

On the Very Idea of a Tantric Canon: Myth, Politics, and the Formation of the Bka' 'gyur¹

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Abstract: *This article explores the myths of massive root tantras of one hundred thousand or more stanzas, which are found in the literature surrounding most of the major tantric Buddhist traditions. These myths are curiously persistent, and arguably constitute a basis of authority for the tantric traditions. By portraying the tantras as revelations of much more extensive scriptural collections that are ancient or eternal, these myths legitimated the production of new Buddhist scriptures. They also impacted the formation of the canons of tantras, such as the Bka' 'gyur, and problematized their closure, insofar as Buddhist communities accepted the possibility of the continued revelation of the tantras.*

Introduction

Perhaps one of the most important and persistent ideas that underlies the tantric traditions of Buddhism is the notion that a complete collection of tantric scriptures, a Treasury of Tantras (Tantrakośa) or Collection of Tantras (Tantrapīṭaka), either did exist in the past, and/or continues to exist in an alternate level of reality. This notion was advanced as an important legitimating ideology at the initial stage of the development of tantric traditions and their literature, and it has remained a widespread belief up until the present day. I will argue that this belief, and the myths that express it, had a significant impact on the ways in which tantric traditions

¹ The title of this essay is intended as an homage to Steven Collins' ground breaking contribution to the study of Buddhist canons, "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon," *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 15 (1990): 89-126. While I cannot pretend that this essay makes anywhere nearly as substantial a contribution to the field, the title is not inappropriate, insofar as this essay explores the disjunction between ideology and practice in the canonical conceptions of esoteric Buddhist communities. A shorter version of this paper was presented at the 2006 annual meeting of the American Oriental Society, and a longer version was presented at the University of California, Santa Barbara in January 2009. I am grateful for the helpful feedback given by attendees of these presentations. I am particularly grateful for additional assistance provided by José Cabezón and Hubert Decler, which I will note below, as well as the helpful feedback provided by the anonymous peer reviewers.

constructed their histories and identities, and in the ways in which they organized and understood their canons of literature. This was particularly the case in Tibet, where it shaped the development of Tibetan canons of Buddhism, and bolstered those who resisted their closure, as it served as a legitimating myth for the continued “rediscovery” or revelation of tantric scriptures. As the canon of *tantras* actually expanded, one finds that the horizon of the myth also expanded, creating the impression of a treasury of knowledge that is always out of reach.²

The Myth of the Hundred Thousand Stanza Root Text

It appears that tantric forms of Buddhism first developed, as a self-conscious esoteric Greater Vehicle (Mahāyāna) movement distinct from the exoteric Greater Vehicle, during the mid- to late-seventh century. As generations of scholarship on the Chinese canon of Buddhism have shown, these traditions did not develop suddenly, *sui generis*, but developed out of the long and apparently universal Buddhist employment of incantation and ritual for the achievement of various ends, such as the curing of illness, protection from misfortune, the improvement of memory, and so forth. Texts dealing with various apotropaic and therapeutic incantations and rituals, which are present in the early strata of Buddhist literature, grew slowly over time, and gained increasing prominence in Greater Vehicle literature during the middle centuries of the first millennium CE. As Matthew Kapstein argued, “[i]t was only after the corpus had grown sufficiently massive to take on a life of its own however, that conditions came to favor the emergence of the Mantranaya and later the Vajrayāna as distinct ways of Buddhist practice.”³

Not surprisingly, the earliest esoteric Buddhist texts were compilations of the ritual lore that had been slowly developing during this period, texts such as the Vidyādhara Collection (Chi ming zhou cang 持明咒藏; Vidyādharapīṭaka), a text that was compiled during the mid-seventh century. The Vidyādhara Collection is, on the surface, much like the many “proto-Tantric” texts that were translated into Chinese from the fourth century onward.⁴ These typically consist of esoteric *mantra*

² In my study of Buddhist mythic discourse, I have followed Bruce Lincoln in seeking to uncover the political implications of this discourse. That is, my concern is not so much the veracity of the myth, or its origins, but rather its social and political functions. As Lincoln argued, myths tend to address “a problem rooted in the social reality that was shared by the people who told and listened to these stories.” See Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 190. In using the term “myth,” I by no means wish to imply that these narratives are false. Regarding their veracity I am completely agnostic. Indian Buddhists may very well have composed dozens of *tantras* of one hundred thousand or more stanzas that are now lost, like so much of the Indian Buddhist corpus; Vajrabodhi (Jingang Zhi 金剛智; 671-741) may very well have acquired the unabridged Vajraśekhara/vajroṣṇiṣa collection, and been forced to jettison it in a typhoon; Atiśa may very well have had his scriptural pride humbled by the *dākinīs*. As I have no firm evidence in support of the hypothesis that these things did happen, I do not advance this position. The reader may correctly apprehend, through the tone of my writing, that I am skeptical of these claims, but my skepticism is simply an expression of doubt, rather than conviction.

³ Matthew Kapstein, *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 245.

⁴ For discussions of this genre see Chou Yi-Liang, “Tantrism in China,” in *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia*, ed. Richard K. Payne (1945; repr., Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 33-60; and

or *dhāraṇī* as well as descriptions of the rituals in which they can be employed. However, this text also contains many of the features that would characterize esoteric Buddhist discourse, and seems to be one of the earliest texts produced as a self-consciously esoteric Buddhist scripture.⁵ From a critical perspective, these esoteric scriptures were “new” textual productions that were nevertheless deeply rooted in preexisting Buddhist traditions. However, as novelty was anathema in the South Asian cultural context, it was necessary to develop strategies to account for the sudden appearance of a new genre of Buddhist literature. Advocates of the new tradition found an answer in the older Greater Vehicle myths of the rediscovery of lost textual traditions.

The earliest version of this myth that I have located occurs in Yi Jing’s (義淨; 635-713) *Records of Eminent Monks of the Great Tang who Sought the Dharma in the Western Regions* (*Da Tang Xiyu qiu fa gao seng chuan* 大唐西域求法高僧傳). In this work he describes a Chinese monk named Dao Lin (道琳; ca. 650) who traveled to India during the seventh century, prior to Yi Jing’s arrival there in 671 CE.⁶ While in India, Dao Lin studied an esoteric Buddhist text, the Vidyādhara Collection. Yi Jing described it as follows:

Moreover, traditionally it is said that the Vidyādhara Collection in Sanskrit consisted of one hundred thousand stanzas, which in Chinese translation would amount to three hundred fascicles. Nowadays, if you search for [these texts] it is evident that many have been lost and few are complete. After the death of the great sage, Ārya Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva (Longshu 龍樹; ca. 200) in particular mastered them. At that time he had a disciple named Nanda (Nantuo 難陀) who was bright, very learned and thoroughly steeped in this text. He spent twelve years in West India, and single-mindedly practiced the *vidyā* (zhou 咒), whereupon he experienced [supernormal] effects. Whenever it was mealtime, his food descended from space. Also, once while reciting *vidyā* he prayed for a wish-fulfilling vase, which he obtained after a little while. And within the jar he found a *sūtra* (jing, 經), which delighted him. But since he failed to bind his vase with a *vidyā*, it disappeared. The Dharma Master Nanda, fearing that the *vidyās* would be scattered and lost, gathered them together to form a single compilation of about twelve thousand stanzas. Within each stanza he paired the text for the *vidyā* with the *mudrā* (yin 印). But although the letters and words [of this text] are the same [as

Matsunaga Yukei, “A History of Tantric Buddhism in India with Reference to Chinese Translations,” in *Buddhist Thought and Asian Civilization: Essays in Honor of Herbert V. Guenther*, ed. Leslie S. Kawamura and Keith Scott (Emeryville, CA: Dharma Publishing, 1977), 167-81.

⁵ The so-called “proto-tantric” or “mixed esoteric” texts are texts that contain features that would later come to characterize the tantric Buddhist movement, but without any signs of self-conscious esoteric or tantric Buddhist identity. While Buddhists had been producing and ritually deploying texts that contain elements later identified with tantric Buddhism, such as the ritual application of *mantra* or *mantra*-like formulae, it appears that the mid- to late-seventh century was the crucial period in which tantric Buddhism arose in South Asia as a self-conscious movement. See Ronald Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 24.

⁶ Yi Jing’s journey lasted more than two decades, from 671-695 CE. See Junjirō Takakusu, trans., *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago (A. D. 671-695) By I-Tsing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), xv.

those of ordinary writing], their meaning and usage are in fact different. There is actually no way that these can be understood without receiving the oral transmission. Later the commentator Master Dignāga (Chenna 陳那; ca. 480-540) saw that it was written so artfully that [it required] the intelligence of extraordinary people, since its import reached the limit of the sensible. Clasp[ing] the book he sighed, saying, “Had this sage applied his intellect to the science of reasoning (*hetuvidyā*; *yinming* 因明), what would there have been for me [to do]?” From this it is evident that the wise recognize their own capacity, while fools are blind to the differences between themselves and others!⁷

This account, composed right when tantric Buddhism was emerging as a self-consciously distinct movement, is remarkable for a number of reasons. It contains many of the legitimating strategies that would characterize this movement. Yi Jing’s account employs three strategies for the legitimation of this text, all of which are commonly deployed by later Tantric commentators. These include the claim that it derives from a massive root text, the claim that it was practiced by famous masters of the past, as well as the claim that its correct practice gives rise to miraculous powers.

Regarding the first, the choice of one hundred thousand stanzas would become a recurrent trope, with many tantric Buddhist scholars claiming that the root tantra (*mūlatantra*; *rtsa ba’i rgyud*) of their tradition ultimately derives from a mythical ur-text of this size, or of multiples of it. Presumably, the length typically chosen for the mythical root texts derives from a Greater Vehicle scriptural precedent, namely the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, the only extant Buddhist text that actually reaches this length. This work set the standard to which later Tantric Buddhists clearly aspired, but apparently never actually achieved. This was probably not due to lack of ability, but due to the ideological nature of this myth, for reasons that will be discussed in section two below.

⁷ Yi Jing (義淨), *Da Tang Xiyu qiu fa gao seng chuan* 大唐西域求法高僧傳 [Records of Eminent Monks of the Great Tang who Sought the Dharma in the Western Regions], T.2066.51.6c24-7a9: ying yun chi ming zhou zang. ran xiang cheng yun ci zhou zang. fan ben you shi wan song. tang yi ke cheng san bai quan. xian jin qiu mi duo shi shao quan. er da sheng mei hou a li ye na jia he shu na. ji long shu pu sa. te jing si yao. shi bi di zi jue hao nan tuo. cong ming bo shi zi yi si dian. zai xi yin du jing shi er nian. zhuan xin chi zhou sui bian gan ying. mei zhi shi shi cong kong xia. you song zhou qiu ru yi ping. bu jiu bian huo. nai yu ping zhong de jing huan xi. bu yi zhou jie qi ping sui qu. yu shi nan tuo fa shi kong zhou ming san shi. sui bian cuo ji he shi er qian song. cheng yi jia zhi yan. mei yu yi song zhi nei. li he zhou yin zhi wen. sui fu yan tong zi shi nai yi bie yong bie. zi fei kou xiang zhuan shou er shi jie wu wu yin. hou chen na lun shi jian qi zhi zuo gong shu ren zhi si ji qing duan. fu jing tan yue. xiang shi ci xian zhi yi yin ming zhe. wo fu he yan zhi you hu. shi zhi zhi shi shi ji zhi du liang. yu zhe an ta zhi qian shen yi (應云持明咒藏。然相承云此咒藏。梵本有十萬頌。唐譯可成三百卷。現今求覓多失少全。而大聖沒後阿離野那伽曷樹那。即龍樹菩薩。特精斯要。時彼弟子厥號難陀。聰明博識漬意斯典。在西印度經十二年。專心持咒遂便感應。每至食時食從空下。又誦咒求如意瓶。不久便獲。乃於瓶中得經歡喜。不以咒結其瓶遂去。於是難陀法師恐咒明散失。遂便撮集可十二千頌。成一家之言。每於一頌之內。離合咒印之文。雖復言同字同實乃義別用別。自非口相傳授而實解悟無因。後陳那論師見其製作功殊人智思極情端。撫經歎曰。嚮使此賢致意因明者。我復何顏之有乎。是知智士識己之度量。愚者聞他之淺深矣)。 See Stephen Hodge, *The Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 10.

The attribution of the text to Nāgārjuna is certainly no accident. This choice was almost surely inspired by his fame in Greater Vehicle circles, and particularly his role in the “rediscovery” of the Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā) scriptural collection.⁸ Yi Jing’s account also clearly expresses the notion of decay through time. While the great sage Nāgārjuna had mastered the one hundred thousand stanza text (indeed, one would need the very long life attributed to him to accomplish this!), his disciple Nanda compiled the more modest twelve thousand stanza text due to anxiety, presumably, about the stability of the Buddhist social context in which it would be studied and preserved, and thus compiled a shorter text that would be less vulnerable to fragmentation and loss. This text thus reproduces the venerable Buddhist anxiety about the decay of their traditions,⁹ and projects the desired aim, the complete revelation of the tantric gnosis, back into the glorious past when Nāgārjuna lived. This theme would also reappear again and again in tantric Buddhist discourse.

