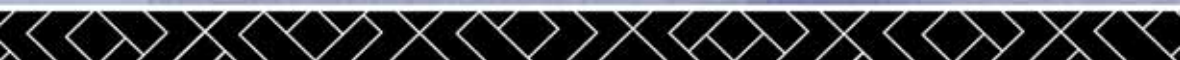
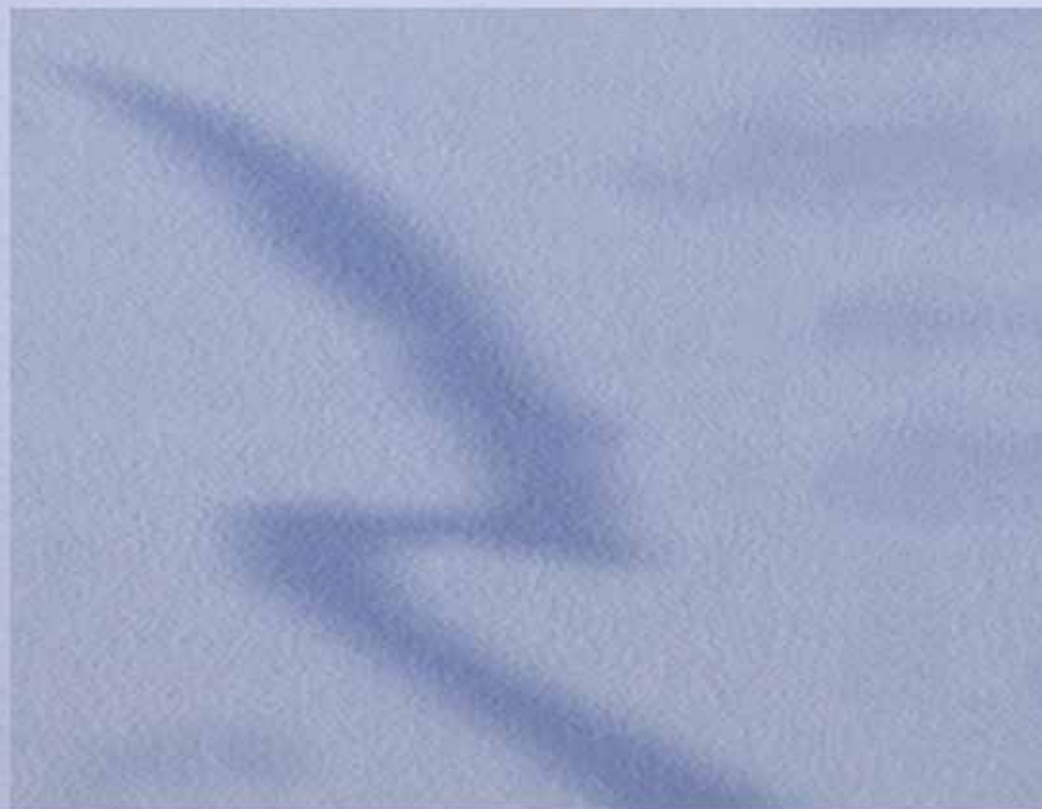


**THE MAHĀ-VAIROCANA-  
ABHISAM̐BODHI TANTRA**  
WITH BUDDHAGUHYA'S COMMENTARY

Translated by  
STEPHEN HODGE

 **RoutledgeCurzon**  
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**Part I**  
**INTRODUCTION**





## I GENERAL INTRODUCTION

During the last thirty years there has been a revolution in the understanding and appreciation of the Buddhist tantras in the West. Whereas they had been regarded in the past with suspicion and disdain by those who saw them as the hybrid products of a degenerate form of late Indian Buddhism, they are now the focus of great interest among both the growing band of Western Buddhists following the Tibetan tradition and the smaller number of Western academics specializing in Buddhist and related studies, as will be evident from even a cursory glance at bibliographies of works on Buddhism now in print. However, this new interest in the Buddhist tantras still has many limitations and unfortunately a detailed description of the development of tantric thought and practices is far from being complete. This situation will not be remedied until much more textual work has been done by the few scholars who have access to the original materials surviving in the various Asian languages. Moreover, almost without exception, present-day scholars in the West have relied solely on Tibetan materials and such Indic texts as have survived the ravages of time for their studies on the tantras. While much valuable work has thus been produced by these scholars, they do present a somewhat one-sided view of Tantric Buddhism as they have tended to concentrate on the more spectacular Anuttara-yoga tantras. For apart from these, there is also a wealth of other tantric literature preserved in Tibetan sources, dealing with the Kriyā, Caryā and Yoga tantras, that awaits detailed exploration and translation. Additionally, the neglect of the vast amount of literature related to Tantric Buddhism available in Chinese translation is quite regrettable, although this is understandable in view of the quite daunting range of linguistic skills which is needed to make full use of these texts. It would not be surprising to find that most Western scholars working on Buddhist tantras from the Indo-Tibetan side are largely unaware of the enormous volume of translated tantric texts preserved in Chinese. We can better understand the sheer bulk of available material if we relate it to the present work. The Chinese text of the *Mahāvairocana Tantra* covers just forty four pages in the standard Taishō Edition and my translation of this covers about 200 pages. However there are another 3,554 pages of texts related to Tantric Buddhism in Chinese, which at the above rate would amount to over 16,150 pages in English. And that is before we start on the native Chinese and Japanese commentarial works, manuals and so forth! A comprehensive study of this material is vital for an understanding of the origins of Tantric Buddhism, for while the Tibetan tradition is strong on later tantric works and less so on earlier ones, the situation with the Chinese materials is the reverse – they have preserved many of the earlier Indian texts which were never translated into Tibetan. This is not only true of ‘tantric’ style texts, but also can be said of all Buddhist works in general. It must be remembered that the bulk of Chinese translations had been completed before the Tibetans had really begun their work on the canon. Chinese translation activities began in the middle of the 2nd century CE and continued until at least the first half of the 11th century, a period of over nine hundred years! Moreover, in stark contrast to the paucity of relevant materials providing reliable dates in Indology, documents from the Chinese tradition often record various historical data with great accuracy. It is noteworthy that the dates when Buddhist texts were translated into Chinese during this nine hundred year period are known

