Abstract and Keywords

In the ritual action central to tantric Buddhist praxis, the practitioner identifies with the deity. Ritual identification involves the practitioner's body, speech, and mind being identified with the body, speech, and mind of the deity evoked in the ritual. Always and already awakened, ritual identification is a practice that enables the practitioner to realize that state. In a widely employed ritual known as *homa*, offerings are made into a fire. While scholarship on the process of awakening has most frequently employed the semiotic pairing of sudden and gradual, or leap and path, it is difficult to fit tantric praxis into one or the other. Looking at the metaphors for the process of awakening, this chapter identifies three models of awakening instead of two: cleansing, cultivating, and transmuting, the last being closest to the tantric conception of the path from ground to goal.

Keywords: homa, ritual identification, tantra, three mysteries, Shingon, metaphors of awakening, deity yoga, alchemy, Buddhism

Prefatory Anecdote

THE first time I ever saw a tantric fire ritual (Skt. *homa*, Jpn. *goma*) was long before sunrise on New Year's Day, 1981, at the Shingon temple in Sacramento.[1] The temple was dark inside, with about 200 people in attendance. Sitting there, we watched as the priest, Rev. Taisen Miyata, entered the *naijin*, the inner ritual area at the front of the temple, sat at the altar, and started a fire in a hearth built into the altar itself. As the flames began to glow, a *taiko* drum started a steady beat, and the sangha began chanting the *Heart Sutra* in unison, over and over again.

As the drum and chanting continued, the flames leapt up and died down repeatedly—five times, once each for protectors, bodhisattvas, Chief Deity, and the Celestial and Worldly Deities. Sitting in the dark with the flames rising and falling, the drum beating, and the

sangha chanting was a powerful experience—moving, not in a sentimental sense, but rather in the intensity of combined visual and auditory sensations.

Introduction

As indicated by this volume itself, after having long been overshadowed by the study of Buddhist doctrine, the study of practice has become recognized as central to the field of Buddhist studies. Most important to this development is the recognition that meditation is neither the sole, nor normative form of Buddhist practice. Instead, the Buddhist tradition is constituted by a wide range of ritual and yogic practices, including but extending (p. 369) well beyond meditation. This change in perception of Buddhist practice correlates with a change in attitude toward tantric Buddhism. In this chapter we examine a particular tantric ritual, the *homa*, which is paradigmatic for tantric practice more generally. The first section introduces the *homa*, emphasizing its characteristic as a votive rite, its place in the contemporary tantric Buddhist world, its historical background, and the structure of the *homa* found in Shingon—one of the tantric Buddhisms of modern Japan. Next, while modern scholarship has employed the semiotic pairing of sudden and gradual to articulate the process of awakening, if instead we consider different conceptions of purification, we find that there are three identifiably distinct metaphors. The final section looks at what the *homa* with its symbolically central act of ritual identification can tell us about the embodied character of Buddhist ritual more generally.

What Is the *Homa*?: Tantric Votive Rite

Performed in many temples and shrines in contemporary Japan, a *homa* involves a fire built on the altar, with offerings made into it.[2] In terms of the conceptual categories employed in the field of religious studies, the *homa* is better understood as a votive offering than as a sacrifice. Although to an observer a sacrifice and a votive offering may appear indistinguishable, the two categories are marked by distinct attitudes.[3] To sacrifice is to give up something by making it sacred, out of reach of human use, and often this means to destroy what is being made sacred.[4] Such destructive acts are sometimes propitiatory (appeasing a deity, making a deity happy), or expiatory (repentance or contrition: making up for having done something wrong). Though it also places offerings out of human use, a votive offering is a different religious modality—it is more explicitly an act of exchange, and in some cases occurs when a vow has been fulfilled. This includes not only objects given in exchange, but also actions. One might, for example, pledge to go on a pilgrimage if one's son is healed. Performing that pilgrimage is then a votive offering as well.[5]

Homa in the Contemporary Tantric Buddhist Cosmopolis

Throughout the tantric Buddhist cosmopolis today, one can find *homa* (Jpn. *goma*) rituals being performed in a variety of settings. In Japan the *homa* is most commonly associated with Shingon and the tantric dimension of Tendai. However, *homa* rituals are also found

in Shugendō and several of the new religious movements of Japan such as Shinnyo-en and Agonshū.

