo, in contemporary Qinghai Province).⁹⁹

These accounts characterize this period as one of wide-scale degenerate religious behavior. Tales abound of lay tantric practitioners (some of whom were apparently supposed to be monks) taking literally the injunctions in the tantras to commit ritual sacrifice, murder, fornication, cannibalism, to consume meat and alcohol, and so forth. For instance, Bu ston describes the situation this way:

The eighteen robber-monks and so forth did much mixing and polluting of the systems of secret mantra translated previously at a time when religious law had not degenerated, and performed the perverted practices of [sexual] union and liberation [through slaying] (*sbyor sgrol*), tantric ritual orgies (*tshogs*), and so forth.¹⁰⁰

Ritualized sacrifice and murder, ritualized profligate sexual activity, and the promulgation of perverted doctrines are among the charges leveled against tantric practitioners by Yeshé Ö,

96 Davidson (2005, 62-66); Kapstein (2000, 11-12). Davidson also discusses the economic strain of large military and religious expenditures in an empire that was no longer expanding or accessing new resources.

97 Karmay (2003, 57-68); see especially 60-61. The sources he draws on are the *Testament of Wal Ba* in *Une chronique ancienne de bSam-yas: sBa-bzhed* (Stein 1961) and *Chos'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud, Gangs can rig mdzod 5* (Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer, 1988).

98 Davidson (2005, 66-72).

99 Kapstein (2000, 10).

100 *ar tsho'i ban de bco brgyad la sogs pas sngar chos khrims ma nyams pa'i dus su bsgyur ba'i gsang sngags kyi gzhung la 'dre bslad mang po byas te/ sbyor sgrol dang tshogs la sogs pa'i lag len phyin ci log la spyod pa* (Bu ston, *Ship*, 1990, 71a.7-71b.1).

a descendent of the dynastic royal family and king of Purang in western Tibet active in the reestablishment of Buddhism at the beginning of the second dissemination.¹⁰¹

However, it is important to remember that these accounts are written from the perspective of traditions originating in the second dissemination of Buddhism, which claims to be a corrective to the degeneration of the “dark” period and therefore has a clear agenda in such a portrayal. While it is difficult to piece together the actual state of affairs, we know that the official translation committees, which had operated under royal support, ceased to function after the collapse of the empire. However, as Kapstein points out, there was still some government patronage. At least some of the petty rulers who controlled various parts of the former empire maintained an interest in Buddhism, as activities such as temple construction indicate.¹⁰² Additionally, aristocratic clans appear to have maintained tantric lineages, since these clans are prominent in the tantric lineages that survive this period.¹⁰³

What is clear about the post-dynastic period is that, in the absence of a strong central government – and with the monastic presence and influence severely reduced (if indeed it persisted at all, particularly in central Tibet) – lay tantric movements and their questionable behavior seem to have exploded. The translation and transmission of tantric texts and practices outside of officially sanctioned channels had certainly occurred during the first propagation of Buddhism in Tibet even while the government attempted to restrict it, as the translation of the *Compendium of Principles* discussed above demonstrates.

With the collapse of the empire, the previously unauthorized strands of Buddhism seem to have gained much fuller expression. In addition, it is likely that tantric texts and traditions of practice continued to enter Tibet during the period following the collapse of the empire, although it is difficult to determine the extent to which this occurred. Although the official translation bureaus disbanded, in all probability at least some translation activity continued during the “dark” period. Identifying with any certainty these new texts and traditions is problematic, but they likely represented the latest developments in Indian tantric Buddhism. These would have included the burgeoning corpus of texts later classified as Mahāyoga and Yoginī Tantras, in which the tendency toward extreme and antinomian practices involving sex, violence, and the like was becoming more pronounced. The disorder and anti-institutional flavor of these traditions was no doubt well suited to the chaotic cultural context of Tibet between the middle of the ninth and middle of the tenth centuries. As was the case with the development of tantric Buddhism in politically decentralized medieval India, the ethos and ideology of tantric Buddhism in Tibet mirrored the violent and divisive social and political landscape of the chaotic period following the collapse of the Tibetan empire.

101 Yeshé Ō issued an ordinance to tantric practitioners with a litany of criticisms of their behavior that included these and many more. For an introduction to and translation of this ordinance, see Karmay (1998, 3-16). For another discussion of a range of practices and figures considered to be problematic by later traditions, see Ruegg (1984, 6:375-380).