in the majority of cases, thereby providing us with a loose framework for the chronology of the development of Buddhist texts. It should therefore not surprise us if the insights we can derive from Chinese sources cast a different light on the development of Tantric Buddhism.

For example, it is normal to classify the tantras into four categories – Kriyā, Caryā, Yoga and Anuttara-yoga – following the normal Tibetan practice and this system of classification is now treated by modern Western scholars as though it were in some way definitive. But it is clear from a study of earlier tantric materials, especially of those preserved in the Chinese tradition, that this system of classification, useful though it was to very late Indian exegetes and their Tibetan successors, was gradually developed to make sense of the mass of tantric materials that they were faced with. Nevertheless, it may be said that this system of classification also represents, in a general manner, the historical sequence in which the tantras were developed. In other words, the majority of the texts that came to be classified as Kriyā tantras derive from the earliest proto-tantric phase, leading on through Caryā tantras to the Yoga and later the Anuttara-yoga tantras. This will be seen most clearly later when we briefly examine the contents of tantric-style texts surviving in Chinese, together with their dates of translation.

But before proceeding any further, it might be useful to attempt a definition for the reader of exactly what kind of texts we may legitimately call tantras, for the situation is not as straightforward as some might wish to believe. I remember asking someone who has specialized in the Indian tantric tradition how can one identify tantric texts as being such and was given the rather ingenuous answer that this is easy because tantras have the word 'tantra' in their titles. But this is clearly not the case, because a number of texts that one would formally classify as tantras are in fact called *sūtras*, such as the *Maha-vairocana-abhisambodhi*<sup>1</sup> itself, the *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṃgraha* and several of the early rNying-ma tantras, such as the *dGongs-'dus* (T 829), the *rNgam-glog* (T 830), the *Kun-'dus* (T 831) and so forth. In fact, the word 'tantra' itself does not even appear anywhere in some of these texts, including the present text itself.

Definitions of the term do appear in some later tantric texts, such as the famous lines in the Continuation Tantra of the *Guhya-samāja*, which state “*Tantra*” is continuity and that continuity is threefold: the ground, the intrinsic nature and the indestructible. The intrinsic nature is the immanent cause, the indestructible is the result and the ground is the means. The meaning of “tantra” is summarized by these three<sup>2</sup>. However, important as these definitions are, they tend to be somewhat doctrinal or soteriological in nature, so we should try to isolate the key constituent elements which go to make up what one might call Tantric Buddhism in its widest sense, to get a better grasp of what we are dealing with. There are a number of such elements, some of which were derived from earlier trends within Buddhism itself and others which were adopted and adapted from non-Buddhist sources. Obviously it is beyond the scope of this book to present a full-scale study and documentation of all these elements, desirable though that may be, but instead I shall confine myself to a summary of those features which characterize the spirit of Buddhist tantric thought<sup>3</sup>:

- 1 Tantric Buddhism offers an alternative path to Enlightenment in addition to the standard Mahāyāna one.