Many these elements are repeated by Kūkai (空海; 774-835) in his early-ninth-century *Introduction to the Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (*Dainichikyō kaidai* 大日經開題), as follows:

Overall this *sūtra* has three texts. The first, the Eternal Text That Accords with Reality (Fa er chang heng ben 法爾常恆本), is the *dharma maṇḍala* (*fa man tu luo* 法曼荼羅) of all Buddhas. The second, the Manifest Extensive Text (Fen liu guang ben 分流廣本), is the *sūtra* of one hundred thousand stanzas disseminated by Nāgārjuna. The third is the Abbreviated Text (Lve ben 略本) of just over three thousand stanzas. While this *sūtra* has three thousand stanzas in seven fascicles, in its brevity, however, it remains true to the extensive [text], expressing much with few [words]. A single word contains infinite import, and a single dot encases principles as numerous as atoms. Why then could the hundred-syllable wheel (*śatākṣaracakra*; *bai zi zi lun* 百字字輪) not completely express this *sūtra*? What principles are not manifest in its more than three thousand stanzas? The extensive and abbreviated [texts], though different, are of identical import.¹⁰

Here we see the elaboration of the myth into a three-fold structure of textual manifestation and decay. Kūkai adds an additional level of textuality, an ultimate

⁸ Regarding this myth see Joseph Walser, *Nāgārjuna in Context: Mahāyāna Buddhism & Early Indian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 73-75.

⁹ Regarding this see Jan Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Kūkai (空海), *Dainichikyō kaidai* [大日經開題; Introduction to the Mahāvairocana Sūtra], in T.2211.58.1a24-b1, and in the *Kōbō daishi zenshū*, ed. Hase Hōshū (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1909-1911), 4:2: ci jing zong you san ben. yi fa er chang heng ben zhu fo fa man tu luo shi ye. er fen liu guang ben long meng suo song chuan shi wan song jing shi ye. san lue ben you san qian yu song sui song wen san qian jing quan qi zhu. ran you yi lue she guang yi xiao chi duo. yi zi zhong han wu bian yi. yi dian nei tun chen shu li. he kuang bai zi zi lun ju shuo ci jing. san qian yu ji he li bu xian. guang lue sui shu li zheng shi yi (此淨總有三本。一法爾常恆本諸佛法曼荼羅是也。二分流廣本龍猛所誦傳十萬頌經是也。三略本有三千餘頌雖頌文三千經卷七軸。然猶以略攝廣以小持多。一字中含無邊義。一點內吞塵數理。何況百字字輪具說此經。三千餘偈何理不顯。廣略雖殊理政是一)。

level of an eternal, transmudane text, which arguably is a Buddhist transformation of Vedic strategies of textual legitimation.¹¹ This manifested in history as a massive ur-text, here again brought to light by Nāgārjuna. And lastly, the final manifestation is the more modest text that is actually available at the present time. While this text is arguably the result of a process of degeneration, Kūkai employs what might be termed a tantric philosophy of language to defend the shorter version of the text. If a single word possesses infinite signification, then clearly the depths of even the short version of the scripture can never be fully plumbed.¹²

While Kūkai does not elaborate here on his claim that the text ultimately derives from the Reality Body (*Dharmakāya*) Buddha's continuous preaching of the *dharmā* (*chos*), it probably derives from the Greater Vehicle Buddhist tendency to divorce their scriptures from the teaching activity of the historical Śākyamuni (560-480 BCE) Buddha, and to locate them instead in cosmic realms such as Akanīṣṭha. Indeed, a number of Greater Vehicle *sūtras* advanced the notion that the Buddhas and their teaching activities are not restricted to the past periods when they manifested on earth. Rather, they are always accessible in their Buddha lands, where their teaching of the *dharmā* continues without interruption.¹³

The notion that the revelation of the tantric scriptures is ongoing and timeless, occurring continuously in the pure lands of the Buddhas and (later) the *ḍākinīs*, effectively dehistoricizes the tradition, weakening somewhat the traditional tendency to look to the past as the locus of authority, and to focus on Śākyamuni and the transmission of "authentic" teachings attributed to him. This idea, obviously, could be used as a strategy for the legitimation of tantric Buddhists' ambitious project of textual production (qua "revelation") that was taking place during the seventh through ninth centuries, when the myths of the *tantras*' origins were also composed. In taking these myths seriously, tantric traditions, either wittingly or unwittingly, opened the door to the possibility of continuing revelation of tantric scriptures, and their associated bodies of practices, in the present and future times.

¹¹ There are in fact remarkable parallels between tantric Buddhist mythic discourse and that generated much earlier in India concerning the Vedas. These parallels include not only the claim that Vedas are, ultimately, eternal and supramundane, but also the notion that the Vedic literature preserved by the Brahmanic community is an incomplete and imperfect manifestation of this corpus. Regarding this see Sheldon Pollock, "'Tradition' as 'Revelation': Śruti, Smṛti, and the Sanskrit Discourse of Power," in *Boundaries, Dynamics, and Construction of Traditions in South Asia*, ed. Federico Squarcini (Florence: Florence University Press, 2005), 41-61.

¹² See Ryūichi Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 213-35.

¹³ There were several Greater Vehicle texts composed during the first half of the first millennium that teach meditative concentrations that supposedly enable the successful practitioner to enter states of deep concentration (*samādhi*) in which he or she can travel to a "Buddha land" (*buddhakṣetra*) and meet with the Buddhas who dwell there. These include the *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhi Sūtra*, a second-century Indian text, and also the *Amitāyurdhyāna Sūtra*, a fifth-century text that was likely composed in Central Asia. See Paul Harrison, "Buddhānusmṛti in the Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9 (1978): 35-57, and Julian Pas, *Visions of Sukhāvati: Shan-Tao's Commentary on the Kuan Wu-Liang-Shou-Fo Ching* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995).

Indian scholars, writing in the ninth century and onward, produced mythic accounts of their traditions' textual origins that were at least as sophisticated as Kūkai's account. The Tibetan scholar Bu ston rin chen grub (1290-1364) summarized nicely the arguments concerning the origin of the *Cakrasamvara Tantra* advanced by Bhavabhaṭṭa (ca. late ninth century) and Bhavyakīrti (Skal ldan grags pa; ca. 900), Indian scholars active during the late ninth and early tenth centuries, as follows:

According to Master Bhavabhaṭṭa, Bhavyakīrti, and so forth, the *Samvara Tantra* was achieved in time beginningless and taught by [Mahāvajradhara (Rdo rje 'chang chen po)] Buddha. Although other teachings decline due to the power of the eon of destruction, the *Samvara* does not decline because it exists practiced by the heroes and heroines who live at the twenty-four places. Thus, it was not spoken again by the sage, the son of Śuddhodana (ca. sixth century BCE); other teachings were first taught by him, and then declined in the intervening period.¹⁴

These commentators sought to claim a transhistorical locus for the text. Bhavabhaṭṭa's successor at Vikramaśilā, Bhavyakīrti, provided an even more elaborate argument than that which Bu ston reported, claiming that "The *Śrī Cakrasamvara*... exists without interruption in inexpressible Buddha lands, and it is experienced through meditative states, and so forth, by the heroes and heroines such as Īsvaraī (Dbang phyug ma)."¹⁵ This claim, if taken seriously, would undermine the notion that legitimate scripture derives from Śākyamuni, and would open the door to further revelation, by intrepid *yogīs* with the ability to visit these Buddha lands through meditative states, or who are otherwise graced with the blessings of the *ḍākinīs* who inhabit these celestial realms.

That said, the prestige of origination in the distant past, in the time of Śākyamuni, waned only slightly, and continued to have considerable prestige in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist circles. If this myth had any power to affect the massive edifice of Śākyamuni's prestige, it was only to dislodge it ever so slightly, creating an alternate pathway for the legitimation of tantric traditions. We see this pathway taken by the advocates of the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*, who did not claim any connection of this text or tradition with the "*Nirmāṇakāya*" Śākyamuni Buddha,

¹⁴ Bu ston rin chen grub, *Bde mchog nyung ngu rgyud kyi spyi rnam don gsal* [Illumination of the General Meaning of the Laghusamvara Tantra], in *The Collected Works of Bu ston*, ed. Lokesh Chandra (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1966), *cha* (6):54, fol. 27b.1-27b.4: *slob dpon bha ba bha dra dang / skal ldan grags pa sogs bde mchog gi rgyud ni/ thog ma med pa 'i dus su thub pa sangs rgyas nas gsungs la/ chos gzhan rnams bskal pa 'jig chags kyi dbang gis nub kyang bde mchog yul nyi shu rtsa bzhi gnas pa 'i dpa' bo dpa' mos nyams su blangs te gnas pa 'i phyir ma nub pas/ thub pa zas gtsang gi sras su gyur nas bskyar nas gsungs pa med/ chos gzhan rnams dang por gsungs kyang / bar skabs su nub pa 'i phyir/*.

For translations of the text in Bhavabhaṭṭa's and Bhavyakīrti's commentaries to which Bu ston refers, see David Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra: A Study and Annotated Translation* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2007), 30-4.

¹⁵ Bhavyakīrti (Skal ldan grags pa), *Śrīcakrasamvarapañjikā Śūramanojñā Nāma* [Dpal 'khor lo sdom pa 'i dka' 'grel dpa' bo 'i yid du 'ong ba zhes bya ba; Commentary on the Śrī Cakrasamvara Called "The Hero's Delight"], Toh. 1405, Sde dge Bstan 'gyur rgyud 'grel vol. *ma*, 3a. For an unabridged translation of this passage see Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 30.

but attributed its expression instead to the “Reality Body” Mahāvajradhara Buddha,¹⁶ and constructed lineage lists that place its revelation in relatively recent points in human history, with the *mahāsiddhas* Lūpa (ca. eighth-ninth century CE) and Saraha (ca. eighth-ninth century) traditionally considered the first human recipients of the tradition in the current era of time.¹⁷

The claim that the *tantras* were revealed by Buddhas other than Śākyamuni became quite commonplace. For example, the Indian commentator Indranāla (Brgya byin sdang po) related the following account of the origin of the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga-ḍākinījālasamvara Tantra*:

Vajradhara (Rdo rje 'chang), the embodiment of all Victors, at the beginning of the fortunate eon created the *maṇḍala* (*dkyil 'khor*), emanated by means of his compassion, in order to purify things in the animate and inanimate worlds. Thinking that he should clearly explain the import of the *tantra* in accordance with his previously formed intention to teach, he manifested the *maṇḍala* on the peak of Mount Sumeru, in order to please his fortunate followers and deity hosts. He progressively explained the yoga of purification and so forth, in accordance with the Great *Primal Tantra* (*Āditantra*; *Dang po 'i rgyud*), and so forth.¹⁸

By the eleventh century, it became *de rigueur* for Indian Buddhist scholars to claim that the *tantras* they were commenting upon derived from a massive root text. At this time we begin to see the inflation of the size of the mythic root *tantras*, a move that may have been competitively motivated.¹⁹ Around this time some intrepid commentators began to provide quotations from these texts, most likely to substantiate their claims. For example, Indranāla supported his claim that the

¹⁶ This claim is made by a number of *Cakrasamvara* commentators; see for example Bhavabhāṭṭa's comments, translated in Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 32. Note that Kūkai also claimed that esoteric Buddhist scriptures were continuously preached by the Reality Body Buddha, as noted above. This appears to have been a widespread claim throughout the ninth-century esoteric Buddhist world.

¹⁷ See, for example, the accounts of the *Cakrasamvara* lineage provided by Gzhon nu dpal, in George N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 380-97.

¹⁸ Indranāla (Brgya byin sdang po), *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga-ḍākinījālasamvara Tantrārthodaraṭīkā* [*Dpal sangs rgyas thams cad dang mnyam par sbyor ba mkha' 'gro sgyu ma bde mchog gi rgyud kyi don rnam par bshad pa zhes bya ba*; Detailed Exegesis of the Import of the Sarvabuddhasamāyoga-ḍākinījālasamvara Tantra], Toh. 1659, D rgyud 'grel vol. ra, 245a.5-245a.7: */rgyal ba kun gyi bdag nyid rdo rje 'chang /bskal pa bzang po 'i thog mar rab sprul nas/ /snod bcud brtan g.yo dngos po dag bya 'i phyir/ /thugs rjes sprul pa 'i dkyil 'khor snang bar mdzad/ /skal ldan rjes 'jug lha tshogs gzung bya 'i phyir/ /sngon byung ston pa 'i dgongs mdzad rjes mthun par/ /mtshon cha 'i rgyud don gsal bar bstan dgongs nas/ /ri rab rtse mor dkyil 'khor rnam sprul zhing / /dang po 'i rgyud chen la sogs rim bzhin du/ /dag pa 'i rnal 'byor la sogs rim bzhin bshad/.*

¹⁹ For example, the mythic root *tantra* for the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*, which was called the *Abhidhāna Tantra* (*Mngon brjod rgyud*), was typically claimed to be one hundred thousand stanzas in length. It was thus often referred to as the *Discourse in One Hundred Thousand [Stanzas]* (*Lakṣābhidhāna*). However, its size gradually inflated through time. The ninth-century *Dākārṇava Tantra* (*Mkha' 'gro rgya mtsho 'i rgyud*) claimed that it was three hundred thousand stanzas in length, while the eleventh-century commentator Vīravajra (Dpa' bo rdo rje) outlandishly claimed that the hundred thousand stanza text was abridged from a larger text with three hundred thousand stanzas, which was in turn derived from an inconceivably massive text with one hundred thousand chapters. Regarding these claims see Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 31.