The *homa* has several different ritual functions. Contemporary Japanese thought identifies a set of five: protection, prosperity, subjugation, emotional affinity, and summoning.[6] In addition to these different functions, a variety of different buddhas, bodhisattvas, and protectors can be evoked as the ritual's main figure; "Chief Deity" is (p. 370) the general term used for this central figure, whoever it may be. Changes of function modify such ritual details as the shape of the hearth, time of day best performed, color of the practitioner's garb, and the form of some of the key mantras employed in the course of the ritual.[7] Different Chief Deities receive different mantras, or mantras modified to correspond to them, and are visualized in distinct ways. In the present forms of the *homa* as employed in Shingon, all of these variations are made within a common ritual structure.[8]

Beyond Japan, the *homa* continues today as part of the ritual repertoire throughout the tantric cosmopolis. For example, Tibetan and Nepali traditions have *homa*s that are usually performed outdoors on temporary altars as part of a larger ceremonial complex, making them more similar to Shugendō practices than to Shingon versions, which are most frequently held inside temples and as stand-alone rituals. *Homa* rituals are also quite commonly practiced in Hindu forms of tantra, and the practice of *homa* has been exported internationally.[9] In some of these cases, the contemporary traditions tend toward a sanitization of their own origins, expunging tantric associations because of its modern disrepute. When deploying the *homa*, these traditions may characterize it more in terms of a yogic culture of practice, rather than as an explicitly tantric practice.

Historical Background to the Tantric *Homa*

Contemporary *homa* practice demonstrates a continuity of ritual culture extending back to Vedic and Iranian sources. In much of contemporary scholarship, Vedic rituals of fire offerings are considered to be the predominant source for tantric forms of *homa*, though the details of this continuity remain unclear. The primary action of making offerings into a fire and the appropriated metaphor of feasting an honored guest that organizes the ritual actions are key indicators suggesting continuity. More problematic, however, is the relation between the ritual organization of Vedic and tantric rites—one detailed study, for example, shows that a paradigmatic Vedic rite, the *agnihotra*, and *homa* do not share a common organizational structure.[10]

Vedic ritual forms date back perhaps as much as 4,000 years or more, and along with Iranian rites are themselves rooted in older practices of Indo-European religious culture.[11] One of the threads linking the Buddhist tantric *homa* to Vedic practices as such is the figure of Agni, who will be discussed more fully later in relation to the major sedimentary layers of contemporary tantric Buddhist ritual—two of which are Vedic and tantric ritual cultures.

Ritual Sediment Underlying the *Homa*

Agni is fire, that is, fire as such, not a god who inhabits fire or who is symbolized by fire. Having a critical role in Vedic ritual from its very earliest period, he is one of the oldest of the Vedic deities. Agni is all kinds of fire, from wildfires and lightning to the cremation (p. 371) fire, the fire of digestion, and the fire of sexuality. His function in Vedic ritual is to transform the offerings by burning, converting them to their scent so that they can ascend into the celestial realm of the gods and ancestors. The offerings are part of a feast being given to honored guests, and the transformation of burning makes the feast offerings available to the guests. As Lopez notes, "The burning of the offering in the sacrificial fire transforms or, rather, transubstantiates the nature and character of what is being offered. Every offering is transubstantiated into *medha* 'juice, essence, aroma,' which is then available to the gods for eating, and *asu* 'life force.' "[12] While this constitutes a transformation, it is not a purification in the sense of purifying something material (and therefore impure) into something spiritual (and therefore pure.) The gods cannot consume ordinary food, and need the offerings transformed into the kinds of substances they can eat, which are odors.[13] While this burning does not involve a symbolic purification of an impure (material) substance, the leftovers from the ritual offerings are considered polluted —in the sense of being potent and dangerous, and therefore needing to be disposed of properly. As the god of fire who converts the offerings into a form accessible to the guests, Agni appears as the first deity to receive offerings in the contemporary Shingon *homa*.

Symbols, such as Agni, do not have a singular, universal meaning. What a symbol means depends upon its place in a network of symbolic uses, that is, on its context. Thus, what Agni means in the context of tantric Buddhist ritual practice is not the same as what Agni means in the Vedic context. The symbolism of purifying the offerings by etherealizing them into scent continues as a kind of ritual sediment upon which the tantric Buddhist *homa* is built. While adaptation of the ritual from Vedic antecedents to tantric Buddhist form retained Agni as a key figure, the doctrinal reframing of the ritual changed from that of making purified offerings to the gods and ancestors to awakening through ritual identification, which is both symbolically and structurally central to Buddhist forms of the *homa* ritual.

Structure of the *Homa*

In contemporary Shingon *homa* rituals, the fire offerings as such take place within a larger frame ritual devoted to Fudō Myōō (Acalanātha Vidyārāja, the Immovable Lord, King of Wisdom), who is the paradigmatic Chief Deity for the frame ritual, no matter who the Chief Deity in the sequence of five fire offerings may be. In Shingon rituals, such as those priests learn during their training, the norm is for there to be two sets of offerings, primary and secondary,[14] offered to Fudō Myōō as the Chief Deity of the frame ritual. Following the first four of the seven secondary offerings, the practitioner begins the sequence of

homa offerings. Upon finishing the *homa* offerings, the balance of the secondary offerings is completed.