- 2 Its teachings are aimed at lay practitioners in particular, rather than monks and nuns.
- 3 As a consequence of this, it recognizes mundane aims and attainments, and often deals with practices which are more magical in character than spiritual.
- 4 It teaches special types of meditation (*sādhana*) as the path to realization, aimed at transforming the individual into an embodiment of the divine in this lifetime or after a short span of time.
- 5 Such kinds of meditation make extensive use of various kinds of mandalas, *mudrās*, mantras and *dhāraṇīs* as concrete expressions of the nature of reality.
- 6 The formation of images of the various deities during meditation by means of creative imagination plays a key role in the process of realization. These images may be viewed as being present externally or internally.
- 7 There is an exuberant proliferation in the number and types of Buddhas and other deities.
- 8 Great stress is laid upon the importance of the guru and the necessity of receiving the instructions and appropriate initiations for the *sādhanas* from him.
- 9 Speculations on the nature and power of speech are prominent, especially with regards the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet.
- 10 Various customs and rituals, often of non-Buddhist origins, such as the *homa* rituals, are incorporated and adapted to Buddhist ends.
- 11 A spiritual physiology is taught as part of the process of transformation.
- 12 It stresses the importance of the feminine and utilizes various forms of sexual yoga.

Though by no means exhaustive, this list incorporates the main elements and pre-occupations of the tantras. During the proto-tantric and early tantric phase only a few of these elements may occur together in any given text, but as we enter the middle and late phases, we find that an increasing number of them, in one form or another, are incorporated into the texts. This process of synthesis and development extended over several centuries, from the earliest proto-tantric texts down to the elaborate *Kālacakra Tantra*, which was possibly the last tantra to be developed in India. While it would be foolhardy to make any definitive statements about the early development of the tantras at the present stage of our knowledge, it might be of interest to briefly examine this process, particularly from the evidence available to us from Chinese sources.

First, the general trend may be seen if we examine a simple listing of the main translations (Table 1) containing any of the above elements down to the early Tang period. Other texts could be added to this list with some justification, such as the Pure Land cycle of texts. What immediately strikes one is the sudden increase of these texts from the Sui to Tang Dynasty, an indication of the increasing popularity of 'tantric' practice in India. Those translated after Xuan-zang during the Tang and early Song periods run into hundreds and so are far too numerous to list. Looking at their contents, we can see a gradual progression from external 'mundane' rituals and objectives to the internal and the 'spiritual', from the unsystematic to the systematic. Hence, as their titles indicate, the majority of the earlier texts are connected with *dhāraṇīs* and they deal with various kinds of prayers or requests for

**Table 1: Chinese Translations of Sutras with ‘Tantric’ Elements**

Wu	<p><b>Zhi-qian</b> (220-230 CE):  <i>Ananta-mukha-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1011)  <i>Mātaṅga-sūtra</i> (= <i>Śārdūla-karṇāvadāna</i>) (T1300)  <i>Dhāraṇī of Supreme Illuminator</i> (T1351)  <i>Puṣpakūta-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1356)</p>
E. Chin (317-420)	<p><b>Dharmarakṣa:</b>  <i>Dhāraṇī for Relieving Toothache</i> (T1327)  <i>Ārṣa-prāśamaṇī-sūtra</i> (T1325)  <i>Māyā-kāra-bhadra-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1378)  <i>*Daṇḍala-māyā Dhāraṇī</i> (T1391)  <i>Maṇi-ratna-sūtra</i> (T1393)</p> <p><b>Nanda:</b>  <i>Sūtra of Avalokiteśvara’s Dhāraṇī for Overcoming Poisoning</i> (T1043)</p> <p><b>Śrī-mitra:</b>  <i>Abhiseka-sūtra</i> (T1331)</p> <p><b>Kumarajīva:</b>  <i>Mahā-māyuri-vidyā-rājñī</i> (T988)</p> <p><b>Buddhabhadra:</b>  <i>Avatamsaka-sūtra-hṛdaya-dhāraṇī</i> (T1021)</p> <p><b>Unknown:</b>  <i>Puṣpakūta-dhāraṇī</i> (T1357) (T1358)</p>
W. Chin	<p><b>Dharmapāla</b> (385-400):  <i>Mātaṅga-sūtra</i> (T1301)</p> <p><b>Sheng-jian:</b>  <i>Sūtra on the Dhāraṇī Against Perversities</i> (T1342)</p>
N. Liang (397-439)	<p><b>Fa-zhong:</b>  <i>Mahā-vaiṣṭya-dhāraṇī</i> (T1339)</p>
Liu Sung (420-478)	<p><b>Guṇabhadra:</b>  <i>Ananta-mukha-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1013)</p> <p><b>*Punyaśīla &amp; Xuan-chang:</b>  <i>Ananta-mukha-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1014)</p> <p><b>Kālayāsa:</b>  <i>Amitābha-dhyāna-sūtra</i> (T365)  <i>Bhaisajya-rāja-bhaisajya-samudgati-sūtra</i> (T1161)</p>
Qi (479-502)	<p><b>Wan-tian-yi:</b>  <i>Infinite Dhāraṇī of Entry into all Dharmas</i> (T1343)</p>
Liang (505-556)	<p><b>Saṅghapala:</b>  <i>Mahā-māyuri-sūtra</i> (T984)  <i>Ananta-mukha-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1016)</p>
N. Wei (534-550)	<p><b>Buddhaśānta:</b>  <i>Ananta-mukha-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1015)  <i>Vajra-maṇḍa-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1344)</p> <p><b>Tan-yao:</b>  <i>Dhāraṇī for Great Benefit</i> (T1335)</p> <p><b>Bodhiruci:</b>  <i>Sarva-bala-rakṣa-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1028)</p>
N. Chou (557-581)	<p><b>Jñānayaśa:</b>  <i>Mahā-megha-sūtra</i> (T992) (T993)</p> <p><b>Yaśogupta:</b>  <i>Avalokiteśvaraika-daśa-mukha-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1070)</p>