Sarvabuddhasamāyoga Tantra was derived from a larger root text by providing quotations from it.²⁰ He did so as follows:

The *Primal Buddha Tantra* states [the following]: “The meaning of the *mantratāntra* is very hard to understand, but it is realized with recourse to the explanatory *tantras* such as the ancillary [*tantras*], and so forth. Seeking out the lineage instructions, one should give rise to, settle, and realize a vast expanse of certainty. The intelligent beings of the future will take delight in the *sādhana* (*sgrub thabs*) and the abbreviated commentaries, so to begin with they were condensed at my command: uphold them reverentially so that they will last long.”²¹

This tendency was even more pronounced in the literature of the *Wheel of Time* tradition, whose adherents claimed that their root *tantra*, “*Wheel of Time Light*” (*Laghukālacakra*), derived from the much larger *Primal Buddha Tantra*. One of the earliest commentators in the *Wheel of Time* tradition was Vajrapāṇi (Phyag na rdo rje), who produced a masterful commentary on the opening chapter of the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*.²² His commentary is replete with quotations from the massive root *tantras*, including the one-hundred-thousand-stanza *Abhidhāna Tantra*, the twenty-five-thousand-stanza *Esoteric Communion Tantra* (*Guhyasamāja Tantra*; *Gsang ba 'dus pa'i rgyud*), the *Primal Buddha Tantra*, and the sixteen-thousand-stanza *Magical Net Tantra* (*Māyājāla Tantra*).²³ Collectively,

²⁰ While I have no data concerning Indranāla, I would tentatively date him to the eleventh century, largely on the basis of similarity between his work and the works of the early *Wheel of Time* (*Kālacakra*; *Dus 'khor*) commentators, such as the claim that the text derives from the *Primal Buddha Tantra* (*Ādibuddha Tantra*; *Dang po'i sangs rgyas kyi rgyud*) and the provision of quotations from it. This feature, along with his invocation of classifications of explanatory *tantras* – which also appears to be relatively late – suggests that Indranāla was active no earlier than the eleventh century. If the *paṇḍita* Vidyākara (ca. eleventh century) who assisted in its translation is the same eleventh-century Vidyākara who compiled the famous poetry collection, this would confirm this estimate. See Sde dge Bstan 'gyur *rgyud 'grel* vol. ra, 389a.

²¹ Indranāla, *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga-dākinijālasamvara Tantrārthodaraṭīkā*, 246b.3-246b.4: /de ltar dang po'i sangs rgyas rgyud las kyang / /gsang sngags rgyud don shin tu rtogs dka' ba/ /bshad rgyud cha mthun sogs kyi sgrub byas te/ /de nyid brgyud pa'i gdams ngag lags btsal bas/ /nges pa'i klong bskyed thag bcad rtogs par bya/ /de don ma 'ongs 'gro ba blo ldan pa/ /sgrub thabs bsdus don 'grel sogs 'thad pa yis/ /legs brtsams rnam par bsdus byas nga yi bka' / /yun ring gnas phyir gus par gzung bar gyis/ /zhes/.

²² This work is one of the three “*bodhisattva* commentaries” that achieved great fame in Tibet, the others being Vajragarba's *Commentary on the Concise Import of the Hevajra Tantra* (*Hevajratantrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā*), and Puṇḍarīka's *Stainless Light* (*Vimalaprabhā*) commentary on the *Laghukālacakra Tantra*. These works were all produced by authors deeply committed to the *Wheel of Time* tradition, and their audacity is indicated by the fact that only one of the three focuses on the *Laghukālacakra* itself. Regarding these authors and their works see Claudio Ciczuzza, *The Laghutantraṭīkā by Vajrapāṇi: A Critical Edition of the Sanskrit Text* (Roma: Istituto Italiano Per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2001), 11-26. See also my essay “The Influence of the Kālacakra: Vajrapāṇi on Consort Meditation,” in *As Long As Space Endures: Essays on the Kālacakra Tantra in Honor of H. H. the Dalai Lama*, ed. Edward A. Arnold (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2009), 193-202; and Francesco Sferra's essay “The Elucidation of True Reality: The Kālacakra Commentary by Vajragarba on the Tattvapaṭāla of the Hevajratāntra,” in Arnold, *As Long As Space Endures*, 93-126.

²³ See, respectively, Ciczuzza, *The Laghutantraṭīkā*, 49, 123, 126, 127. I find his quotation from the sixteen thousand stanza *Magical Net* particularly interesting. Among the texts he quotes, it is the most likely to have actually existed, and not only because of its relatively smaller size. I wonder if this might be a reference to the *Magical Net* collection of eighteen *tantras*, considerable evidence concerning

these quotations create the impression of an idealized tantric canon, replete with massive ur-texts, at the author's disposal.²⁴ This is an impression that perfectly fits a text supposedly authored not only by a bodhisattva, but by Vajrapāṇi himself, who played a major role in the origin myths of many of the *tantras*, serving either as the teacher or interlocutor. These features clearly heighten the authority of the text, and undoubtedly contributed to its popularity in Tibet.

Tantric Canons: Withdrawals from the *Ḍākinīs'* Treasury

While we have no evidence that Buddhist communities (of this world and historical era at least!) actually produced a *tantra* that was one hundred thousand stanzas long, there were several attempts, beginning in the early eighth century, to compile collections or canons of *tantras*. Not surprisingly, the number one hundred thousand resurfaces in connection with these attempts.

The best known of these attempts are the collections of eighteen *tantras* recorded in Chinese and Tibetan sources. In the Rnying ma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, this was referred to as the "Eighteen Great Tantra Collection" (Rgyud sde chen po bco brgyad)²⁵ of the Mahāyoga class or the "Eighteen Tantras of the Māyājāla Class" (Sgyu 'phrul 'dra ba'i rgyud sde bco brgyad).²⁶ East Asian Buddhists likewise partially preserved a similar but not identical collection called the "Vajrasekhara" or "Vajroṣṇiṣa" (Jin gang ding 金剛訂) collection.²⁷

which has been preserved, as will be discussed in section three below. A collection of eighteen *tantras* could easily reach sixteen thousand stanzas, which would result in an average of 889 stanzas per text. For comparison, the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*, which is relatively short, contains approximately seven hundred stanzas.

²⁴ To my knowledge, none of the massive root *tantras* that are quoted in texts such as Vajrapāṇi's currently exist, *in toto* in this world, at least. While I am personally skeptical that any of these texts actually existed, it is of course possible that some may have been composed and then lost. Probably the candidate that seems most likely to have existed is the *Primal Buddha Tantra* qua *Mūlakālacakra-tantra*. Perhaps not incidentally, this text was traditionally thought to consist of twelve thousand stanzas, making it one of the smallest of legendary root tantras. There are a considerable number of quotations from this text, as well a substantial fragment. This fragment is the *Instruction on Consecration* (*Sekoddeśa; Dbang mdor bstan pa*; Toh. 361), which is widely believed to be a section of the otherwise-lost twelve-thousand-stanza *Paramādibuddhatantra*. Regarding this see Giacomella Orofino, *Sekoddeśa: A Critical Edition of the Tibetan Translations* (Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente), 1994. See also John Newman, "The Paramādibuddha (the Kālacakra Mūlatantra) and Its Relation to the Early Kālacakra Literature," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 30 (1987): 93-102.

²⁵ See Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, trans. and ed. Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 1991), 2:222.

²⁶ See Kenneth Eastman, "The Eighteen Tantras of the Tattvasamgraha/Māyājāla," *Transactions of the International Conference of Orientalists in Japan* 26 (1981): 95-6.

²⁷ The Rnying ma tradition preserved translations of all eighteen texts in their canon of *tantras*; see Kaneko Eiichi, *Ko-Tantora Zenshū Kaidai Mokuroku* (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1982), 65-6. As will be discussed below, the full collection of eighteen *tantras* was only partially preserved in East Asia, although Amoghavajra (Bukong Jingang 不空金剛; 705-74) composed an index of it in the mid-eighth century. These collections have been thoroughly compared, and are clearly similar but not identical. They only share three texts in common, the *Esoteric Communion*, the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga*, and the *Śrīparamādya Tantras*. They represent variant collections, which likely shared at some point common origin in India. See Rolf Giebel, "The Chin-kang-ting ching yü-ch'ieh shih-pa-hui chih-kuei:

Rnying ma sources provide fascinating accounts of the origin of this collection; they were actually revealed by Vajrapāṇi to King Ja, who is usually identified with King Indrabhūti. According to some sources, they literally fell from heaven in the king's lap while he was practicing meditation in accordance with the lower *tantras*.²⁸ This story was also recounted by the Indian scholar Jñānamitra in his *Commentary on the Method of the Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred and Fifty Stanzas (Prajñāpāramitānaya-śatapañcāśatikā-ṭīkā; 'Phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa tshul brgya lnga bcu pa 'i 'grel pa)*, as follows:

Regarding the history of this scripture, when the Buddha had previously lived for eighty years in the human world, there was not yet in the human world of Jambudvīpa anyone and who were suitable vessels for practice in the vehicles of the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga, Esoteric Communion Tantra*,²⁹ and so forth. These scriptures existed at that time in Cāturmahārājākāyika (Rgyal chen ris bzhi pa), Trāyastriṃśa (Sum cu rtsa gsum), Tuṣita (Dga' ldan) [heavens], and so forth, where there were gods and fortunate *bodhisattvas* who were suitable vessels. Later, after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, there were some persons in the retinue of King Indrabhūti of Za hor who had faith in the miraculous *dharma*, who were destined for the practice of this vehicle and who were suitable vessels [for this]. The eighteen classes [of scripture] such as the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga* thus came to Za hor through the blessings of Vajrapāṇi.³⁰

This collection, then, was seen as having celestial origin, appearing in the world through Vajrapāṇi's blessings. These stories thus demonstrate the pervasive notion that the true tantric canon exists in the heavens or pure lands, and that fragments of it are periodically revealed to exemplary individuals in fortunate human communities.

An Annotated Translation," *Journal of Naritasan Institute for Buddhist Studies*, 18 (1995), 111-115. See also Eastman, "The Eighteen Tantras of the Tattvasaṃgraha/Māyājāla," 95-6.

²⁸ Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 1.459. There are, however, many versions of this story. For example, the *Bod kyi rgyal po srong btsan sgam po 'i bka' chems gser gyi 'phreng ba* relates how a rain of scriptures and precious objects fell from heaven and were gathered up by King Ja of Magadha. He placed them in a precious basket, which he hung on a banner. The *dākas* and *dākinīs*, however, caused them to be blown by the wind of *jñāna* onto the roof of the palace of the Tibetan King Lha tho tho ri (ca. fifth century). See Per K. Sørensen, *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography, the Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies, An Annotated Translation of the XIVth Century Tibetan Chronicle: rGyal-rabs gsal-ba 'i me-long* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994, 534-5.

²⁹ Here I read *Guhyasamañca* as *Guhyasamāja*.

³⁰ Jñānamitra, *Prajñāpāramitānaya-śatapañcāśatikā-ṭīkā* [*'Phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa tshul brgya lnga bcu pa 'i 'grel pa*; *Commentary on the Method of the Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred and Fifty Stanzas*], Toh. 2647, Sde dge rgyud 'grel vol. ju, 272b.7-273a.3: *gsung rab 'di 'i lo rgyus bshad na/ [273a] sngon sangs rgyas mi yul na lo brgyad cu bzhugs pa 'i tshe na/ sarba buddha sa ma yo ga dang / guhya sa manyitsa la sogs pas 'dul zhing theg pa de dag gi snod du gyur pa 'dzam bu 'i gling gi mi yul na med pas rgyal chen ris bzhi pas sum cu rtsa gsum dang / dga' ldan la sogs pa 'i gnas na lha rnam dang bskal pa bzang po 'i byang chub sems dpa' la sogs pa snod du 'gyur nas de 'i tshe mdo sde de ni bzhugs so/ /slad kyis sangs rgyas mya ngan las 'das pa 'i 'og tu za hor gyi rgyal po 'khor dang bcas pa ngo mtshar du chos la dad pa dag cig 'dug pa theg pa de 'i 'dul skal du gyur cing snod du gyur nas/ sarba buddha sa ma yo ga la sogs pa sde chen po bco brgyad phyag na rdo rje 'i byin gyi rlabs kyis za hor gyi yul du gshegs pa dang /.*

For a translation of the larger passage in which this text is embedded see Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 242-3.