While historically different numbers of sets of *homa* offerings are known, in contemporary Shingon *homa*, as mentioned previously, there are usually five sets of offerings. Each set of offerings is directed toward a different deity or set of deities. These are Agni (p. 372) (Jpn. Katen), the Lord of the Assembly, the Chief Deity (Jpn. *honzon*), the Thirty-Seven Deities (buddhas, bodhisattvas and protectors of the Vajradhātu mandala[15]), and the Worldly Deities (Vedic and astral deities).

Structurally then, although each of the five sets of offerings is made to different deities, they are made in the midst of the larger frame ritual's offerings to Fudō Myōō (Acalanātha Vidyārāja), the Chief Deity of the frame ritual. Significantly, the five sets of offerings fall between the time that the practitioner ritually identifies with Fudō Myōō and dissociates from that identification. Ritual identification does not take place in any of the five sets of offerings. Instead, those sets of offerings are being made by the identity of practitioner and Chief Deity.[16]

Ritual Identification of Practitioner and Deity in the Ritual Program of the *Homa*

Given the lengthy history of the *homa* and its transmission to several different religious cultures, there are a vast number of ritual manuals prescribing different forms of the ritual. In the Shingon tradition, these share a characteristic that is found throughout Buddhist tantric praxis: ritual identification of the practitioner with the deity. This idea itself has different expressions and different doctrinal formulations, as for example in Dzongkhapa's focus on it as the defining characteristic of tantric Buddhism.[17] Ritual identification of the practitioner and the deity evoked into the fire takes place as three ritual acts, known as the "three mysteries" (*sanmitsu*), one each for the identity of the practitioner's body, speech, and mind with those of the deity. These are bodily merging of oneself and deity (*nyūga ga nyū*), spoken invocations (*shōnenju*), and contemplation of the wheel of syllables (*jirinkan*).[18] Actual performances of these are by posture (*āsana*), recitation of mantra, and contemplating the significance of key *bīja* mantra by means of reciting a formulaic text.[19]

The symbolism of ritual identification is that there is another kind of three-way identification, in this case between the deity, the practitioner, and the fire. Thus, the mouth of the hearth is also the deity's mouth and the practitioner's. The fire in the hearth is also digestive fire and at the same time the transformative fire of the deity's wisdom.[20] The material offerings made into the fire are also symbolic offerings made to the deity, and at the same time the practitioner's obscurations (*āvaraṇa*), that is, their own mistaken conceptions and misplaced affections (*jñeyāvaraṇa*, and *kleśāvaraṇa*, respectively), which are transformed from their negative forms to positive ones. In addition to the five explicit functions identified earlier, tantric rituals were interpreted as conducive to awakening. Ronald Davidson has described this, saying, "Like the transformation of wood into ash,

this interpretation emphasized the simultaneous transmutation of the personality afflictions into forms of awakened being, by means of their purification in the fire of gnosis."[21] In the same way that the contextual difference between Vedic ritual and tantric Buddhist ritual affects the significance of Agni, so also does the interpretive (p. 373) context of the nature of the obscurations change the significance of the ritual identification from one of purifying ("etherealizing") to transforming. Looking more specifically at metaphors for the process of awakening allows us to understand ritual identification as an alchemical transmutation, revealing one's always and already awakened state.

Metaphors of the Process of Awakening

Scholarship on the idea of awakening has largely been dominated by a twofold model. In the South Asian context, that has been the dichotomy of "leap" and "path."[22] On the East Asian side, although the conceptual dichotomy is fundamentally the same, the terminology has been "sudden" and "gradual."[23] These metaphors are based on consideration of the nature of the path from ground to goal. Does it require slow, steady progress, such as the accumulation of merit over countless eons, or does it involve a leaping across that can only be done in a moment? Thinking instead from the perspective of "purification," however, we can see a different set of metaphors by which the process of awakening has been described. We suggest that a threefold schema provides a richer, more nuanced basis for understanding conceptions of the path. These three are cleansing, cultivating, and transmuting.