**Table 1 (continued)**

Sui (581-618)	<p><b>Narendrayāsa:</b>  <i>Mahā-megha-sūtra</i> (T991)  <b>Jānagupta:</b>  <i>Ananta-mukha-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1017)  <i>Amoghapaśa-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1093)  <i>Tathāgata-mahā-kauśalyopāya-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1334)  <i>Dharmolka-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1340)  <i>Mahā-bala-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1341)  <i>Vajra-maṇḍa-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1345)  <i>Dhāraṇī of the Twelve Buddhas</i> (T1348)  <i>Dhāraṇī of Supreme Illuminator</i> (T1353) (T1354)</p>
T'ang	<p><b>Xuan-zang</b> (post 645):  <i>Sarva-buddha-hṛdaya-dhāraṇī</i> (T918)  <i>Five Dhāraṇīs</i> (T1034)  <i>Avalokiteśvaraika-daśa-mukha-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1071)  <i>Amoghapaśa-hṛdaya-sūtra</i> (T1094)  <i>Vasudhārā-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1162)  <i>Ṣaṇ-mukha-dhāraṇī</i> (T1360) (T1361)  <i>Subāhu-mudrā-dhāraṇī-sūtra</i> (T1363)  <i>Sūtra of Most Secret Dhāraṇī of Eight Names</i> (T1365)  <i>Dhāraṇī that Saves from Adversities</i> (T1395)</p>

liberation from sufferings, adversities or disasters. Such texts probably have their roots in the early *paritta* type of sutras. But we are unable to detect any fusion in a systematic manner of Buddhist thought with these prayers and practices. So though a few of these texts, such as the *Sutra on the Dhāraṇī Against Perversities* (T 1342) and the *Infinite Dhāraṇī of Entry into all Dharmas* (T 1343) refer to emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and others such as the *Ṣaṇ-mukha-dhāraṇī* (T 1360 & T 1361) mention 'awareness-only' (*vijñapti-mātra*), the general feeling one gets from looking at these texts is that they were for the benefit of unsophisticated ordinary people beyond the confines of the great monasteries such as Nālandā. Hence the aims of the practices are often quite modest and do not entail a radical course of self-development using the complex types of meditation (*bhāvanā*) and the mandalas or *mudrās* that are so characteristic of fully developed tantras. On the other hand, as one might expect to find in a popular devotional form of Buddhism, we can note the existence of various kinds of worship and offering (*pūja*) to the Buddhas which later form a part of tantric practice. It is noteworthy that some texts describe types of worship that employ visualization of various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, especially those associated with the Pure Land group of texts. For example, the *Amitāyur-dhyāna-sūtra* (T 365), translated into Chinese by Kālayāsa around 430 CE, gives vivid descriptions of Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara and Mahā-sthāma-prāpta and also of the mandala-like Pure Land of Amitābha itself. It can easily be seen how similar such meditative visualizations are to those prescribed in tantric texts both for worship and for *sādhana*. The visualizations of the Pure Land parallel to a remarkable extent those of mandalas, as for example, that in Chapter 16 herein of the *Mahā-vairocana Tantra*.

Other texts in the above list are important as they give some indication of the introduction and use of rituals. For example, the well-known *Mātariṅga Sutra* (T551, T552, T1300, T1301), first translated by Zhi-qian in 230 CE and re-translated several

times down to the late 5th century CE, speaks of a magical ritual used for subjugation. The earliest versions tell of a low-caste (*caṇḍālī*) woman who was infatuated with Ānanda. Her mother tries to entice him in the following manner. She magically creates flowers in eight jars of water and then taking these up, she casts them back into the jars while reciting spells. Later versions of the text contain a prototype of the Buddhist *homa* ritual. The sorceress mother smears the floor of her house with cow-dung and spreads white rushes (*kuśā*) upon it. She then lights a large fire there and casts a hundred and eight flowers into it while reciting the necessary spell with each flower. These texts also contain six *dhāraṇīs* and the instructions for performing the associated ceremonies.

We see other ritual elements in the *Mahā-māyūrī-vidyā-rāja Sūtra*. The several versions of this text in Chinese bear witness to its continuing popularity. In an appendix to it, translated by Śrī-mitra (T 1331) around 340 CE, there are instructions for the delimitation of the ritual area (*sīma-bandha*), which is then to be decorated with five swords, five banners, five mirrors, twenty-one arrows and twenty-one lamps. This site is to be anointed with perfumes and mustard seeds are to be burnt to expel obstructing demons.