Such claims of celestial origin also became quite commonplace. Many of the *siddhas* (*sgrub thob*), who are key figures in the legends about the early dissemination of the *tantras*, are believed to have received their texts via revelation by divine figures such as Vajrapāṇi and Vajradhara. Often such revelation required travel to inaccessible realms. For example, Nāgārjuna is reputed to have recovered scriptures sealed within an iron *stūpa* (*mchod rten*) in Southern India.³¹ The *Samputatilaka Tantra* was recovered by the *siddha* Kāṅha (ca. ninth century) from the *ḍākinī* Bhadri in “Pretapuri,” somewhere on the Tibetan plateau.³² A particular striking example of such recovery is relayed in the origin myths of the *Kṛṣṇayamāri Tantra*. These accounts claim that Vilāsavajra (Sgeg pa’i rdo rje; ca. eighth century)³³ traveled to Oḍiyāna, where the *ḍākinīs* gave him temporary access to a treasury of *tantras*, permitting him to withdraw as many texts as he could memorize in seven days. He was able to memorize during this time the *Kṛṣṇayamāri Tantra* and several other texts.³⁴

East Asian Buddhists also preserved accounts of a collection of eighteen *tantras* known as the *Assembly of the Eighteen Adamantine Pinnacle Yoga Sūtras* (*Jin gang ding jing yu jia shi ba hui* 金剛頂經瑜伽十八會). This Vajraśekhara/vajroṣṇīṣa³⁵ collection reportedly consisted of one hundred thousand stanzas. Amoghavajra composed an index to this collection that describes in some detail all eighteen of the texts in the collection.³⁶ Vajrabodhi, one of the central figures in the eighth-century dissemination of esoteric Buddhism in China, claimed that he had secured a copy of this collection, but was forced to jettison it when the boat carrying him to China was struck by a typhoon.³⁷ He related his journey to his disciple Amoghavajra, who composed a written account of it.

This account describes Vajrabodhi’s three year sea voyage from Sri Lanka to China, which concluded when he reached Guangdong in 719 C.E. This voyage

³¹ Examples of such myths include the well-known “Legend of the Iron Stūpa,” which narrates the revelation of the *Mahāvairocanaṅghisambodhi* and *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṅgraha Sūtras* by Vajradhara Buddha to Nāgārjuna within an iron *stūpa*. Regarding this narrative see Charles Orzech, “Legend of the Iron Stūpa” in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 314-7.

³² See David Templeman, *Tāranātha’s Life of Kṛṣṇācārya/Kāṅha* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1989), 9-10.

³³ I follow here Ronald Davidson in using the attested Sanskrit name Vilāsavajra, rather than the hypothetical reconstructions Lalitavajra or Līlāvajra. See his “The Litany of the Names of Mañjuśrī: Text and Translation of the Mañjuśrīmāmasaṅgīti,” in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein*, ed. Michel Strickmann (Brussels: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises, 1981), 6-7 n. 18.

³⁴ See Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, trans., *Tāranātha’s History of Buddhism in India* (1970; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), 243. Many thanks to Professor José Cabezon for bringing this narrative to my attention.

³⁵ Note that the Chinese term *Jin gang ding* is ambiguous. It was reconstructed as Vajraśekhara on the basis of the text of that title preserved in the Tibetan canon. However, Giebel points out that Kūkai indicated that the Sanskrit equivalent to *Jin gang ding* was Vajra-uṣṇīṣa (“The Chin-kang-ting ching,” 109). Given the long tradition of identifying it with the title Vajraśekhara, I have provided both names when discussing it here.

³⁶ See Rolf Giebel’s annotated translation of this text in his “The Chin-kang-ting ching.”

³⁷ Regarding Vajrabodhi and his significance see Chou Yi-Liang, “Tantrism in China,” 47-51.

was almost disastrous, and resulted in Vajrabodhi losing the hundred thousand stanza version of the Vajraśekhara/vajroṣṇīṣa *tantra* collection that he was carrying with him in a typhoon. Amoghavajra recorded the following account of the story:

I set out from the Western Lands by way of the southern seas with a fleet of more than thirty great ships, each of which had five or six hundred passengers. At one point, when we had reached the middle of the sea while crossing the ocean, we hit a typhoon. The other ships, together with their passengers, were scattered and sank. The ship on which I was traveling was also about to sink. I had been keeping the two scriptures³⁸ close to me in order to worship them. When the captain saw that the ship was about to sink, he had all of the things on board cast into the sea. At that time I was terrified and forgot to put away the scriptures. As a result, the hundred-thousand-stanza [text] was cast into the ocean, and only the abbreviated text remained. I then began to mentally recite and perform the rite for mitigating disaster, to end the typhoon. The wind and water became calm for more than one *li* (里) around the ship.³⁹

This account represents one of the few eyewitness accounts of a one-hundred-thousand-stanza tantric text. Given the fact that it was lost, while the abbreviated version of the text was saved, there is room for doubt concerning the existence of this larger text, and this question has vexed a generation of scholars of Japanese esoteric Buddhism.⁴⁰ While the independent Tibetan tradition confirms that there was at least one collection of eighteen *tantras* circulating in India during the eighth century, the controversy has centered on the plausibility of a one hundred thousand stanza version of the text.

While this question has greatly concerned advocates of the Shingon school, for the purpose of this essay, the question of the story's veracity is irrelevant. This is because the label "one hundred thousand" quickly came to function in esoteric Buddhist discourse as an empty signifier, a signifier without a signified. As Ernesto Laclau argued, such signifiers are "signifiers of lack, an absent totality."⁴¹ In this case the complete tantric canon is the absent totality required by tantric discourse,

³⁸ That is, the full and abridged versions of the Vajraśekhara/vajroṣṇīṣa collection.

³⁹ Amoghavajra (Bukong Jingang 不空金剛), *Jin gang ding jing da yu jia mi mi xin di fa men yi jue* 金剛頂經大瑜伽祕密心地法門義訣 [The Mahāyoga of the Vajraśekhara/Vajroṣṇīṣa Sūtra, The Dharma Gate to the Secret Basis of Mind Ritual Manual], T.1798.39.808b17-23: wo cong zi guo fa lai du yu nan hai qi you da chuan san shi yu zhi. yi yi jie you wu liu bai ren. yi shi tong guo da hai xing zhi hai zhong feng yu da feng. zhu chuan ji ren ping jie piao mo. wo suo fu chuan yi yu jiang mo. er shi liang ben jing jia chang jin yu shen shou chi gong yang. qi shi chuan zhu jian chuan yu mo. chuan shang zhu wu jie zhi hai zhong. dang shi bu zhu wang shou jing jia. qi bai qian song yi zhi hai zhong wei cun lue ben. er shi wo fa xin nian zuo chu zai fa da feng bian zhi. qu chuan zhou hui ke yi li yu feng shui bu dong (我從西國發來度於南海其有大船三十餘隻。一一皆有五六百人。一時同過大海行至海中達於大風。諸船及人並皆漂沒。我所附船亦欲將沒。爾時兩本經夾常近於身受持供養。其時船主見船欲沒。船上諸物皆擲海中。當時怖懼忘收經夾。其百千頌亦擲海中唯存略本。爾時我發心念作除災法大風便止。去船周迴可一里餘風水不動)。

⁴⁰ See Giebel, "The Chin-kang-ting ching," 110-1.

⁴¹ See Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipations* (London: Verso, 1996), 42.

without which it could not function.⁴² I would go so far as to argue that even if Vajrabodhi had such a text, the logic of tantric discourse would require that it be jettisoned. This concept helps us to understand why tantric Buddhists continued to write about these massive texts and collections, but apparently never produced one, even though they certainly could have done so.⁴³ The continuing invocation of the idea points to its political nature. As Laclau argued, “This relation by which a particular content becomes the signifier of the absent communitarian fullness is exactly what we call a *hegemonic relationship*. The presence of empty signifiers – in the sense that we have defined them – is the very condition of hegemony.”⁴⁴ That is, this myth, this very idea of a tantric canon that is unrealizable in the present, became one of the central strategies for the legitimation of authority of the tantric traditions. Tantric Buddhist institutions, based as they are on lineage-based claims to authority, presuppose limited and limiting lines of access to this store of gnosis, which manifest in history as loci of authority. The *gurus* and *bla mas* are portrayed as authentic nodes in the lineage transmission. It is thus a conservative ideology, one that displaces the source of authority to an inaccessible place – the pure lands, Khecarīpada, Shambhala, the distant past, and so forth – and then advances a hierarchal structure of authority that serves to limit access to that source.

In support of this argument, I would like to bring forward as a paradigmatic example a curious story told and retold about Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna (980-1054), one of the preeminent figures in the New Tradition (*Gsar ma pa*) “restoration” of Buddhism in Tibet. He was famed as the great scholar for whom the pious king, Lha bla ma ye shes ’od (947-1024), sacrificed his life in order to bring him to Tibet. Atiśa in turn agreed to travel to Tibet to ensure the survival of the *dharmā* there, despite the warning of the goddess Tārā (Sgrol ma) that doing so would shorten his lifespan.⁴⁵ This story is the story of the humbling of Atiśa’s pride. As might be expected with a narrative that lies at the heart of a hegemonic ideology, it appears to be both pervasive yet strangely absent, in the secondary literature at least.⁴⁶

Atiśa’s biography, the *Detailed Hagiography*, in what is clearly an effort to establish his authority, detailed an extended list of all of the *tantras* known by

⁴² Laclau also wrote that “there can be empty signifiers within the field of signification because any system of signification is structured around an empty place resulting from the impossibility of producing an object which, none the less, is required by the systematicity of the system.” Laclau, *Emancipations*, 40.

⁴³ While composing a one hundred thousand stanza text would not be easy, such composition is not unprecedented, as the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* attests.

⁴⁴ Laclau, *Emancipations*, 43. Italics in original.

⁴⁵ Regarding the story of Atiśa’s journey to Tibet see Hubert Decler, “Atiśa’s Journey to Tibet,” in *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 157-77. See also Alaka Chattopadhyaya, *Atiśa and Tibet* (1967; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), 377-84.

⁴⁶ It appears to be a very well known story, one that had been recounted to me a number of times, by various *dge bshes* and *bla mas*. However, there is no mention of it in secondary sources such as Chattopadhyaya’s *Atiśa and Tibet*. I am thus deeply indebted to Hubert Decler for not only identifying the source of the narrative – Atiśa’s early biography, the *Detailed Hagiography* (*Rnam thar rgyas pa*) – but also providing me with his own unpublished translation of the narrative.

Atiśa.⁴⁷ This list is a treasure trove of data concerning early Tibetan beliefs concerning the canon of *tantras*. For example, in relating the numerous scriptures known by Atiśa, it presents an unusual list of seven doxographical categories,⁴⁸ which points to the relative lateness of the “standard” fourfold classification of *tantras*.⁴⁹ The list concludes with the “ultimate” category, the Yoginītantras (Rnal ’byor ma’i rgyud), as follows:

With respect to the unexcelled Yogatantras, Atiśa knew, without exception, an uncountable [number] but if we examine them at length, [they consisted of] twelve thousand *tantras* of five hundred thousand [stanzas] and so forth, [such as] the *Śrī Khasama*, the great one-hundred-thousand[-stanza] *Cakrasamvara*, the *Catuspīṭha*, the *Mahāmāyā*,⁵⁰ the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga*, the *Buddhakāpala*, and the *Hevajra*.⁵¹

Apparently, in an effort to illustrate Atiśa’s breadth of knowledge, the reader is treated to a hyperbolic list of the huge number of massive texts that he knew; the “twelve thousand *tantras* of five hundred thousand [stanzas] and so forth,” represents his knowledge of only one of the seven classes of *tantra* presented by this text; elsewhere the reader is informed that he knew 100,455 *tantras* overall. This text is almost certainly the result of centuries of widespread belief in the existence of massive root *tantras* by Indian and Tibetan Buddhists.

One of the most important implications of the myth of the tantric canon is the idea that our knowledge of *tantras* is always fragmentary and incomplete, which leaves open the door to further revelation, and creates the space for the construction of a hierarchy to mediate access to the inaccessible store of wisdom. Atiśa’s biography thus cannot simply relate his knowledge without contextualizing it by demonstrating its limitations. After astounding the reader with the overwhelming immensity of

⁴⁷ According to the colophon, the *Detailed Hagiography* was authored by Mchims thams cad mkhyen pa, who was also known as Mchims nam mkha’ grags (1210-1285). See Helmut Eimer, ed., *Rnam Thar Rgyas Pa: Materialein zu einer Biographie des Atiśa (Dīpaṅkaraśrījñāna)*, Asiatische Forschungen 67 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2 vols, 1979), 2.390, section 447. Regarding this, see Leonard van der Kuijp, “Udanavarga, Vol.3, Tibetischer Text. By Champa Thupten Zongtse,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114 (1994): 124-26.