102 Kapstein (2000, 12).

103 Davidson (2005, 76).

Yoga Tantra During the Second Dissemination of Buddhism

The accounts of tantric activity in Tibet during the “dark” period from the middle of the eighth century until the latter part of the ninth century appear to justify the dynastic-period fears of the ruler Tri Songdetsen and his ministers concerning certain aspects of tantra, as the practice of antinomian tantric activities proliferated and social chaos ensued (or vice versa). Toward the end of the tenth century royal concerns about tantra reemerged in various of the smaller kingdoms that eventually succeeded the Tibetan empire. According to later accounts, this provided the impetus for the second period of the dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet. I will now discuss the translation of tantric texts and practices during the beginning of this period that illuminate the process of transmission and reflect broader cultural issues involved in the Tibetan assimilation of Buddhist tantra. In particular, I will focus on the ruling elite and its attitude toward tantra.

Accounts indicate that in the middle of the tenth century Yeshé Ö (ye shes ’od), a king of western Tibet who was descended from the dynastic-period ruling family, became a devout Buddhist.¹⁰⁴ Holding the opinion that all tantric systems had become degenerate since the fall of the empire, Yeshé Ö assembled a contingent of the most able and intelligent young men from the aristocracy of western Tibet and dispatched them to Kashmir for the purpose of returning with authentic and “orthodox” tantric texts and lineages.

This marks the beginning of the second dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet.¹⁰⁵ We find many of the same issues influencing the translation and transmission of tantric material as shaped the earlier period, such as the concern about practices involving violence and sex, and particularly their effect on social stability and order. The tantric traditions that were now palatable to royal tastes provide an important indicator of both the state of tantra and the status of Yoga Tantra at this time.

According to Bu ston, Yeshé Ö specifically instructed the delegation to study and bring back to western Tibet the systems of the *Compendium of Principles*, the *Secret Assembly* (*gsang ba ’dus pa, guhyasamāja*), and the *Litany of Names of Mañjuśrī* (*’jam dpal mtshan brjod, mañjuśrī-nāma-saṅgīti*).¹⁰⁶ Thus, we see that the kings of western Tibet, as they attempted to reassert royal control at the end of the chaotic period that followed upon the collapse of

104 According to Bu ston, this king’s name was Khorré (khor re) before he took monastic ordination as Yeshé Ö (Bu ston, *Ship*, 1990, 71a.5).

105 Buddhism – or at least Buddhist monasticism – must already have been reestablished in western Tibet at this time, since according to the biography of Rinchen Zangpo (958-1055), the most prominent of the Tibetans sent to Kashmir, he was ordained at age thirteen (Tucci 1988, 28). Thus, around the year 973 there must have been several monks in western Tibet, since the ordination ceremony requires the presence of a number of fully-ordained monks.

106 Bu ston, *Ship* (1990, 71b.6-71b.7).

the empire, denounced the tantric traditions that survived this “dark period” as well as the new developments of Indian tantra that likely continued to find their way to Tibet. During the first dissemination of Buddhism, the *Compendium of Principles* had not been translated under official authority probably because it contained practices involving violence that were considered controversial and dangerous. However, at the beginning of the second dissemination of Buddhism, the *Compendium of Principles* was perceived as a means of reestablishing authentic (and “safe”) tantric traditions.

Thus, despite royal concern during the imperial period over its ideology, the *Compendium of Principles* now appeared conservative in light of the more radical presentations of violence and sex found in later Indian tantric developments included under the rubrics of Mahāyoga and Yoginī Tantra, the unrestricted practice of which seems to have flourished following the collapse of the empire. Yoga Tantra played a prominent role in the reestablishment of Buddhism, as evidenced by the numerous translations of Yoga Tantras, as well as commentaries and ritual texts related to them, made at the beginning of the second dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet.

In addition to the *Compendium of Principles* and other Yoga Tantras representing forms of tantric Buddhism considered “safe” and acceptable by King Yeshé Ö, it is likely that the benefits of a royal Vairocana cult continued to attract the ruling elite, although now such usefulness was viewed solely in terms of its own populace and not in terms of relations with central Asian kingdoms and China. As evidence of this, we find Vairocana temples at the center – the preeminent location – of monastic complexes built under royal patronage in western Tibet, including important art-historical sites such as the monasteries of Tabo and Alchi.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the utility of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* as a funeral rite no doubt contributed to its popularity during this time.