Further developments may be seen in the *Dhāraṇī for Great Benefit* (T1335) translated by Tan-yao in 462 CE. In addition to the burning of mustard seeds and such like, this text also prescribes the recitation of mantras before the images of various deities to bring about their appearance in order to fulfil the wishes of the practitioner. Again, it describes the making of a ritual area, but now with Buddha images arranged in circle to receive offerings.

Mandalas, which figure so much in tantras, can be formally divided into two main categories according to Buddhaghūya – the intrinsically existent mandala and the representational mandalas. The first of these is the ‘real’ mandala formed by the Buddha and the emanations of his qualities as Bodhisattvas and so forth. The second type is the graphic or plastic representation of the first. These two types seem to derive from different, though not entirely unrelated sources. As mentioned above, one might see the origin of the intrinsically existent mandala in the descriptions of the various pure lands, so striking is the similarity. On the other hand, the origins of the representational mandala may well lie in the arrangement of Buddha and Bodhisattva images upon altars for worship. As images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas became acceptable to people in India, we often find representations of the Buddha flanked by Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi. With the proliferation of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, one can understand how these would have come to resemble the basic pattern of a mandala when arranged geometrically. Hence the arrangement of such images in a circle, described in the *Dhāraṇī for Great Benefit*, can be seen as a rudimentary mandala. This same text also teaches various attainments (*siddhi*) to stop storms, to make rain, to become invisible and so forth.

I have only been able to select a few of the most noteworthy texts for mention here, but all of these works bear witness to the steady increase of tantric elements in Buddhism, leading on to the flowering of sophisticated tantric texts in the seventh and eighth centuries.

In addition to the evolutionary process indicated by the chronological sequence of these texts preserved in Chinese, there are other indications we may note that speak of the spread and acceptance of tantric practices. For example, Śāntideva (fl.

700–750 CE) compiled the *Śikṣā-samuccaya*, a valuable selection of quotations from various Mahāyāna texts, dealing with the practices a Bodhisattva was expected to engage in. There are several interesting features to be found in this work relevant to the development of Tantric Buddhism in India. One is Śāntideva's acceptance and use as a textual authority (*āmnāya*) of the *Trisamaya-rāja*, one of the sources of the *Mahā-vairocana Tantra*. The other is the evidence for the growing importance of internal visualization, similar to that in tantric practices. These are the relevant passages:

- 1 'You should recite this vidyā mentioned in the *Tri-samaya-rāja* for the mandala samaya: Namaḥ sarva-buddha-bodhisattvānām. Oṃ viraji viraji mahā-cakra-viraji. Sata sata sārata sārata trapi trapi vidhamani. Sabhajani sambhajani, taramati, siddha agre tvam svāhā. With that you may enter all mandalas. Or else you should recite Essence of the *Tathāgata* eight thousand times and then enter into both mundane and supra-mundane mandalas ...'
- 2 'Focusing upon the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, you should also recite [the mantras] following the Rite of Good Conduct, with a mind that longs to benefit all beings. This prescribed rite (vidhi) should be observed at the conclusion of this ceremony. What is prescribed in the *Tri-samaya-rāja* is authoritative (*āmnāya*), so there is no fault [in doing this].'
- 3 'According to the *Tri-samaya-rāja*, the prescribed ritual is to close your eyes and recite the Hundred Lettered [Mantra] eight thousand times, with your mind focused upon the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. As soon as you have shut your eyes, you will behold the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and be freed from sins. Or else circumambulating a *stūpa*, you should recite it eight thousand times and also place books of the holy Dharma in front of the image in the shrine.'
- 4 'The Bodhisattva who is endowed with eight qualities will constantly meet Buddhas. What are those eight? He urges people to visualize the body-form of the Buddha, he worships (upasthāna) the *Tathāgatas*, he expounds the eternal form of the *Tathāgata* ....' (From the *Bṛhat-sāgara-nāga-rāja-paripṛcchā*).
- 5 'Nobly born sons or daughters should visualize the Buddha depicted in paintings or described in books.' (From the *Sraddha-bālādhānāvātāra-mudrā*).

From this we can see that the kind of 'tantric' practice generally accepted around that time already included use of mandalas, the recitation of *dhāraṇīs*, ritual worship (*pūja*) and visualization.

Xuan-zang, the great Chinese traveller, was also in India until 645 CE. He has left us a detailed account of his travels in the *Da-tang-xi-yu-ji*, yet he makes no mention of anything which would clearly indicate the wide-spread existence of tantric practices or texts, apart from the use of *dhāraṇīs*. It has been argued that this could be due to his lack of interest in such matters, yet as he was a keen observer of the state of Buddhism as he found it throughout India at that time, it would not be unreasonable to expect him to have mentioned such practices in passing had he actually witnessed them. It is likely that any specifically tantric texts and practices that were already in existence at that time had not yet gained general acceptance in the main centres of Buddhism he visited, such as Nālandā.