⁴⁸ The text classifies the *tantras* as follows: (1) Bya ba’i rgyud (Kriyātantra), (2) Spyod pa’i rgyud (Caryātantra), (3) Rtog pa’i rgyud (Kalpatantra), (4) Gnyis ka’i rgyud (Ubhayatantra), (5) Rnal ’byor gyi rgyud (Yogatantra), (6) Rnal ’byor chen po’i rgyud (Mahāyogatantra), and (7) Rnal ’byor bla na med pa’i rgyud (Anuttarayogatantra). While the latter has no known Sanskrit equivalent (*Anuttarayogatantra is, apparently, an unattested back-translation), it is interesting to note that here the category Anuttarayogatantra is used to refer exclusively to the Yoginī or Mother *Tantras*. See Eimer, *Rnam Thar Rgyas Pa*, 2.46-51, sections 064-072.

⁴⁹ For an excellent survey of early Tibetan tantric doxographies see Jacob Dalton, “A Crisis of Doxography: How Tibetans Organized Tantra during the 8th-12th Centuries,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 115-81.

⁵⁰ Here I read *Ma hā ma ya* as *Mahāmāyā*.

⁵¹ My translation from the *Detailed Hagiography*, section 072 (Eimer, *Rnam Thar Rgyas Pa*, 2.50-51): *rnal ’byor bla na med pa’i rgyud la dpal nam mkha’ dang mnyam pa dang / ’bum pa chen po ’khor lo sdom pa dang / rdo rje gdan bzhi dang / ma hā ma ya/ sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor dang / sangs rgyas thod pa dang / dgyes pa rdo rje/ ’bum phrag lnga la sogs pa’i rgyud sde stong phrag bcu gnyis rgyas par phyen na grangs med pa bzhugs pa jo bos ma lus par mkhyen/*

Atiśa's knowledge about the *tantras*, a knowledge which would have far exceeded anything achieved or achievable by the text's Tibetan readers, it then goes on to relate a story that re-asserts the myth of the fragmentary tantric canon, thus assuring the reader of the incompleteness of her or his own knowledge.

Although it is certain that he knew these *tantras*, [the *tantras*] which he learned about in a dream one night, aside from those which he had learned at other times and occasions, was beyond his own and our intellectual understanding. Now, once he offered to the *paṇḍita* Vāgīśvarakīrti (late tenth century), the gatekeeper of Somapuri, a handful of golden *maṇipatras*, and he made twelve symbolic prostrations to him. It is said that he then listened to 100,455 *tantras*, among which were the six *tantras* of definitive meaning, entirely taught in one session.

Then pride arose in Jo bo's mind, with the thought "No one is more learned than I in the Greater Vehicle or in *mantra*." Thereupon one night, in a dream, many *dākinīs*, [presented] many volumes of scriptures on *mantra* before him, and showed him many *tantras*, saying "Do you know this *tantra*, called so-and-so?" There were many *tantras* about which Jo bo had not even heard the titles. There were a few volumes off to the side. When I asked, "What are these?" they said "These are the ones that you know!" Then his pride was broken.⁵²

This narrative simultaneously accomplishes two important aims. One is establishing Atiśa's authority, his status as a *paṇḍita* par excellence, ideally suited to guide the Tibetans. It thus attributes to him an incomprehensibly vast knowledge of the *tantras*. Yet, at the same time, it preserves the underlying ideological structure of tantric discourse, by re-setting the goal, once again placing the Treasury of Tantras safely out of reach. The message here is indeed that, for tantric Buddhists, scholastic pride is unwarranted. No matter how many *tantras* one knows, one's knowledge will always be dwarfed by the supramundane Treasury of Tantras preserved by the *dākinīs*.

⁵² My translation from *Detailed Hagiography*, section 073-074 (Eimer, *Rnam Thar Rgyas Pa*, 2.50-52): [073] rgyud de rnams mkhyen par yang rigs te / dus dang gnas skabs gzhan du gsan pa ma gtogs par nub cig gi rmi lam du gsan pa rang la yang rang cag gi blo yul las 'das te / de yang so ma pu ri 'i sgo srung gi pa ṇḍi ta ngag gi dbang phyug grags pa bya ba de la gser ma ṇi pa tra snyim pa gang phul brda 'i phyag lan bcu gnyis btsal nas rgyud 'bum phrag gcig dang bzhi brgya lnga bcu rtsa lnga gsan / de 'i nang nas don dam pa 'i rgyud drug bya ba mthar thug 'ba' zhig ston pa yang bzhugs kyin gda' skad / [074] jo bo nyid kyis thugs la yang theg pa chen po gsang sngags la nga bas mkhas pa med snyam pa 'i thugs rgyal yod pa la / yang nub cing rmi lam na mdun gyi nam mkha' la mkha' 'gro ma mang pos sngags kyis glegs bam mang po spyir rgyud 'di / 'di skad bya ba yin na 'di yang khyod kyis shes sam bya ba la sogs pa rgyud mang po yang dag pa bstan pas / jo bos mtshan tsam yang ma thos pa 'i rgyud mang po bzhugs kyin gda' / logs shig na po ti chung kha cig 'dug ngas 'di rnams ci yin dris pas / 'di rnams khyod kyis shes pa de tsho yin gsung bas / der thugs rgyal chag.

I am indebted to Hubert DeCleer for identifying the source of this story, and providing me with his own translation of this passage. This translation is my own, but it was strongly influenced by DeCleer's unpublished translation. Note that the text shifts between the first and third person voices. This may indicate that elements of the narrative originated in an oral account attributed to Atiśa.

Mythic Treasuries and the Tibetan Bka' 'gyur

At the conclusion of an essay on the political implications of Vedic conceptions of canonicity, David Carpenter argued that “[w]hile canons everywhere may function as instruments for the creation of identity and the establishment of authority, there remain real differences in the ways in which these things are accomplished in each case, and even in the degree to which they are accomplished.”⁵³ I believe that attempts at creating and closing canons in Tibet were affected by two countervailing forces, but to different degrees, yielding different results.⁵⁴ These are the conservative equation of textual authority with Indic origination, and the sometimes compatible, sometimes conflicting notion that the continuing revelation of lost texts, preserved by the Buddhas and *dākinīs*, is possible. These, in turn, may overlap with other forces at work in the Tibetan traditions, such as scholarship (*mkhas pa nyid*) and spiritual accomplishment (*grub pa*), which appear to form a creative tension, sometimes converging and sometimes diverging.⁵⁵

I believe that the recurrent accounts in Buddhist literature of large ur-texts of one hundred thousand stanzas, collections of *tantras* of this length, and even massive collections of one hundred thousand *tantras*, which in turn are only incomplete expressions of the celestial collections preached by the Buddhas and preserved by the *dākinīs*, had a significant impact on the development of the Tibetan canons of *tantras*. While I would never suggest that these myths represent a primary cause of these collections, they were a factor that shaped their development, and also problematized attempts at their closure. With respect to the *tantra* collection in the Bka' 'gyur, it seems that generally speaking the conservative view prevailed, resulting in the *de facto* closure of this canonical collection. Nonetheless, the collection was, to a limited but noticeable extent, marked by these myths.

The history of the formation of Tibetan canonical collections, such as the Bka' 'gyur, is a complex subject beyond the scope of this essay. Research thus far has demonstrated their gradual development over several centuries from relatively unsystematized textual collections.⁵⁶ While the myths discussed here probably had

⁵³ David Carpenter, “The Mastery of Speech: Canonicity and Control in the Vedas,” in *Authority, Anxiety, and Canon*, ed. Laurie Patton (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 31-32.

⁵⁴ For an excellent collection of essays addressing the various Tibetan canonical collections, see Helmut Eimer and David Germano, eds., *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

⁵⁵ That is, I would suggest that these myths on the one hand undoubtedly bolstered the conservative and scholastic impulse to preserve the extant canon, to prevent its further deterioration on earth. Yet, at the same time, belief in a larger canon preserved in other realms likewise kept open (in theory, if not in practice), the possibility of further revelation. Tibetan Buddhist traditions appear to be united with respect to the need for canons, but differ in their openness to their further expansion.

⁵⁶ Regarding research on the history of the Bka' 'gyur, see especially Helmut Eimer, “Some Results of Recent Kanjur Research,” in *Archiv für zentralasiatische Geschichtsforschung*, ed. Dieter Schuh and Michael Weiers, Heft 1 (Sankt Augustin: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag, 1983), 5-25; and “A Note on the History of the Tibetan Kanjur,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 32, nos. 1-2 (1988): 64-72. See also Paul Harrison, “Meritorious Activity or Waste of Time? Some Remarks on the Editing of Texts in the Tibetan Kanjur,” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan*

little direct impact on this process, it did shape it in numerous, subtle ways. We can see this influence in the language used to describe the collection, and the ways in which texts in the collection were labeled and organized.

We can see this in a pivotal work by Bu ston rin chen grub, one of the major figures in the early attempts to organize the canonical collections, and limit them to works that were believed to be of genuine Indic provenance. Bu ston was famous (or infamous) for his composition of a controversial catalogue of *tantras*. This work was notorious primarily for the *tantras* that he chose to leave out, namely, many of the *tantras* of the Rnying ma school, including dynastic translations that Bu ston considered to be apocryphal.⁵⁷ Bu ston entitled this work “Catalog of the One Hundred Thousand Tantras” (Rgyud ’bum gyi dkar chag), despite the fact that the catalogue actually listed four hundred and twenty-two works.⁵⁸ It seems likely that Bu ston chose this title under the influence of the myths that have been examined here; in other words, in composing a catalogue of *tantras* he had in mind not only the relatively modest collection of *tantras* to which he had access, and which he considered to be valid. But he also had in mind the far larger collections imagined and described by the Indian and Tibetan Buddhist traditions.⁵⁹

This title was assumed by several editions of the Bka’ ’gyur. In the Sde dge canon, for example, the collection of *tantras* is likewise labeled One Hundred Thousand Tantras (Rgyud ’bum).⁶⁰ Needless to say, this collection has only slightly more texts than Bu ston’s catalogue, nor does it contain any texts that approach

Studies, Narita 1989, ed. Shōren Ihara and Zuihō Yamaguchi (Narita: Naritasan Shinshoji, 1992), 1:77-93; and also “In Search of the Source of the Tibetan bKa’ ’gyur: A Reconnaissance Report,” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes 1992*, ed. Per Kvaerne (Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994), 295-317.

⁵⁷ These judgments, based as they were on the criterion of whether the text was authentically Indic, often on the basis of whether the text was known to contemporary Indian scholars, were naturally problematic and contentious. For an interesting discussion of this issue see Ronald Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 251-54.

⁵⁸ See Helmut Eimer, *Der Tantra-Katalog des Bu ston im Vergleich mit der Abteilung Tantra des tibetischen Kanjur: Studie, Textausgabe, Konkordanzen und Indices* (Bonn: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1989).

⁵⁹ I recognize that the Tibetan term ’bum, much like the Sanskrit term *lakṣa*, can designate not only the number one hundred thousand, but also a vast quantity in general. It can function much like the English word “myriad,” or the Chinese term *wan* (萬), both of which can mean ten thousand or “a lot.” However, given the ubiquity of the number one hundred thousand in Indian and Tibetan discourse about the *tantras* and their canons, I do not think that the general sense is the sole denotation of the term here, although the connotation of “a lot” is clearly implied.