Cleansing: Purity as the Absence of Pollution

Cleansing presupposes that a pure state already exists under the obstacles and debris of negative mental and emotional states, and that one needs to clean those away—purity in this case being conceived in negative terms as the absence of pollution. This negative conception is not only found in the Buddhist tradition, but is grounded in the broader Indic culture, continuing into the present. In his study of the religious culture of modern Chhattisgarh village in the state of Madhya Pradesh, Lawrence A. Babb notes that "pollution is an existent; purity is its absence. To become pure is to rid oneself of pollution; it is not to 'add purity.' "[24] This "negative" understanding is also found in Buddhaghosa's treatment of the ten bad deeds. These are grouped into the three dimensions of human existence, body, speech, and mind: three bodily actions (killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct), four verbal actions (lying, malicious speech, harsh speech, and frivolous speech), and three mental actions (covetousness, malice, and wrong view).[25] The ten good deeds are "described as merely 'abstaining' (*virati*) from the 10 bad deeds."[26] Maria Heim explains that this logic is extended to the idea that "the highest kind of abstinence is not resisting temptation or following precepts, but being so advanced that the thought to commit a bad action never even enters one's head."[27] Here we see a rationale that at least resonates with one version of tantric antinomianism—not that of intentionally (p. 374) breaking the rules of monastic life, but of acting without negative motivation even when performing actions otherwise prohibited. This is consistent with some Theravadin

interpretations of karma as consequent upon intentional acts—actions done without conscious intent (*cetanā*) do not create karmic consequences.[28]

One of the best-known instances of a metaphor for this negative conception of purification as cleansing is that of the mirror. This is found, for example, in the origin myth of Sōtō Zen. According to the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, in order to select a Dharma heir, the Fifth Patriarch, Hongren, instructed his students to submit a verse demonstrating their attainment. All of the students deferred, thinking that Shenxiu, the senior-most student who was already their instructor, would naturally be chosen. Fearing that his own awakening was inadequate, Shenxiu himself hesitated to show the verse he wrote to his master, eventually writing it anonymously on the wall of a hallway at night. That verse read:

> The body is the *bodhi* tree;
> The mind is like a bright mirror's stand.
> Be always diligent in rubbing it—
> Do not let it attract any dust.[29]

Prior to the invention of modern mercury-coated glass mirrors, mirrors were made of polished metal, such as brass. Such mirrors easily lose their reflective sheen, and require regular polishing in order to maintain their utility. Hence the necessity of polishing the mirror becomes a metaphor for meditation as the means of maintaining a pure mind.

Huineng's response to Shenxiu also refers to this metaphor, but challenges its accuracy as representing the process of awakening:

> *Bodhi* is fundamentally without any tree;
> The bright mirror is also not a stand.
> Fundamentally there is not a single thing—
> Where could any dust be attracted?[30]

Cleansing metaphors also include aquatic imagery in which water is naturally pure. Images such as letting turbid water settle or disturbed water calm operate on the basis of this negative conception of purity as the absence of pollution. Cleansing metaphors reveal a view of the process of awakening in which purity is negatively conceived as the absence of pollution.

Cultivating: Agricultural Metaphors

Metaphors of cultivating point to an understanding of the process of awakening as one of clearing away the obstacles and debris of negative mental and emotional states in order to be able to propagate positive ones. And it also introduces images of merit as (p. 375) something that can be cultivated. A variety of agricultural metaphors found in the literature can be encompassed under cultivation as a general category.

We have already encountered the idea of "good roots" (*kuśala mūla*) in relation to the negative conceptions of cleaning metaphors. But the idea of good roots is itself an agri-

cultural metaphor pointing to wet rice culture. When rice seedlings are transplanted into paddy fields, they need to have good roots—to not be dead, rotted, or withered. Similarly, there is the concept of a "field of merit" (*puṇyakṣetra*). Acts such as making donations to either the sangha as an institution or to individual monks or nuns constitutes planting seeds of merit in a field of merit.

A different use of "field" is the idea of a buddha field (*buddhakṣetra*). The descriptions of buddha fields convey the medieval Indian sense of what characteristics were desired. Maitreya's palace and pleasure grove in Tuṣita is considered by Gelukpa followers of Tsongkhapa to be a "purified field." Along with other characteristics, it is described as having the desirable characteristic of being far from a city, and "all the ground is made from a variety of precious stones that are smooth like the palm of one's hand, soft when pressed down upon and comfortable to walk on. It has lakes, water fountains, waterfalls, grassy meadows, and so forth which produce pleasure to touch."[31] The idea that a pure land is smooth, easy to walk on, and with plentiful water are consistent across many such descriptions, and indicate what is not desired—a dry land, with hills and rough surfaces.

While pure lands are described in such highly positive terms, the English term "pure land" derives from the Chinese *ching tu*, which is interpreted as "land that purifies." The best known of pure lands is Sukhāvatī, the pure land of Amitābha, and what is most critical about Sukhāvatī is that—unlike this realm—it is a place where there are no obstacles to one hearing the Dharma accurately, cultivating practice effectively, and attaining awakening.