However this situation seems to have changed thirty years later when Yi-jing arrived in India in 673 CE. We find a number of references in his 'Record of Eminent Monks



who Sought the Dharma in the West' (*Xī-yu-qiū-fa-gao-seng-zhuan*) to tantric practices, where there is the very suggestive remark that people 'seek the secret books from the nāga palaces in the oceans and search for mantras from stone-chambers in the mountains'. Even more noteworthy is what he has to say in the section dealing with Dao-lin, who also had spent many years in India. It seems that Dao-lin was very interested in tantric practices. He resided for a number of years at Nālandā and then set out first to Lāṭa in Western India where he 'stood before the divine altar and received the vidyās once again'. Regarding the vidyās, Yi-jing says,

*'It is said that the Vidyādhara Collection comprises a hundred thousand verses in Sanskrit, which in Chinese would amount to over three hundred rolls. But if one inspects these texts nowadays, it will be seen that many have been lost and few are complete. After the death of the Great Sage, Nāgārjuna in particular studied the main parts of this Collection. Then one of his disciples called Nanda, who was both intelligent and learned, turned his attention to this text. He spent twelve years in the west of India, applying himself solely to the study of the dhāraṇīs. At length he achieved success. Whenever it was time for him to eat, his meals descended from the sky. Furthermore, one day while he was reciting the vidyās, he wanted to get a wish-fulfilling jar, which he obtained after a short while. He was overjoyed to find that there was a book within this jar, but as he did not bind the jar with a vidyā, it suddenly vanished. Then, fearing that the vidyās might be scattered and lost, the Dharma Master Nanda gathered them together into a single collection of about twelve thousand verses, forming a single corpus. In each verse he matched up the text of the vidyās with mudrās. Although the words and the letters are similar [to those in normal use], in fact their meanings and usages are different. Truly, there is no way of comprehending them without an oral transmission. Later, the Master Dignāga saw that the merit of this work surpassed the intelligence of ordinary people and its thought pushed reason to its limits. He put his hand upon the book and said sighing, "If this sage had applied his mind to logic, what honour would have remained for me?". One can see by this the wise know their own value though fools are blind to the worth of others. This Vidyā Collection of Prayers is not yet available in China, hence Dao-lin applied his mind to these subtleties, for it is said in this Collection that 'one will only succeed in walking in the sky, riding nāgas, commanding the hundred spirits or being a benefactor of beings, by means of these vidyās'. When I, Yi-jing, was staying at Nālandā, I went several times to the altar place, but as I was not successful in either my application to the essence of this teaching or in gaining merit, in the end I gave up my hopes. I have touched on the main points of these new teachings here, in order to make them known.'*

The Chinese word *tán* (壇), which I have translated in the above passages as 'altar' is ambivalent, as it was also used to translate the word 'maṇḍala'. In view of the quotations given above from Śāntideva's *Śikṣā-samuccaya*, there is a strong likelihood that Yi-jing is referring to the use of mandalas at Nālandā while he was there. It should also be remembered that Śubhakarasiṃha, who translated the *Mahāvairocana Tantra* into Chinese, and his teacher Dharmagupta would have been at Nālandā exactly at the same time as Yi-jing was, which gives rise to the intriguing possibility that they may have actually met!

Yi-jiing mentions at length another monk, the Dhyāna Master Wu-xing, who was in India around the same time as himself. He had been there since 667 and died as he began his journey back to China in 674. Upon his death, the large number of texts he had collected, together with his travelogue-report were forwarded to China. In the part of this report which survives, Wu-xing states that '*recently the Mantra Method has come to be venerated throughout the land*'<sup>4</sup>. More will be spoken of Wu-xing's importance later.

It is this period onwards to the end of the eighth century which saw the most rapid development in tantric thought and practice. Though strictly outside the scope of this book, some observations regarding the probable sequence of events may not be out of place, especially as our commentator Buddhaguhya was active in the middle years of this period. Although there are scholars who seem to speak with great confidence about the dating and chronological relationship of the texts and people who figure in this process, my following suggestions are of a tentative and hypothetical nature. I make no apology for this, as it merely reflects the uncertainty surrounding the whole subject. One only has to take into consideration the enormous amount of available historical and documental evidence, much of which is ambiguous or contradictory, to understand the daunting task awaiting anyone attempting even an outline history of Tantric Buddhism. For example, one may present a reasonably plausible account of the relationship of the eighty four tantric *siddhas*, as has been done by several scholars, only to find that this does not fit in with evidence derived from other sources. Also, as I have stressed elsewhere, one ignores the information preserved in Chinese works at one's peril. The *only* reliable and datable eye-witness accounts that we have for the whole of the period in question are those provided for us by the Chinese monks who travelled in India – nothing comparable is available from Indian or Tibetan sources.