⁶⁰ Various editions of the Bka’ ’gyur designate the *tantra* collection in various ways. Among the editions that I have consulted, the Sde dge and Urga editions term it the Rgyud ’bum. The Phug brag edition terms it, less colorfully, the “Tantra Collection” (Rgyud sde); see Jampa Samten, *Phug brag bka’ ’gyur bris ma’ i dkar chag, A Catalogue of the Phug-Brag Manuscript Kanjur* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1992), ix. The Snar thang, Lha sa, Peking, and Stog Palace editions simply designate it as Rgyud (*tantra*). The designation Rgyud ’bum thus appears to be a relatively late designation, appearing with the eighteenth-century Sde dge print of the canon. But the idea of a Rgyud ’bum is clearly much older, going back to Bu ston at least, and traceable ultimately to the persistent association of this number with the *tantras*.

that number of stanzas. In fact, if you subtract one hundred thousand from the number of *tantras* supposedly studied by Atiṣa, 100,455, you get a number that is very close to the number of *tantras* actually preserved in this edition of the Bka' 'gyur.⁶¹

The myths of the legendary root *tantras* and treasuries of *tantras* appear to have affected Bu ston in other ways as well. For example, Bu ston provides the following rather unusual title for the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*: “*The Tantra Abbreviated from the Great One Hundred Thousand [Text]: The Appendix of the Root Tantra’s Appendix*” (‘*Bum pa chen po las bsdus pa’i rgyud/ rtsa ba’i rgyud kyi phyi ma’i phyi ma*).⁶² This is not the title provided in the standard Prajñākīrti-Mar do revised translation of this text, to which Bu ston refers, or any other translation for that matter.⁶³ The extant Sanskrit text and the Tibetan translations give the title “*Discourse of Śrī Heruka*” (*Śrīherukābhīdhāna*; *Dpal he ru ka’i nges par brjod pa*) at the end of each chapter, and the title “*Great Yoginī King of Tantras Called the Cakrasamvara*” (*Śrīcakrasamvaraṃ Nāma Mahāyoginītantrarāja*) in the text’s colophon.⁶⁴ The source of this Bu ston’s “title” is actually the following descriptive passage in the colophon: “It is the king of all teachings, the appendix of the appendix (*uttarottaram*), included within the Discourse of Śrī Heruka, the one hundred thousand [stanza] great king of *tantras*.”⁶⁵

It is certainly not the case that Bu ston made a mistake here, given the fact that he composed a massive commentary on this text, one that discusses the text’s title at length.⁶⁶ While I am not certain how and why Bu ston came up with this title,

⁶¹ The Rgyud 'bum section of the Sde dge canon contains 468 texts in twenty volumes. If we also count the Ancient Tantra (Rnying rgyud) collection that immediately follows it in a separate section, then the number rises to 484 texts in twenty-three volumes. See Ui Hakuju, et al., *A Complete Catalogue of Tibetan Buddhist Canons (Bkaḥ-ḥgyur and Bstan-ḥgyur)* (Sendai: Tōhoku Imperial University, 1934), 67-141. The exact number of *tantras* varies somewhat among the collections, with certain early collections, such as the Phug brag and Stog Palace manuscript Bka' 'gyurs containing additional texts not found in later collections. Regarding this see Samten, *Phug brag bka' 'gyur bris ma'i dkar chag*; and Tadeusz Skorupski, *A Catalogue of the Stog Palace Kanjur*, *Bibliographia Philologica Buddhica Series Major 4* (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1985).

⁶² See Eimer, *Der Tantra-Katalog des Bu ston*, 61.

⁶³ Bu ston lists the revisers as Lo tṣṣha ba grags 'byor shes rab and Mar pa chos kyi dbang phyug (1043-1138) (Eimer, *Der Tantra-Katalog des Bu ston*, 61). The latter figure was commonly known as Mar pa do pa, or Mar do. The name Grags 'byor shes rab (ca. 1100) is, presumably, a translation of Prajñākīrti, whose name is transliterated rather than translated in the standard canonical translation. See Toh. 368, Sde dge Rgyud 'bum vol. ka, 246b.

⁶⁴ The Sanskrit here reads *Śrīcakrasamvaraṃ Nāma Mahāyoginītantrarāja*, and the Tibetan translations differ here. The Sumarikīrti-Mal revised translation, which is preserved in the Phug brag ms. Bka' 'gyur, matches this reading: *dpal 'khor lo sdom pa zhes bya ba'i rnal 'byor chen po'i rgyud kyi rgyal po* (P Rgyud sde vol. nga, 144b), while the Prajñākīrti-Mar do translation reads *dpal he ru ka'i nges par brjod pa zhes bya ba rnal 'byor ma chen mo'i rgyud kyi rgyal po*, attesting *Discourse of Śrī Heruka* rather than *Cakrasamvara* (D Rgyud 'bum vol. ka, 246b). For more information on these texts and their variant readings, see my forthcoming *The Cakrasamvara Tantra: Editions of the Sanskrit and Tibetan Texts* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2009).

⁶⁵ Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 382-83.

⁶⁶ See Bu ston, *Bde mchog rtsa rgyud kyi rnam bshad gsang ba'i de kho na nyid gsal bar byed pa* [The Elucidation of the Secret Reality, A Detailed Exegesis of the Samvara Root Tantra], in *The*

it does seem certain that in making this choice he was influenced by the myth of the *tantra*'s origin, which so strongly asserts its derivation from a much larger root *tantra*.

There are other small signs of the impact of this myth on the organization and designation of the collection of *tantras* and texts within it. Bu ston likewise referred to the *Wheel of Time Tantra* in his catalogue as the “*Abbreviated Kālacakra Tantra*” (*Dus kyi 'khor lo bsdus pa'i rgyud*), which is itself an abbreviation of its full name, and one that highlights the idea that it derives from a much longer text.⁶⁷ The title given to the *Cakrasamvara Tantra* in the Bka' 'gyur is likewise “*The King of Tantras, Śrī Samvara Light*” (*Tantrarāja-śrīlaghusamvara-nāma; Rgyud gyi rgyal po dpal bde mchog nyung ngu zhes bya ba*).⁶⁸ Here the term “light” (*laghu; nyung ngu*) points to the myth of the *tantra*'s origin. While the name *Laghusamvara* does not occur in the text itself, this became a popular shorthand name for it, and by selecting it as the text's title the translators placed emphasis on the idea that it was derived from a much larger scripture.

This is the case with respect to other *tantras* as well. For example, in the possibly older One Hundred Thousand Ancient Tantra (Rnying ma rgyud 'bum) collection,⁶⁹ the early dynastic translation of the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga-dākinījālasamvara Tantra*, one of the eighteen Mahāyoga/Magical Net *tantras*, is given this simple title.⁷⁰ However, in the eleventh-century New Tradition translation it becomes an appendix to an absent mythical text, the *Primal Buddha Tantra* through its new title, the *Śrī-sarvabuddhasamāyoga-dākinījālasamvara-nāma-uttaratantra*.⁷¹

Collected Works of Bu ston, ed. Lokesh Chandra (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1966), *cha* (6):141-718.

⁶⁷ The longer title, preserved in the canonical translations, is “*The Śrī Kālacakra King of Tantras, Drawn from the Paramādibuddha*” (*Paramādibuddhodhṛta-śrīkālacakra-nāma-tantrarāja, Mchog gi dang po'i sangs rgyas las phyung ba rgyud kyi rgyal po dpal dus kyi 'khor lo zhes bya ba*) which likewise highlights the text's origin myth. See Eimer, *Der Tantra-Katalog des Bu ston*, 60.

⁶⁸ See Sde dge Rgyud 'bum vol. ka, 213a.

⁶⁹ The history of the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum collection is a complex issue outside of the scope of this essay. While the final organization of this collection occurred during the latter dissemination (*phyi dar*) period when the Bka' 'gyur was being organized (indeed, its compilation may very well have been inspired by the exclusion of its texts from the Bka' 'gyur), it clearly does contain materials that are genuine early translations from the former dissemination (*snga dar*) period, that is, the eighth and ninth centuries. Regarding this see Dorji Wangchuk, “An Eleventh-Century Defense of the Authenticity of the Guhyagarbha Tantra,” in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Helmut Eimer and David Germano, 265-91 (Leiden: Brill, 2002); as well as Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: Two Texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 1-4.

⁷⁰ I refer to the title of the translation preserved in the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum, *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga Tantrarāja-nāma* (*Sangs rgyas thams cad mnyam par sbyor ba zhes bya ba rgyud gyi rgyal po*). It is no. 207 in Kaneko's catalogue (see Kaneko Eiichi, *Ko-Tantora zenshū kaidai mokuroku* [Tokyo: Kukusho Kankōkai, 1982], 254-255). It occurs in the Mtshams brag manuscript of the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum at vol. t s h a , 1 b - 2 6 a , <http://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/canons/ngb/ngbeat.php#cat=tb/0402>.

⁷¹ The latter dissemination translation (Toh. 366) is attributed to Lha rin po che in the canonical text, although it is attributed to Smṛtījñānakṛti by Bu ston (Eimer, *Der Tantra-Katalog des Bu ston*, 61). It probably dates to the eleventh century.

The collection of *tantras* that came to be the Bka' 'gyur is thus replete with references to absent root *tantras*, with various texts that refer to a greater canon that exists not in this world, but was imagined by Buddhists as existing in the more glorious past, or in more glorious realms of reality. The myths of larger tantric canons bolstered the truly *conservative* efforts of scholars such as Bu ston to preserve what they surely believed were fragments of a much larger, but largely lost (in this world and time period) tantric canon.⁷² This conservative vision also served to displace authority to regions difficult to access (India, Khecarīpada, and so forth). The project of creating the Tibetan canons, supported as they were by this ideology, was, on the one hand, a project that bolstered the authority of those figures – translators, *bla mas*, and so forth – who mediated access to this treasury of knowledge.⁷³

But this ideology was double-edged, and threatened to cut the hands of those who sought to wield it. The efforts of scholars such as Bu ston to regulate the canon, to exclude texts that he felt were not genuine, was undermined by narratives such as the story of the breaking of Atiśa's pride. This story could be read as a very clever assault on the scholastic arrogance that might lead a learned person, such as Bu ston, to attempt to close the tantric canon. If even Atiśa, with his vast knowledge of *tantra*, knew only a fragment of those texts preserved by the *dākinīs*, how could a lesser scholar even imagine that he has anything but a pitifully limited understanding?

While there were, of course, later attempts to catalogue and close and the tantric canon, the widespread belief in the myth that underlies this account may have undermined these attempts, and prevented the absolute closure of the canon. For these attempts were equivocal, and arguably never completely successful, insofar as these canons have never been formally closed. Even the adherents to the new tantric traditions, the *gsar ma pas*, by virtue of accepting the myths of the revelation of the *tantras* from their supramundane treasuries, could not absolutely reject the possibility of further revelations, despite their conservative privileging of all things Indic. As Ron Davidson has shown, there were several apocryphal texts included into the New Tradition canons, including a number of works that claimed to be withdrawn from the “*dākinīs*’ secret treasury.”⁷⁴

⁷² Many accounts of the origin of the *tantras* emphasize this notion of loss through time, much like Yi Jing's account of the Vidyādhara Collection discussed in section two above. For example, Tāranātha (1575-1634) reported that there was a tradition that the *Tārā Tantra* underwent a gradual diminishment over the course of the four *yugas*, starting out as a ten-million-stanza text in the *kṛtayuga*, condensed into a six-hundred-thousand-stanza text during the *tretāyuga*, further condensed to twelve thousand stanzas during the *dvāparayuga*, and finally resulting in the extant thousand-stanza verse text during the *kaliyuga*. See David Templeman, trans., *The Origin of the Tārā Tantra, Jo Nang Tāranātha* (Revised edition, Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1995), 3.

⁷³ On this see Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, chap. 4.

⁷⁴ See Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 150-51; and also his essay “Gsar ma Apocrypha: The Creation of Orthodoxy, Gray Texts, and the New Revelation,” in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Helmut Eimer and David Germano (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 203-24.

It thus seems that the idea of a “Canon of Tantras,” a *Tantrakośa*, became for esoteric Buddhist traditions an empty signifier, pointing toward an absent corpus that served as a displaced locus of authority. The actual collections of *tantras* preserved by these traditions, such as the Rgyud ’bum or Tantra Collection preserved in the Bka’ ’gyur, would then be the relics of this absent body.⁷⁵ Venerated remnants, they are carefully wrapped and enshrined, but rarely actually read. While the practice traditions connected with some of them thrived, many of these vital traditions maintain only a tenuous connection to the root texts preserved in the Bka’ ’gyur. They are significant primarily as ciphers of authority, vital ideological links to the Buddhas, *dākinīs*, and *siddhas* who are thought to have manifested them. Their gnosis is thus enveloped as the secret meaning of the obscure texts that they revealed to the world. The idea that the authority figures of tantric traditions mediate their controlled revelation, via the ritual and meditative practices that they moderate and conduct, is one of main bases of the authority of these traditions.

⁷⁵ For an extended comparison of the *tantras* to relics, see my essay “Disclosing the Empty Secret: Textuality and Embodiment in the Cakrasamvara Tantra,” *Numen* 52, no. 4 (2005): 417-44.

Glossary

Note: these glossary entries are organized in Tibetan alphabetical order. All entries list the following information in this order: THL Extended Wylie transliteration of the term, THL Phonetic rendering of the term, the English translation, the Sanskrit equivalent, the Chinese equivalent, other equivalents such as Mongolian or Latin, associated dates, and the type of term.