It is largely for these reasons that Yoga Tantra ascended to prominence during the initial phase of the second propagation of Buddhism in Tibet. This period was dominated by Rinchen Zangpo (958-1055) – one of the youths sent by Yeshé Ö to Kashmir – whose translation activities were so prolific that he is known simply as “The Great Translator” (*lo tstsha ba chen po*; abbr. *lo chen*). More translations in the Tibetan canon are ascribed to him than to any other figure. Bu ston chronicles the activities of Rinchen Zangpo and his companion Lekpé Sherap (*legs pa'i shes rab*, aka *lo chung* or “The Junior Translator”) during their three trips to Kashmir and with teachers they invited to western Tibet.¹⁰⁸ Yoga Tantra systems were central to these activities, as Rinchen Zangpo and Lekpé Sherap translated most of the Yoga Tantras along with their commentarial and ritual literature. In addition, Bu ston states that they received initiation in the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala – the central maṇḍala of the *Compendium of Principles*

107 Tabo Monastery is located in the Spiti region of present-day Himachal Pradesh, India; Alchi is located in Ladakh, India, west of Leh.

108 This section is drawn from Bu ston, *Ship* (1990, 72a.4-74b.7). Tucci, drawing on biographies of Rinchen Zangpo, states that the first stay in Kashmir lasted about seven years (Tucci 1988, 61).

and the prototypical maṇḍala of the Yoga Tantra class – and that subsequently they completely entered the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala thirty-five times.

Bu ston relates that Rinchen Zangpo considered himself such a Yoga Tantra expert that he refused to take teachings on Yoga Tantra from Atiśa (982-1054 CE),¹⁰⁹ the Indian master from Vikramaśīla Monastery who spent the last twelve years of his life in western and central Tibet. The significance of this is underscored by the fact that Atiśa was perhaps the most influential Indian figure active in Tibet at the beginning of the second transmission of Buddhism. Thus, Rinchen Zangpo, the dominant Tibetan involved in the initial phase of the second dissemination of Buddhism, was deeply rooted in Yoga Tantra traditions. This emphasis at least in part stemmed from orders from his royal benefactors in western Tibet, who desired to rectify what they saw as degenerate forms of tantric Buddhism prevalent during the period after the collapse of the Tibetan empire by promoting “clean” and morally upright tantric Buddhism. The many Yoga Tantra temples constructed in western Tibet under royal patronage reflect the central role Yoga Tantra played at the beginning of the second dissemination of Buddhism.

Yoga Tantra After Rinchen Zangpo

As the second dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet progressed, increasing numbers of Tibetans traveled to India and returned with the latest in tantric doctrines and procedures, including practices involving the subtle body and manipulation of its energies. By the eleventh century, these systems were being incorporated into the institutional monastic framework in India, where even the most extreme practices involving sex, violence, cannibalism, and the like were interpreted in such a way as to blunt at least somewhat their antinomian bent and render them palatable for a monastic audience. The popularity of these systems in Tibet began to eclipse Yoga Tantra as the preeminent system, and its influence waned.

These newer tantras, which would come to be categorized under the rubric of Highest Yoga Tantra, displaced Yoga Tantra at the top of the tantric food chain. However, the Yoga Tantras continued to be fundamental components of the ritual and scholastic training of prominent Tibetan religious personages. For example, the important eleventh-century Nyingma figure Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo wrote a commentary on the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*.¹¹⁰ We also find several texts on Yoga Tantra among the works of the early Sakya hierarchs, including Jetsün Drakpa Gyeltsen’s (rje btsun grags pa rgyal mtshan, 1147-

109 Bu ston, *Ship* (1990, 76b.6). This account still circulates in contemporary Gelukpa oral traditions and was related to me by the late Ven. Pema Losang Chögyen, Maṇḍala Master of Namgyel Monastery in Dharamsala, India (personal communication, July, 1996).

110 *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi 'grel pa* (Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, <http://www.tbrc.org/kb/tbrc-detail.xq?jsessionid=1D1B75C02ACBF7A64E7034E82DEB8BAD?RID=W15580&wylie=n>).

1216) commentary on Ānandagarbha's *Source of Vajras*¹¹¹ (an important Vajradhātu Maṇḍala ritual text) and several works on the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*.