For reasons that I give below in the next section, I believe it is likely that the *Mahāvairocana Tantra* (hereafter MVT) was composed or 'revealed' some time during the first half of the seventh century, perhaps around 640 CE or a little earlier. If we examine its contents in comparison with other tantric works, it clearly belongs to the earliest phase of true tantras, and must precede all Yoga and Anuttara-yoga tantras on both doctrinal and iconographical grounds. Although we can identify several other works that would have been composed immediately following the MVT, the next major work in the development of tantric Buddhism must be the *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṃgraha* (STTS). This work is of seminal importance, as it heralds a number of innovations such as the adoption of a five Buddha family pattern in contrast to the three Buddha family pattern which is predominant in the MVT. We are fortunate in possessing the Sanskrit text of this work, its Tibetan translation, as well as several Chinese versions. The earliest evidence we have for the existence of this tantra again comes from Chinese sources. The Indian *ācārya* Vajrabodhi introduced elements derived from it (which he had obtained around 700) into China with his *Recitation Sūtra Extracted from the Vajra-śekhara Yoga* (T 866), which gives in a summarized form the basic meditational practices now found in the first section of the STTS. It is thought by Japanese scholars that this summary is based on material pre-dating the more elaborate version of the STTS (T 865) translated by Amoghavajra in 753. A certain amount of circumstantial evidence points to south India as the area of its origin. For example, according to its Chinese commentary, a certain *bhadanta*

(Nāgārjuna?) took the *Tattva-saṃgraha* from the Iron Stupa in south India. It is also stated in Vajrabodhi's biography that he received teachings on the *Tattva-saṃgraha* in southern India when he was thirty one (700 CE) from Nāgabodhi (Nāgabodhi is said to have been the disciple of Nāgārjuna, according to Sino-Japanese traditions). This is the first datable reference to it, so we may therefore assume that it had come into existence by the last quarter of the seventh century, though this was unlikely to have been in the full form we now have. Furthermore, Śākyamitra, one of the later eighth century Indian commentators on the STTS, relates in the introductory salutation verses where and by whom he was instructed and initiated into the STTS in his commentary on it. From the places named, we can see that the southern area of India was the home of the majority of his teachers. Especially important seems to have been the coastal region in the present-day Bombay – Goa area, known then as Koṅkana and Sahya. Moreover, his commentary on the STTS is entitled 'The Adornment of Kośāla' (*Kośāla-alamkāra*). There were two Kośālas in India: the old Kośāla centred on Śrāvastī, and another one further to the south, straddling a wide area across India from east to west. Śākyamitra's Kośāla is likely to have been the latter. We know from Xuanzang's travelogue that this Kośāla was the country in which the famous stūpa of Nāgārjuna-koṇḍa was located, which is significant in view of the tradition that it was Nāgārjuna who removed the STTS from the Iron Stūpa. Finally, Amoghavajra, who translated the first section of the STTS, obtained his copy during his trip to southern India between 743-746.

The next text of major importance is the *Guhya-samāja Tantra*. Again, the first datable reference to this text is to be found in Chinese sources. When he returned from his trip to India, Amoghavajra wrote a summary of the eighteen parts of the *Vajra-śekhara* (understood by the Sino-Japanese tradition as another name for the STTS), the *Shi-ba-hui-zhi-gui* (T 869). This work gives titles and brief descriptions of the contents of eighteen tantras, though it is unfortunately not possible to identify all of those which he describes with extant tantras<sup>5</sup>. However, he clearly does include a description of a prototype *Guhya-samāja Tantra* (GST) as the fifteenth item, but the information he gives shows that the version which we have now in Tibetan and Sanskrit was still to be finalized when he returned to India in 743–746 CE. In fact, a detailed examination of the text of the GST, in conjunction with the oldest commentaries, indicates that the GST, like many other Buddhist texts, underwent several stages of development before the final form was reached. We can see from a comparison of the contents of its eighteenth chapter, the Continuation Tantra (*uttara-tantra*) with the preceding portion of the GST, that the GST originally comprised just the first twelve chapters of the version we now have, because all the fifty two questions and answers contained in the Continuation Tantra relate to topics mentioned only in those first twelve chapters of the GST. This is further borne out by an examination of the Explanatory Tantra, the *Sandhi-vyākaraṇa*, which also deals only with matters arising from the first twelve chapters. This, therefore, is likely to have been the form of the GST around the time when Amoghavajra was in India – a short version of twelve chapters, with perhaps the Continuation Tantra (the now eighteenth chapter) already having been composed but still existing as an independent work. Following this, we may posit a further development into a version with seventeen chapters, for the earliest commentaries by teachers such as Vajrahāsa do not deal with chapter eighteen, the Continuation Tantra. In view of the general chronology of

people connected with him, Vajrahāsa's commentary seems to have been written c.750. It is noteworthy that Vajrahāsa is also named by the rNying-ma Tantric Collection (*rNying-ma'i rGyud-'bum*) as a translator of the first seventeen chapters of GST with rMa Rin-chen mChog, which were later re-translated by Śraddhākaravarma and Rin-chen bZang-po. Finally, the eighteenth chapter would have been appended to the Root Tantra shortly after this time. The rNying-ma Tantric Collection states, probably spuriously, that this was translated by Buddhaguhya and 'Brog-mi dPal Yeshe.