Transmuting: An Alchemical Process

A third metaphor is that of alchemical transmutation in which the negative mental and emotional states are converted into positive ones. If not suggested by ideas about the nature of the unbeneficial roots (*akuśala mūla*), this kind of conception is at least compatible with it.[32] In the *Path of Purification* (P. *Visuddhimagga*), Buddhaghosa (fl. fifth century CE) gives a typology of six personality types (*cariyā*), three of which are negative (being the three roots of affliction) and three positive—the positive and negative forms being inversions of each other. The greedy temperament correlates with a faithful temperament: "Greed seeks out sense desires as object, while faith seeks out the special qualities of virtue and so on. And greed does not give up what is harmful, while faith does not give up what is beneficial."[33] Similarly, a hating temperament corresponds with an intelligent one: "Hate seeks out only unreal faults, while understanding seeks out only real faults. And hate occurs in the mode of condemning living beings, while understanding occurs in the mode of condemning formations."[34] Lastly, the inverse of a deluded temperament is a speculative one: "For just as delusion is restless owing to (p. 376) perplexity, so are applied thoughts that are due to thinking over various aspects. And just as delusion vacillates owing to superficiality, so do applied thoughts that are due to facile conjecturing."[35] In contrast to Buddhaghosa's description of the ten good deeds as simply the absence of the ten bad deeds, discussed earlier, here the relation between the positive and negative temperaments suggests an alchemical conception that negative (or impure or ordinary,

foolish person) can be converted to positive (or pure, or a buddha). This can be taken to imply that there is something like an underlying purity or undifferentiated unity which is expressible either in positive or negative form. In Indian systems of alchemy this is ash, which "is the supreme manifestation of primal matter."[36] Recall the previous quote from Davidson regarding the reduction of obscurations to ash in the *homa* fire.

This same logic is found in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, which is an important source for the idea of the comprehensive ground of consciousness, *ālayavijñāna*. *Ālayavijñāna* is the karma-bearing unconscious which is pure in the sense of being neither positive nor negative, but which carries latencies depending on thoughts, decisions, and actions. The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* says:

> Mind [*ālayavijñāna*] is always neutral.
>
> Mentation [karma producing thought] moves in two ways.
>
> The arising of consciousness [conscious awareness of objects]
>
> Is virtuous and nonvirtuous.

and then goes on:

> Mind is naturally clear.
>
> Mentation is what makes it turbid.
>
> Mentation together with consciousness
>
> Always plants latent tendencies.[37]

The idea of an underlying purity which is pure in the sense of being neither positive nor negative enables a logic in which negative or positive expressions can be converted one to another in a kind of mental alchemy.

Later than both the *Lotus Sutra* and Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, the metaphor of alchemical transmutation is explicit in Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (ca. 700 CE), where he adjures his practitioners to "[g]rasp tightly the quicksilver elixir, known as the Awakening Mind, which must be thoroughly worked."[38] Here Śāntideva is likening the conversion of an ordinary person into a bodhisattva to the kind of transformation effected by the alchemists' mercury. Stephen E. Harris has argued that this reference to alchemy is more than simply a literary flourish for Śāntideva. Instead, it is a second logic of awakening found in the text, the most frequent one being that of cleansing. The metaphor of cleansing includes equating the power of *bodhicitta* to eradicate "great vices in an instant" to the destructive power of the rain of fire that destroys the cosmos at the end of time.[39] Harris, however, finds the alchemical conception of transmutation (p. 377) itself to be a consistent enough theme throughout the work to constitute an alternative model of the working of *bodhicitta*. He calls attention to meditations that "invoke all three of the root *kleśas* of anger (*krodha*) craving (*tṛṣṇā*) and delusion (*moha*) and by far the most frequent

strategy employed is to waken and redeploy their energy into liberative purposes."[40] Focusing on alchemical imagery, Harris suggests that "the energy of the *kleśas*, though defiled, when combined with *bodhicitta* will naturally fuel its own destruction and replacement by the force of the *kuśala dharmas* themselves."[41]

At the center of the *homa* is ritual identification in which the ritual practitioner and the buddha or bodhisattva evoked into the ritual enclosure become identical. This is a transmutative moment, such that the thought of awakening (*bodhicitta*) is actualized. Embodying the buddha, the practitioner's speech is the speech of the buddha, and his/her view of the world is the buddha's pure vision of the world as empty.