Yoga Tantra undergoes a brief renaissance with the activities of Bu ston during the first half of the fourteenth century. While the works in his twenty-six volume corpus cover a wide range of topics, he is considered to be a Yoga Tantra expert above all else. He composed approximately forty Yoga Tantra texts – both exegetical and liturgical works – that span some four volumes of his collected works. He was influential in central Tibet and also with the Yüan court in China, and with support from these quarters he constructed a Yoga Tantra temple at Zhalu (zhwa lu), his monastic seat near Zhikatsé (gzhis ka rtse) in west central Tibet; the murals of Yoga Tantra maṇḍalas survive to the present. He was also responsible for the design of the Kumbum (*sku 'bum*) Stūpa-Temple in Gyantsé (rgyal rtse), the main (top-floor) room of which is a Yoga Tantra chapel.

While Bu ston is Tibet's most celebrated proponent of Yoga Tantra and its influence would never again match the heights it reached during his lifetime, it continued to be an integral aspect of Tibetan religious life, as the widespread importance of Yoga Tantra in the training of prominent Tibetan religious figures indicates. For example, we find several Yoga Tantra lineages in the list of teachings received (*gsan yig*) of Bu ston's slightly younger contemporary, the important Nyingma figure Longchenpa (klong chen pa, 1308-63). His biography states that he received instruction in Yoga Tantra texts including the *Compendium of Principles* and the practice of its Vajradhātu Maṇḍala as well as the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* and its Sarvavid Vairocana practice.¹¹²

Yoga Tantra also figures prominently in the religious biography of Tsongkhapa (tsong kha pa, 1357-1419), the founder of the Gelukpa (*dge lugs pa*) school born just before Bu ston's death. Tsongkhapa wrote several Yoga Tantra works on texts including the *Compendium of Principles* and its Vajradhātu Maṇḍala practice, and on the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* and its Sarvavid Maṇḍala rite. He also wrote a section on Yoga Tantra in his *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path of Secret Mantra* (*sngags rim chen mo*).¹¹³ Additionally, the first section of his *Explanation of Ethics of Secret Mantra: Fruit Cluster of Feats* (*gsang sngags kyi tshul khrims kyi rnam bshad dngos grub kyi snye ma*), an exposition on the standards of tantric conduct, is structured around the presentation of tantric pledges in the *Vajrasékhara*

111 Rje btsun grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Rdo rje 'byung ba'i yig sna*, in *Sa skya pa'i bka' 'bum: The Complete Works of the Great Masters of the Sa Skya Sect of the Tibetan Buddhism*, comp. Bsod nams rgya mtsho, vol. 4 (1968, 112.2.1-147.4.6).

112 Kun-bzañ-'gyur-med-mchog-grup-dpal. *Thugs-sras Sprul-sku of Lha-luñ V, Kun mkhyen chos kyi rgyal po gter chen dri med 'od zer gyi rnam par thar pa cuñ zad spros pa no mtshar skal bzañ mchog gi dga' ston: A Brief Biography of Kun-mkhyen Kloñ-chen Rab-'byams-pa Dri-med-'od-zer (1308-1363) with an Account of the Rediscovered Teachings of His Prophesied Reembodiment Gter-chen Padma-gliñ-pa (1450-1521)* (1984, 16.3 and 17.3-17.4).

113 For an introduction to and translation of the Yoga Tantra section as well as commentaries on it, see H. H. the Dalai Lama, Dzong-ka-ba, and Hopkins (2005).

Tantra,¹¹⁴ an exegetical Yoga Tantra. Moreover, according to his biography, Tsongkhapa studied Yoga Tantra for a year at Zhalu Monastery (Bu ston's seat) in addition to training with scholars from Zhalu both before and after his residence there.¹¹⁵ Thus, he attached a great deal of importance to Yoga Tantra, as is clear not just from the commentaries he wrote on it but also from the considerable amount of time he devoted to its study.