Ka					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>dkyil 'khor</i>	kyinkhor		San. <i>maṅḍala</i>		Term
<i>bka' 'gyur</i>	Kangyur	Translated Word [of the Buddha]			Title collection
<i>skal ldan grags pa</i>	Kelden Drakpa		San. <i>Bhavyakīrti</i>	ca. 900	Person
Kha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>mkha' 'gro rgya msho' 'i rgyud</i>	<i>Khandro Gyamtsö Gyü</i>	<i>Ocean of Dākas Tantra</i>	San. <i>Dākārṇava Tantra</i>		Text
<i>mkhas pa nyid</i>	khepanyi	scholarship			Term
Ga					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>grags 'byor shes rab</i>	Drakjor Sherap		San. <i>Prajñākīrti</i>	ca. 1100	Person
<i>grub pa</i>	druppa	spiritual accomplishment			Term
<i>dga' ldan</i>	Ganden		San. <i>Tuṣita</i>		Place
<i>dge bshes</i>	geshé	spiritual friend	San. <i>kalyāṇamitra</i>		Term
<i>sgyu 'phrul 'dra ba 'i rgyud sde bco brgyad</i>	Gyutrül Drawé Gyüdé Chopgyé	<i>Eighteen Tantras of the Māyājāla Class</i>			Textual Group
<i>rgyal chen ris bzhi pa</i>	Gyelchen Ri Zhipa		San. <i>Cāturmahārāja- kāyika</i>		Place
<i>rgyud</i>	gyü		San. <i>tantra</i>		Term
<i>rgyud gyi rgyal po dpal bde mchog nyung ngu zhes bya ba</i>	<i>Gyügyi Gyelpo Pel Demchok Nyungngu Zhejawa</i>	<i>The King of Tantras, Śrī Samvara Light</i>	San. <i>Tantrarāja- śrīlaghusamvara- nāma</i>		Text
<i>rgyud 'grel</i>	Gyündrel	tantric commentaries			Term
<i>rgyud sde</i>	Gyüdé	Tantra Collection			Title collection
<i>rgyud sde chen po bco brgyad</i>	Gyü Dechenpo Chopgyé	<i>Eighteen Great Tantra Collection</i>			Textual Group
<i>rgyud 'bum</i>	Gyübum	One Hundred Thousand Tantras			Title collection
<i>rgyud 'bum gyi dkar chag</i>	Gyübumgyi Karchak	<i>Catalog of the One Hundred Thousand Tantras</i>			Textual Group
<i>sgeg pa 'i rdo rje</i>	Gekpé Dorjé		San. <i>Vīlāsavajra</i>	ca. eighth century	Person
<i>sgrub thabs</i>	druptap	meditation manual	San. <i>sādhana</i>		Term

<i>sgrub thob</i>	druptop	accomplished one	San. <i>siddha</i>		Term
<i>sgrol ma</i>	Dröлма		San. <i>Tārā</i>		Buddhist deity
<i>brgya byin sdang po</i>	Gyajin Dangpo		San. <i>Indranāla</i>		Person
Nga					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>mngon brjod rgyud</i>	<i>Ngönjö Gyü</i>	<i>Discourse Tantra</i>	San. <i>Abhidhāna Tantra</i>		Text
<i>snga dar</i>	ngadar	Former Dissemination			Term
Cha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>chos</i>	chö		San. <i>dharma</i>		Term
<i>mchims thams cad mkhyen pa</i>	Chim Tamché Khyenpa			1210-1285	Person
<i>mchims nam mkha' grags</i>	Chim Namkha Drak			1210-1285	Person
<i>mchog gi dang po'i sangs rgyas las phyung ba rgyud kyi rgyal po dpal dus kyi 'khor lo zhes bya ba</i>	<i>Chokgi Dangpö Sanggyelé Chungwa Gyükyi Gyelpo Pel Dükyi Khorlo Zhejawa</i>		San. <i>Paramādi-buddhodhṛta-śrīkālacakra-nāma-tantrarāja</i>		Text
<i>mchod rten</i>	chörten	reliquary monument	San. <i>stūpa</i>		Term
Ja					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>jo bo</i>	Jowo				Person
Nya					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>nyung ngu</i>	nyungngu	light	San. <i>laghu</i>		Term
<i>gnysis ka'i rgyud</i>	Nyiké Gyü	Dual Tantra	San. <i>Ubhayatantra</i>		Doxographical Category
<i>rnying rgyud</i>	Nyinggyü	Ancient Tantra [Collection]			Title collection
<i>rnying ma</i>	Nyingma				Organization
<i>rnying ma rgyud 'bum</i>	Nyingma Gyübum	One Hundred Thousand Ancient Tantra [Collection]			Title collection
Ta					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>rtog pa'i rgyud</i>	Tokpé Gyü	Ritual Treatise Tantra	San. <i>Kalpatantra</i>		Doxographical Category
<i>stog</i>	Tok				Building
Da					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>dang po'i rgyud</i>	Dangpö Gyü	Primal Tantra	San. <i>Āditantra</i>		Doxographical Category
<i>dang po'i sangs rgyas kyi rgyud</i>	<i>Danpö Sanggyekyi Gyü</i>	<i>Primal Buddha Tantra</i>	San. <i>Ātibuddha Tantra</i>		Text

<i>dus kyi 'khor lo bsdus pa'i rgyud</i>	<i>Dükyi Khorlo Düpé Gyü</i>	<i>Abbreviated Kālacakra Tantra</i>			Text
<i>dus 'khor</i>	<i>Dünkhor</i>	<i>Wheel of Time</i>	San. <i>Kālacakra</i>		Text
<i>bde mchog gi rgyud</i>	<i>Demchokgi Gyü</i>		San. <i>Samvara Tantra</i>		Text
<i>bde mchog nyung ngu rgyud kyi spyi rnam don gsal</i>	<i>Demchok Nyungngu Gyükyi Chinam Dönsel</i>	<i>Illumination of the General Meaning of the Laghusamvara Tantra</i>			Text
<i>bde mchog nyung ngu'i rgyud</i>	<i>Demchok Nyungngü Gyü</i>	<i>Great Bliss Light Tantra</i>	San. <i>Laghusamvara Tantra</i>		Text
<i>bde mchog rtsa rgyud kyi rnam bshad gsang ba'i de kho na myid gsal bar byed pa</i>	<i>Demchok Tsagyükyi Namshé Sangwé Dekhonanyi Selwar Jépa</i>	<i>The Elucidation of the Secret Reality, A Detailed Exegesis of the Samvara Root Tantra</i>			Text
<i>rdo rje 'chang</i>	Dorjé Chang		San. <i>Vajradhara</i>		Buddhist deity
<i>rdo rje 'chang chen po</i>	Dorjé Chang Chenpo		San. <i>Mahāvajradhara</i>		Buddhist deity
<i>sde dge</i>	Degé				Place
Na					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>rnam thar rgyas pa</i>	<i>Namtar Gyepa</i>	<i>Detailed Hagiography</i>			Text
<i>rnal 'byor gyi rgyud</i>	Nenjorgyi Gyü		San. <i>Yogatantra</i>		Doxographical Category
<i>rnal 'byor chen po'i rgyud</i>	NenJOR Chenpö Gyü	Great Yoga Tantra	San. <i>Mahāyogatantra</i>		Doxographical Category
<i>rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i rgyud</i>	NenJOR Lana Mepé Gyü	Unexcelled Yoga Tantra	San. <i>Yoganiruttaratantra</i>		Doxographical Category
<i>rnal 'byor ma'i rgyud</i>	Neljormé Gyü		San. <i>Yoginītantra</i>		Doxographical Category
<i>snar thang</i>	Nartang				Place
Pa					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>dpa' bo rdo rje</i>	Pawo Dorjé		San. <i>Vīravajra</i>	ca. eleventh century	Person
<i>dpal 'khor lo sdom pa'i dka' 'grel dpa' bo'i yid du 'ong ba zhes bya ba</i>	<i>Pel Khorlo Dompé Kandrel Pawö Yidu Ongwa Zhejawa</i>	<i>Commentary on the Śrī Cakrasamvara Called "The Hero's Delight"</i>	San. <i>Śrīcakrasamvara-pañjikā Śūramanojñā Nāma</i>		Text
<i>dpal sangs rgyas thams cad dang mnyam par sbyor ba mkha' 'gro sgyu ma bde mchog gi rgyud kyi don rnam par bshad pa zhes bya ba</i>	<i>Pel Sanggyé Tamché dang Nyampar Jorwa Khandro Gyuma Demchokgi Gyükyi Dön Nampar Shepa Zhejawa</i>	<i>Detailed Exegesis of the Import of the Sarvabuddha-samāyoga-dākinījālasamvara Tantra</i>	San. <i>Sarvabuddha-samāyoga-dākinījālasamvara Tantrārthodaratikā</i>		Text
<i>dpal he ru ka'i nges par brjad pa</i>	<i>Pel Heruké Ngepar Jöpa</i>	<i>Discourse of Śrī Heruka</i>	San. <i>Śrīherukābhidhāna</i>		Text

<i>spyod pa'i rgyud</i>	Chöpé Gyü	Performance Tantra	San. <i>Caryātantra</i>		Doxographical Category
Pha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>phug brag</i>	Pudrak				Place
<i>phyag na rdo rje</i>	Chakna Dorjé		San. <i>Vajrapāṇi</i>		Buddhist deity
<i>phyi dar</i>	chidar	Latter Dissemination			Term
<i>'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa tshul brgya lnga bcu pa'i 'grel pa</i>	<i>Paḳpa Sherapkyi Paröltu Chinpa Tsül Gya Ngapchupé Drepa</i>	<i>Commentary on the Method of the Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred and Fifty Stanzas</i>	San. <i>Prajñāpāramitānaya-śatapañcāśatikā-ṭīkā</i>		Text
Ba					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>bu ston</i>	Butön				Person
<i>bu ston rin chen grub</i>	Butön Rinchen Drup			1290-1364	Person
<i>bod kyi rgyal po srong btsan sgam po'i bka' chems gser gyi 'phreng ba</i>	<i>Bökyi Gyelpo Songtsen Gampö Kachem Serkyi Trengwa</i>	<i>The Golden Rosary Final Testament of the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo</i>			Text
<i>bya ba'i rgyud</i>	Jawé Gyü	Action Tantra	San. <i>Kriyātantra</i>		Doxographical Category
<i>bla ma</i>	lama		San. <i>guru</i>		Term
<i>dbang mdor bstan pa</i>	<i>Wangdor Tenpa</i>	<i>Instruction on Consecration</i>	San. <i>Sekoddeśa</i>		Text
<i>dbang phyug ma</i>	Wangchukma		San. <i>Īśvarī</i>		Buddhist deity
<i>'bum</i>	bum	one hundred thousand	San. <i>lakṣa</i>		Term
<i>'bum pa chen po las bsdus pa'i rgyud/ rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi phyi ma'i phyi ma</i>	<i>Bumpa Chenpolé Düpé Gyü/ Tsawé Gyükyi Chimé Chima</i>	<i>The Tantra Abbreviated from the Great One Hundred Thousand [Text]: The Appendix of the Root Tantra's Appendix</i>			Text
Ma					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>mar do</i>	Mardo				Person
<i>mar pa chos kyi dbang phyug</i>	Marpa Chökyi Wangchuk			1043–1138	Person
<i>mar pa do pa</i>	Marpa Dopa				Person
Tsa					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>rtsa ba'i rgyud</i>	tsawé gyü	root tantra	San. <i>mūlatantra</i>		Term
Tsha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>mtshem brag</i>	Tsemdrak				Place

Dza					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
'dzam bu 'i gling	Dzambü Ling		San. <i>Jambudvīpa</i>		Place
Zha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
gzhon nu dpal	Zhönnu Pel				Person
Za					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
za hor	Zahor				Place
La					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
lo tstsha ba grags 'byor shes rab	Lotsawa Drakjor Sherap				Person
Sa					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
sangs rgyas thams cad mnyam par sbyor ba zhes bya ba rgyud gyi rgyal po	Sanggyé Tamché Nyampar Jorwa Zhejawa Gyügyi Gyelpo	<i>The Union of All Buddhas King of Tantras</i>	San. <i>Sarvabuddha- samayoga Tantrarāja-nāma</i>		Text
sum cu rtsa gsum	Sumchu Tsasum		San. <i>Trāyastriṃśā</i>		Place
gsang ba 'dus pa 'i rgyud	Sangwa Düpé Gyü	<i>Esoteric Communion Tantra</i>	San. <i>Guhyasamāja Tantra</i>		Text
gsar ma pa	sarmapa	New Tradition			Term
Ha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
lha tho tho ri	Lhato Tori			ca. fifth century	Person
lha bla ma ye shes 'od	Lha Lama Yeshe Ö			947-1024	Person
lha rin po che	Lha Rinpoché				Person
lha sa	Lhasa				Place
Sanskrit					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Sanskrit	Dates	Type
			<i>Akaṇiṣṭha</i>		Place
			<i>Amoghavajra</i> (Chi. <i>Bukong Jingang</i>)	705-74	Person
			<i>Atiśa</i>		Person
			<i>Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna</i>	980-1054	Person
			<i>Ārya Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva</i> (Chi. <i>Longshu</i>)	ca. 200	Person
			<i>Bhadri</i>		Buddhist deity
			<i>Bhavabhaṭṭa</i>	ca. late nine century	Person