Theorizing Buddhist Ritual

Despite repeated efforts by many scholars, no widely accepted definition of ritual has emerged, suggesting that the task is misdirected by a now outmoded metaphysics. There is nothing about which a correct definition can be constituted. Instead, "ritual" is a socially constructed concept, which means it is constructed by use, rather than being an object about which a definition can be devised. Socially constructed, that concept is employed in both popular religious culture and in academic discourse. Regarding the latter usages, Kevin Trainor has said that "[t]he category of ritual itself has been produced and employed within a community of scholars with its own ritualized strategies for operating in the world."[42] In lieu then of a definition, we can draw on the two usefully general characteristics of ritual that Trainor has identified. Ritual is first "undeniably something that one does, i.e., it entails the use of one's body…. [And, second] ritual tends toward formality and away from spontaneity."[43] The first characteristic is relevant in relation to one theory of Buddhist ritual as primarily a matter of "seeing," while the second is evidenced by the historical continuity of ritual structures and metaphors discussed earlier in the chapter.

Four Stages of Ritual Identification

One suggestion about how to understand Buddhist ritual has been to consider it a Buddhist analogue of Hindu *darśan*, "wherein the supplicant ritually invokes the presence of a deity, and both supplicant and deity behold one another."[44] For much of tantric Buddhist thought, however, "deity yoga"—as it is known in Tibetan traditions—is a path of practice that only begins with seeing a buddha. The four interactions between the practitioner and the Buddha in deity yoga frequently begin with seeing, then proceed to (p. 378) laughing, embracing (or holding hands), and culminate in uniting.[45] As conceptualized in the four stages of deity yoga, uniting correlates with ritual identification in the performance of tantric ritual. The critical difference between a Mahayana philosophy of practice and a tantric one is ritual identification, "the act of generating oneself as the deity" (Tib. *bdag bskyed*), or in Shingon terminology, the "three mysteries" (Jpn. *sanmitsu*), which are the unity of the body, speech, and mind of the practitioner with the body, speech, and mind of the deity. José Ignacio Cabezón notes that, along with offerings and

expiatory rites at the end of a ritual, ritual identification is "ubiquitous to tantric ritual generally."[46]

Embodied Awakening: Body, Speech, and Mind

Present-day representations of Buddhist practice frequently emphasize its mental aspect. On the one hand, this follows from the highly psychologized nature of contemporary American popular religious culture. On the other, many Buddhist understandings give the mind a central, determinative role in consciousness. Thus, because of the apparent congruence of these two, the representation of practice as a mental exercise is overdetermined. However, the underlying dualism of Western thought, which dichotomizes material and bodily from spiritual and mental, distorts the understanding of awakening by making the goal into a purely mental transformation.

Buddhist thought discusses the totality of human existence as a process having three aspects—body, speech, and mind—as in the three mysteries discussed previously. Highlighting this holistic conception of human existence, awakening involves the integral transformation of body, speech, and mind together. The import of embodiment is made evident in a text centered on Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara, the *Wuliangshou rulai guanxing gongyang yigui*. The practices prescribed by this text "are said to induce a *samādhi* wherein the practitioner's body becomes indistinguishable from the body of the deity. The power of this *samādhi*, claims the text, will bring about the eradication of defilement, allowing the practitioner to attain the highest level of rebirth in the Pure Land at death."[47]

A second characteristic of modern presentations of Mahayana interpret *bodhicitta* as the *intention* to become awakened, structuring this teleologically as a present unawakened state and a future awakened one. The tantric logic, however, asserts that one is always and already awakened, even if one doesn't act like it. Thus, *bodhicitta* is not about intention toward a future state, but rather thinking (*citta*) as awakened (*bodhi*), that is, actualizing the always already awakened state. Ritual actions of actualizing *bodhicitta* are not therefore merely assertions of pious intent, but are linked directly to the central ritual act of ritual identification. Ritual identification by means of the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind "do not bring about this union so much as they give form to it. In other words, the practitioner has always been one with the deity; the rites of the three mysteries merely enact, express, or realize this primordial state of affairs."[48] The performative complexity of the *homa* ritual reflects the complex symbolic and interpretive (p. 379) history of the ritual.[49] As a process of sedimentation, Vedic, Buddhist, Mahayana, and tantric layers have each been laid on top of one another, in some cases accentuating features in the lower layers, and in others blurring them.

Conclusion

Ritual identification as performed in the contemporary Shingon *homa* involves the full range of human existence as categorized by Buddhist thought: body, speech, and mind. It exemplifies the third metaphor of the process of awakening, alchemical transmutation of

negative expressions of an underlying undifferentiated state into positive ones. In this case it is the primordial unity of practitioner and buddha that is made manifest in the ritual context. This conception of the process of awakening differs from the other two metaphors, cleansing and cultivating. These three metaphors together provide a fuller and more nuanced analysis of different conceptions than the long-standing semiotic pairing of sudden/leap and gradual/path.