Roughly contemporary with Tsongkhapa was the scholar Bodong Choklé Namgyel (bo dong phyogs las rnam rgyal, 1376-1451), who composed texts on individual Yoga Tantras and their practices as well as a general presentation of Yoga Tantra.¹¹⁶ Yoga Tantra traditions also continued in the Sakya school; for example, the scholar Gorampa Sönam Senggé (1425-69) wrote three texts on the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*, one of which is a commentary on the entire tantra.¹¹⁷

During the sixteenth century the prominent Kagyü hierarch Mikyö Dorje (mi bskyod rdo rje, 1507-54) – the eighth Karmapa – composed works on the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* and the Sarvavid Vairocana rite¹¹⁸ in addition to a lengthy exposition on Yoga Tantra, which he wrote in 1547.¹¹⁹ Slightly later, the Drikung Kagyü hierarch Chökyi Drakpa ('bri gung chos kyi grags pa, 1595-1659) wrote ritual texts for Sarvavid Vairocana Maṇḍala practice.¹²⁰ As late as the nineteenth century, Yoga Tantra texts were still being written by the likes of Losel Tenkyong (blo gsal bstan skyong, b. 1804),¹²¹ incarnate lama of Ribuk (ri sbug), the retreat connected with Zhalu Monastery and the place to which Bu ston retired when he stepped down as abbot of Zhalu. Thus, it appears that Yoga Tantra traditions continued with some vigor at Bu ston's monastic seat at least into the nineteenth century.

Yoga Tantra traditions continue to the present in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Initiation lineages persist for the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala in the Sakya and Geluk schools, although by all accounts the last master of Yoga Tantra was the Sakya lama Chopgyé Trichen Rinpoché (bco brgyad khri chen rin po che), who died in 2007. In terms of praxis, the only Yoga Tantra system performed with any frequency is the Sarvavid Vairocana practice of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations Tantra*, which is employed as a

114 I am grateful to Gareth Sparham for generously sharing with me the manuscript of his translation of and introduction to Tsongkapa's *Fruit Cluster of Feats*, before it was published as *Tantric Ethics* (2005). I was not previously aware of the text or its heavy reliance on the *Vajraśekhara Tantra*.

115 Gareth Sparham, "Introduction," in *An Explanation of Ethical Standards in Secret Mantra Called "Fruit Cluster of Accomplishments"* (unpublished manuscript).

116 Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, <http://www.tbrc.org>, P2627.

117 *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (van der Kuijp 1992, 16:110).

118 Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, www.tbrc.org, P385.

119 van der Kuijp (1992, 16:111).

120 Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, www.tbrc.org, P2666.

121 Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, www.tbrc.org, P857.

funeral rite in the schools that developed from the traditions originating in the second dissemination of Buddhism.¹²² As was likely also the case in India, the practical application of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* in death rites resulted in its popularity over time and persistence as the lone Yoga Tantra practiced widely today.

Conclusion

The significant role traditions classified as Yoga Tantra have played in shaping Tibetan Buddhism is evident from the earliest period of translation activity, when the *Compendium of Principles*, the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*, and other Yoga Tantras – together with their exegetical and ritual systems – were transmitted to Tibet. Several factors made these tantras attractive to the dynastic-period pro-Buddhist ruling elite: they represented the latest in Indian tantric technology, were adaptable as a royal Vairocana cult, and, in the case of the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*, offered a tantric system of funerary rites to compete with the indigenous Bön systems that were a fundamental part of Tibetan religious life. Certain elements of these tantras – in particular, those involving ritual violence and coercive black magic – raised the concern of imperial officials and elicited their proscription. This concern was borne out as antinomian and extreme tantric behavior appears to have flourished during the period of social disorder and dislocation that followed the collapse of the Tibetan dynasty.

At the beginning of the second dissemination of Buddhism, the *Compendium of Principles* and other texts included under the rubric of Yoga Tantra were seen as conservative in relationship to the violence and sex of later tantric developments and the deployment of such practices during the “dark” period. As such, the tantras of the Yoga class were used to reestablished authentic tantric lineages and “correct” modes of tantric behavior, as again the royal benefactors of Buddhism sought traditions that would promote social stability. This, in conjunction with their continued utility as a royal Vairocana cult and in funerary rites, resulted in Yoga Tantra traditions reaching the zenith of their influence in Tibet during the late tenth and eleventh centuries. Although this influence waned as subsequent tantric developments entered Tibet from India, the *Compendium of Principles* and other Yoga Tantra traditions continued to be an integral part of the scholastic and ritual training for Tibetan religious figures, and the funerary rites deriving from the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* maintain their place as one of the two main funeral systems in contemporary Tibetan culture.

¹²² I have heard second-hand that the late Khyunga Rinpoché, former retreat master of the Drikung Kagyü school, employed Sarvavid rituals frequently and for a wide variety of purposes (personal communication, Hun Lye, April, 2002).

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