<i>sangs rgyas thod pa</i>	<i>Sanggyé Tōpa</i>	<i>Buddha Skull [Tantra]</i>	<i>Buddhakāpala</i>		Text
		Buddha land	<i>buddhakṣetra</i>		Term
			<i>Cakrasamvara</i>		Text
<i>'khor lo sdom pa'i rgyud</i>	<i>Khorlo Dompé Gyü</i>	<i>The Wheel Binding Tantra</i>	<i>Cakrasamvara Tantra</i>		Text
<i>gdan bzhi pa</i>	<i>Den Zhipa</i>	<i>The Four Seats [Tantra]</i>	<i>Catuspīṭha</i>		Text
<i>mkha' 'gro</i>	khandro		<i>dāka</i>		Term
<i>mkha' 'gro ma</i>	khandroma		<i>dākinī</i>		Term
<i>gzungs</i>	zung		<i>dhāraṇī</i>		Term
<i>chos kyi dkyil 'khor</i>	chökyi kyinkhor	reality maṇḍala	<i>dharmā maṇḍala</i> (Chi. <i>fa man tu luo</i>)		Term
		reality body	<i>dharmakāya</i>		Term
			<i>Diṅnāga</i> (Chi. <i>Chenna</i>)	ca. 480-540	Person
<i>gnyis dus</i>	nyidü	age of doubles	<i>dvāparayuga</i>		Term
			<i>Guhyasamāja</i>		Text
			<i>Guhyasamañca</i>		Text
			<i>guru</i>		Term
		science of reasoning	<i>hetuvidyā</i> (Chi. <i>yingming</i>)		Term
<i>kye'i rdo rje</i>	<i>Kyé Dorjé</i>	<i>Hevajra [Tantra]</i>	<i>Hevajra</i>		Text
		<i>Commentary on the Concise Import of the Hevajra Tantra</i>	<i>Hevajratantra-pinḍārthaṭikā</i>		Text
			<i>Indrabhūti</i>		Person
			<i>Ja</i>		Person
<i>ye shes</i>	yeshé	gnosis	<i>jñāna</i>		Term
			<i>Jñānamitra</i>		Person
<i>rtsod pa'i dus</i>	tsöpé dü	age of strife	<i>kaliyuga</i>		Term
			<i>Kāṇha</i>	ca. ninth century	Person
			<i>Khecarīpada</i>		Place
<i>gshin rje'i gshed nag po'i rgyud</i>	<i>Shinjé Shé Nakpö Gyü</i>	<i>Black Yamāri Tantra</i>	<i>Kṛṣṇayamāri Tantra</i>		Text
<i>rdzogs dus</i>	dzokdü	perfected age	<i>kṛtāyuga</i>		Term
		<i>Wheel of Time Light</i>	<i>Laghukālacakra</i>		Text
			<i>Laghūsamvara</i>		Text
		<i>Commentary on the Laghu[samvara] Tantra</i>	<i>Laghutantraṭikā</i>		Text
		<i>Discourse in One Hundred Thousand [Stanzas]</i>	<i>Lakṣābhidhāna</i>		Text
			<i>Lalitavajra</i>		Person

			<i>Līlavajra</i>		Person
			<i>Lūipa</i>	ca. eighth-ninth century CE	Person
			<i>Magadha</i>		Place
<i>sgyu 'phrul chen po</i>	<i>Gyuntrül Chenpo</i>	<i>Great Illusion [Tantra]</i>	<i>Mahāmāyā</i>		Text
<i>grub chen</i>	drupchen	greatly accomplished one	<i>mahāsiddha</i>		Term
<i>rnam par snang mdzad mngon par byang chub pa</i>	<i>Nampar Nangdzé Ngönpar Jangchuppa</i>	<i>The Complete Awakening of Mahāvairocana</i>	<i>Mahāvairocana-abhisambodhi</i>		Text
<i>rnam par snang mdzad mngon par byang chub pa 'i mdo</i>	<i>Nampar Nangdzé Ngönpar Jangchuppé Do</i>	<i>The Complete Awakening of Mahāvairocana Scripture</i>	<i>Mahāvairocana-abhisambodhi Sūtra</i> (Chi. <i>Da wei lu zhe na cheng fo shen bian jia te jing</i>)		Text
		Greater Vehicle	<i>Mahāyāna</i>		Doxographical Category
<i>rnal 'byor chen po</i>	Neljor Chenpo		<i>Mahāyoga</i>		Doxographical Category
<i>ma ni pa tra</i>	mani patra	precious sheet	<i>maṇipattra</i>		Term
<i>sngags</i>	ngak		<i>mantra</i>		Term
		Mantric Method	<i>Mantranaya</i>		Doxographical Category
<i>gsang sngags rgyud</i>	sangngak gyü		<i>mantratantra</i>		Term
		<i>Magical Net Tantra</i>	<i>Māyājāla Tantra</i>		Text
<i>phyag rgya</i>	chakgya	seal, consort	<i>mudrā</i> (Chi. <i>yin</i>)		Term
			<i>Nāgārjuna</i> (Chi. <i>Longshu</i>)	ca. 200	Person
			<i>Nanda</i> (Chi. <i>Nantuo</i>)		Person
<i>sprul pa 'i sku</i>	trülpé ku	manifestation body	<i>nirmāṇakāya</i>		Term
			<i>Oḍiyāna</i>		Place
<i>mkhas pa</i>	khepa	scholar	<i>paṇḍita</i>		Term
<i>mchog gi dang po 'i sangs rgyas</i>	<i>Chokgi Dangpö Sanggyé</i>	<i>Supreme Primal Buddha</i>	<i>Paramādibuddha</i>		Text
<i>mchog gi dang po 'i sangs rgyas rgyud</i>	<i>Chokgi Dangpö Sanggyé Gyü</i>	<i>Supreme Primal Buddha Tantra</i>	<i>Paramādibuddha-tantra</i>		Text
<i>yongs su mya ngan las 'das pa</i>	yongsu nyangenlé depa	complete cessation	<i>parinirvāṇa</i>		Term
		Perfection of Wisdom	<i>Prajñāpāramitā</i>		Doxographical Category

'phags pa da ltar gyi sangs rgyas mngon sum du bzhugs pa'i ting nge 'dzin shes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo	Pakpa Datargyi Sanggyé Ngönsumdu Zhukpé Tingngendzin Shejawa Tekpa Chenpö Do	The Scripture on the Concentration in which One is Brought Face-to-face with the Buddhas of the Present	Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi Sūtra (Chi. Ban zhou san mei jing)		Text
			Pretapuri		Place
			Puṇḍarīka		Person
			Śākyamuni	560-480 BCE	Person
		concentration	samādhi		Term
			Sambhala		Place
yang dag par sbyor ba'i thig le rgyud	Yangdakpar Jorwé Tiklé Gyü	Drop of Union Tantra	Saṃpuṭatilaka Tantra		Text
			Samvara		Text
			Saraha	ca. eighth-ninth century	Person
sangs rgyas thams cad mnyam par sbyor ba	Sanggyé Tamché Nyampar Jorwa	The Union of All Buddhas	Sarvabuddha-samāyoga		Text
sangs rgyas thams cad mnyam par sbyor ba'i rgyud	Sanggyé Tamché Nyampar Jorwé Gyü	The Union of All Buddhas Tantra	Sarvabuddha-samāyoga Tantra		Text
sangs rgyas thams cad mnyam par sbyor ba mkha' 'gro sgyu ma bde ba'i mchog rgyud	Sanggyé Tamché Nyampar Jorwa Khandro Gyuma Dewé Chok Gyü	The Great Bliss of the Network of Dākinīs in Union with All Buddhas Tantra	Sarvabuddha-samāyoga-dākinījālasamvara Tantra		Text
de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi de kho na nyid bsdu pa'i mdo	Dezhin Shekpa Tamchekyi Dekhonanyi Düpé Do	The Compendium of the Reality of All Tathāgatas Scripture	Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha Sūtra (Chi. Fo shuo yi qie ru lai zhen shi she da cheng xian zheng san mei da jiao wang jing)		Text
		hundred-syllable wheel	śatākṣaracakra (Chi. bai zi zi lun)		Term
shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa stong phrag brgya pa	Sherapkyi Paröltu Chinpa Tongdrak Gyapa	The Perfection of Wisdom Scripture in One Hundred Thousand [Stanzas]	Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra (Chi. Da pan ruo bo luo mi duo jing)		Text
			Smṛtijñānakīrti		Person
			Somapuri		Monastery
			Śrī Cakrasamvara		Text
dpal nam mkha' dang mnyam pa	Pel Namkha dang Nyampa	Glorious Sky-like [Tantra]	Śrī Khasama		Text

<i>sangs rgyas thams cad dang mnyam par sbyor ba mkha' 'gro sgyu ma bde ba'i mchog gi rgyud phyi ma</i>	<i>Sanggyé Tamché dang Nyampar Jorwa Khandro Gyuma Dewé Chokgi Gyü Chima</i>	<i>The Great Bliss of the Network of Dākinīs in Union with All Buddhas Appendix Tantra</i>	<i>Śrī-sarvabuddha-samāyoga-dākinījālasamvaranāma-uttaratantra</i>		Text
		<i>Great Yoginī King of Tantras called the Cakrasamvara</i>	<i>Śrīcakrasamvaraṃ Nāma Mahāyoginī-tantrarāja</i>		Text
<i>dpal mchog dang po'i rgyud</i>	<i>Pelchok Dangpö Gyü</i>		<i>Śrīparamādya Tantra</i>		Text
			<i>Śuddhodana</i>	ca. sixth century BCE	Person
			<i>Sumarikīrti-mal</i>		Person
			<i>Sumeru</i>		Mountain
			<i>sūtra (Chi. jing)</i>		Term
		Treasury of Tantras	<i>Tantrakośa</i>		Title collection
		Collection of Tantras	<i>Tantrapīṭaka</i>		Title collection
<i>sgrol ma'i rgyud</i>	<i>Drölmé Gyü</i>	<i>Tārā Tantra</i>	<i>Tārā Tantra</i>		Text
			<i>Tāranātha</i>	1575-1634	Person
<i>gsum dus</i>	sumdü	age of triads	<i>tretāyuga</i>		Term
			<i>Vāgīśvarakīrti</i>	late tenth century	Person
			<i>Vajra-uṣṇīṣa</i>		Textual Group
			<i>Vajrabodhi (Chi. Jingang Zhi)</i>	671-741	Person
			<i>Vajragarbha</i>		Buddhist deity
<i>rdo rje rtse mo</i>	Dorjé Tsemo	<i>Adamantine Pinnacle</i>	<i>Vajraśekhara (Chi. Jin gang ding)</i>		Textual Group
		Adamantine Vehicle	<i>Vajrayāna</i>		Doxographical Category
			<i>Vajroṣṇīṣa (Chi. Jin gang ding)</i>		Textual Group
<i>rig ma</i>	rikma	spell	<i>vidyā (Chi. zhou)</i>		Term
		Vidyādhara Collection	<i>Vidyādharaṭīṭaka (Chi. Chi ming zhou cang)</i>		Title collection
			<i>Vidyākara</i>	ca. eleventh century	Person
			<i>Vikramaśilā</i>		Place
		<i>Stainless Light</i>	<i>Vimalaprabhā</i>		Text
<i>rnal 'byor pa</i>	neljorpa		<i>yogī</i>		Term
<i>rnal 'byor ma</i>	Neljorma		<i>Yoginī</i>		Doxographical Category

<i>dus</i>	dū	age	<i>yuga</i>		Term
			<i>Zahor</i>		Place
Chinese					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Chinese	Dates	Type
		<i>Introduction to the Mahāvairocana Sūtra</i>	<i>Da ri jing kai ti Jpn. Dainichikyō kaidai</i>		Text
		<i>Records of Eminent Monks of the Great Tang who Sought the Dharma in the Western Regions</i>	<i>Da Tang Xiyu qiu fa gao seng chuan</i>		Text
			<i>Dao Lin</i>	ca. 650	Person
		Eternal Text That Accords with Reality	<i>Fa er chang heng ben</i>		Doxographical Category
		Manifest Extensive Text	<i>Fen liu guang ben</i>		Doxographical Category
		<i>The Amitayur Buddha Contemplation Scripture</i>	<i>Fo shou guan wu liang shou fo jing</i> (San. <i>Amitāyurdhyāna Sūtra</i>)		Text
			<i>Guangdong</i>		Place
		<i>The Mahāyoga of the Vajraśekhara/ Vajroṣṇīṣa Sūtra, The Dharma Gate to the Secret Basis of Mind Ritual Manual</i>	<i>Jin gang ding jing da yu jia mi mi xin di fa men yi jue</i>		Text
		<i>Assembly of the Eighteen Adamantine Pinnacle Yoga Sūtras</i>	<i>Jin gang ding jing yu jia shi ba hui</i>		Text
			<i>Konghai Jpn. Kūkai</i>	774-835	Person
		A measure of length, 360 paces	<i>li</i>		Term
		Abbreviated Text	<i>Lve ben</i>		Doxographical Category
		ten thousand	<i>wan</i>		Term
			<i>Yi Jing</i>	635-713	Person

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