The perspective on Buddhist ritual practice provided by an examination of tantric conceptions of ritual identification as a union proceeding in four steps also provides much greater depth than simply identifying Buddhist ritual as a corollary to Hindu *darśan*. In addition, ritual identification emerges as a tantric doctrinal component that is unique to the tradition. Tantra is more than simply a collection of free-floating yogic and ritual technologies that was "transmitted independent of any theoretical or doctrinal overlay."[50] It is instead a lived tradition in which practice and doctrine are integral to one another.

The *homa* is found throughout the tantric cosmopolis, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain, and across the full range of Buddhist cultures from Nepal, through all of Inner Asia, to East Asia, and now internationally. It is a dramatic ritual performance, in which a fire is built by the practitioner, and offerings are made into that fire. The offerings are representative of the practitioner's own mental and emotional obscurations, while the fire is the wisdom of emptiness that purifies the practitioner's obscurations, converting them into pure offerings for the buddha. It is ritual identification of the practitioner's body, speech, and mind with the same three existential aspects of the deity that is central to the practice, and that at the same time makes the practice effective.

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Notes:

(1.) My thanks to Maria Heim, Dan Lusthaus, Charles Muller, and Gil Fronsdal for the kind assistance they provided.

A preliminary version of these opening sections was presented as a public lecture at the University of Southern California's Shinso Ito Center for Japanese Culture and Religion. My thanks to Duncan Williams, the Shinso Ito Center, the University of Southern California, and Shannon Takushi for organizing the event.

(2.) In Japan, *homa* are most commonly encountered either as stand-alone rituals, or as the central event of a more extended ceremony. In other Buddhist cultures, however, *homa* also constitute a smaller part of a larger ceremonial, such as "to expiate faults of omission and commission in the enactment of the rite, and so as to 'satisfy the deity' "; José Ignacio Cabezón, "Introduction," in *Tibetan Ritual*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16. Such a contextual change also modifies the significance of the ritual.

(3.) These terms—*sacrifice* and *votive offering*—are sublated from their contexts of origin in Greek, Latin, and early Christian religious practice, and are used here heuristically, rather than as absolutely distinct categories.

(4.) Douglas Hedley, "Sacrifice," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, ed. Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 346.

(5.) David E. Aune, "Prayer," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual*, ed. Ristro Uro, Juliette J. Day, Rikard Roitto, and Richard E. DeMaris (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 250–51.

(6.) Richard K. Payne, "Homa: Tantric Fire Ritual," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. John Barton (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), n.p..

(7.) On this latter point, see Richard K. Payne, "Mantra and Grammar: A Linguistic Dimension of Extraordinary Language," in *Investigating Principles: International Aspects of Buddhist Culture, Essays in Honour of Charles Willemen*, ed. Lalji "Shravak" and Supriya Rai (Hong Kong: Buddha-Dharma Centre of Hong Kong, 2019), 277–88.

(8.) While outside the specific ritual corpus of modern Shingon, ritual programs may vary in different religious traditions. However, other scholars have noted the consistent nature of ritual structures within specific traditions. Stephanie W. Jamison uses the metaphor of "ritual boxes" that are opened and closed in the course of a ritual performance; Stephanie W. Jamison, *Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer's Wife: Women, Ritual, and Hospitality in Ancient India* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 52. Charles Orzech has referred to "boilerplate"; Charles D. Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The Scripture for Humane Kings in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 155; and Yael Bentor to "frames"; Yael Bentor, *Consecrations of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 7–8. José Cabezón refers to this as a "narrative" ("Introduction," 17), which is, however, a second-order analysis of a relation that is dialectically both "model of" and "model for."

(9.) Richard K. Payne and Michael Witzel, eds., Homa *Variations: The Study of Ritual Change across the* Longue Durée (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

(10.) Richard K. Payne, "Ritual Syntax and Cognitive Theory," *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, 3rd series, no. 6 (2004): 195–227.

(11.) There are noteworthy similarities with not only Iranian, but also Greek and Roman ritual practices as well. In recent work, Holly Gether argues that the Iranian practices were not simply part of the Indo-European background to tantra, but had a direct influence in the medieval origins of the tantric *homa*. This is an interesting proposal, and deserves further study, though it remains in a preliminary stage of development. Holly Grether, "Tantric Homa Rites in the Indo-Iranian Ritual Paradigm," *Ritual Studies* 21, no. 1 (2007): 16–32; see also, "The Ritual Interplay of Fire and Water in Hindu and Buddhist Tantras," in Richard K. Payne and Michael Witzel, eds., Homa *Variations: The Study of Ritual Change across the* Longue Durée (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 47–66.

(12.) Carlos Lopez, "Food and Immortality in the Veda: A Gastronomic Theology?" *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 3, no. 3 (1997): 11–19 (slightly revised version available at https://www.academia.edu/3647011/Food_and_Immortality_in_the_Veda_A_Gastronomic_Theology; accessed January 11, 2019).

(13.) Lopez, "Food and Immortality in the Veda," 15.

(14.) The Japanese terms can be rendered as "regular" and "scattered."

(15.) The Vajradhātu is one of the two mandalas employed in the Shingon tradition, the other being the Garbhadhātu mandala. These provide an esoteric cosmology that is dialectically the ground for and reflected in the symbolism and organization of ritual practices.

(16.) Robert Sharf comes to the same conclusion, saying: "The fire ritual is thus framed by the recitations of the dispersed invocations [secondary offerings], and the practitioner is to remain in a state of unity with the principal deity throughout the fire offerings." Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 26, no. 1 (2003): 81.

(17.) Jeffrey Hopkins, "Preface," in *The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra*, Vol. I: *Tantra in Tibet*, trans. Jeffrey Hopkins (1977. Reprint, Boulder, CO: Snow Lion, 2016), vii–xii; viii.

(18.) Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual," 69–70.

(19.) On this last, see Richard K. Payne, *Language in the Buddhist Tantra of Japan: Indic Roots of Mantra* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 82–85.

(20.) Yixing, T.1796: 39.662b7–13; cited in Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual," 71.

(21.) Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 141.

(22.) This dichotomy is the basis of Karl H. Potter's classic study, *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies* (1963. Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002).

(23.) This was given expression in the collection Peter N. Gregory, ed., *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought* (1987. Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991).

(24.) Lawrence A. Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 49.

(25.) Maria Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things: Buddhaghosa on Mind, Intention, and Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 67–68.

(26.) Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things*, 74.

(27.) Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things*, 75.

(28.) Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things*, 91–92.

(29.) John R. McRae, trans., *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (Moraga, CA: BDK America, 2000), 20 (T. 348b).

(30.) McRae, trans., *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, 22 (T. 349a).

(31.) James B. Apple, "Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven as a Pure Land in Gelukpa Forms of Tibetan Buddhism," in *Pure Lands in Asian Texts and Contexts: An Anthology*, ed. Georgios T. Halkias and Richard K. Payne (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), 188–222; 196.

(32.) The term *kusala*, and by implication its negative *akusala*, have been subject to some contestation. While often given ethical connotation (good or meritorious) in the commentarial literature, Lance Cousins argues that earlier usages indicate "produced by wisdom" or "skillful." Lance Cousins, "Good or Skillful? *Kusala* in Canon and Commentary," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 3 (1996): 136–64. Heim argues against the notion that the ethical significance is later, however. Instead, she suggests that the two meanings overlap: "there are ways that moral sensitivity and awareness can be conceived as skillful, and ethically good action as well crafted." Maria Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things*, 57.

(33.) Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* (Visuddhimagga), trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (1975. Reprint, Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), 97 (Ch. III, § 75).

(34.) Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* (Visuddhimagga), 97 (Ch. III, § 76).

(35.) Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* (Visuddhimagga), 97 (Ch. III, § 77).

(36.) David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 283.

(37.) Karl Brunnhölzl, "Translator's Introduction," in *A Compendium of the Mahāyāna: Asaṅga's* Mahāyānasaṃgraha *and Its Indian and Tibetan Commentaries*, 3 vols. (Boulder, CO: Snow Lion, 2018), I:3–147; I:65.

(38.) Ch. 1, verse 10. Śāntideva, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, trans. Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6.

(39.) Stephen E. Harris, "The Skillful Handling of Poison: *Bodhicitta* and the *Kleśas* in Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 45 (2017): 331–48; 332.

(40.) Harris, "The Skillful Handling of Poison," 335.

(41.) Harris, "The Skillful Handling of Poison," 340.

(42.) Kevin Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism: Rematerializing the Sri Lankan Theravāda Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 137. Trainor is summarizing Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 205f., 219.

(43.) Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism*, 137.

(44.) Robert H. Sharf, "Ritual," in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 257. It is important

to note that Sharf is here talking not about all Buddhist rituals, but only about Buddhist invocation rituals, giving his claims the character of a tautology.

(45.) See Jeffrey Hopkins's translation of the introduction to Tsongkhapa's *Sngags rim chen mo*, published as *Tantra in Tibet* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), 156–62. My thanks to Roger Jackson for assistance with this. Jackson further points out that the order is not the same in all instances. He also suggests that the earliest sources seem to be the *Hevajra* and *Saṃpuṭa* tantras (personal communication, email dated December 19, 2018).

(46.) José Ignacio Cabezón, "Introduction," in *Tibetan Ritual*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–34; 18.

(47.) Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual," 72.

(48.) Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual," 70.

(49.) This history is more complex than the two-strata chronological analysis suggested by Sharf, who in turn draws on work by Phyllis Granoff. Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual," 83–84.

(50.) Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual," 57.

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