Yet the GST did not spring into being out of a vacuum. As we have seen, it must have taken several decades to evolve from the prototype described by Amoghavajra to the full length version we now have. But we can additionally identify several stepping-stones in the process of evolution of tantras from the *Tattva-saṃgraha Tantra* to the *Guhya-samāja Tantra*, especially the *Guhya-garbha* and the *Māyā-jāla Tantra*. Although the exact relationship between these two texts is uncertain, it seems from iconographical considerations for example, that the sequence of development was *Tattva-saṃgraha* → *Guhya-garbha* → *Māyā-jāla* → *Guhya-samāja*.

Apart from these tantras, several other important works also belong to this early period, such as the *Buddha-sama-yoga Tantra* and the *Śrī-paramādyā Tantra*. The former is of interest because Amoghavajra mentions it as the ninth item in his *Shi-ba-hui-zhi-gui*, which is an indication of its age, while parts of the latter are especially venerated in the Japanese Shingon tradition. However, I must now conclude this brief survey of the evolution of tantric literature as we are in danger of losing sight of the main theme of this introduction, the *Mahā-vairocana-abhisambodhi Tantra*.

## II HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### i. Date of Compilation

Following the above outline of the development of tantric Buddhism, it might be asked where the MVT itself fits in. Once again we may arrive at a tentative date for its composition by making use of evidence available from the Chinese tradition in particular. As we know, the MVT was translated by Śubhakarasiṃha into Chinese in 724. However, it seems certain that he was unable to make use of his own version of the text, if in fact he had brought one with him. Instead, he had to use a copy he and Yi-xing found at the Hua-yan Temple in Chang-an. As will be mentioned later, there are good grounds for believing this copy of the MVT was one of the texts gathered by Wu-xing, who was in India for eight years until his death there in 674. Of course, we do not know when he obtained a copy of the MVT during his stay in India, but let us assume that it would have been some time around 672 CE when he was beginning to think of returning to China. When we take into consideration the other evidence mentioned above regarding the increasing popularity of tantric practices around this time, it seems likely that the MVT was composed and gaining acceptance some time shortly before Wu-xing's arrival in India, perhaps about the middle of the seventh century. This is corroborated to a certain extent by the lineage given for the MVT according to Chinese sources: Mahāvairocana → Vajrapāṇi → Dharmagupta → Śubhakarasiṃha. We see from this that Dharmagupta is the first human in the chain of transmission of the MVT, so it is not unreasonable to assume that the first version of MVT was compiled sometime during Dharmagupta's lifetime, which if we discount the stories in the Chinese records about his age as a pious fiction, would have been during the hundred years from around 615 CE to 715 CE<sup>6</sup>. It may even be the case that Dharmagupta himself was actually involved in the composition of the MVT. It is also difficult to imagine that MVT was compiled much earlier than this, since none of the Indian monks (Zhi-tong, Bhagavad-dharma, Atikūṭa, Divakara, Śikṣānanda, Manicinta) arriving in China from India at the end of the seventh century, who were involved in the translation of the tantric type of texts, are known to have brought a copy of the MVT with them.

As with all such texts, the MVT underwent several stages of development. As there is no known Sanskrit version of the MVT surviving<sup>7</sup>, unless there is one hidden somewhere in Tibet or locked away among the Sanskrit texts 'rescued' from Tibet in recent decades and kept in Beijing, we must depend upon the Tibetan and Chinese translations for our understanding of this process. According to both the Chinese and the Tibetan traditions, the MVT we now have is said to have been an extract of an enormous original version – Śubhakarasiṃha says that it had 100,000 verses. This may in fact imply that the MVT is a compilation from a more amorphous set of materials or even a cycle of texts. Certainly, even a cursory glance through the MVT suggests that it was assembled from a variety of sources, some of which can still be identified. It has long been recognized in the Sino-Japanese tradition that Chapter I forms an entity in itself and is distinct from the remainder of the text. The traditional explanation is that this chapter contains the doctrinal basis for the practical matters discussed in later chapters. However, given the fact that it is almost entirely written in prose and its contents seem stylistically so different to the rest of the work, one has the

feeling that it originally was likely to have been an independent Mahāyāna work that was suitably modified and placed at the beginning of the MVT. Likewise, the prose Chapters VIII (The Samādhi Without Perceptual Forms) and XX (The Bodhisattva's Training Accompanied by Expedient Means) seem to deal with more standard Mahāyāna topics and were added to the MVT from other sources at the time of compilation. The early prose segment of Chapter VI (The True Nature of Siddhi Accomplishment) is based on a parallel passage in the *Tri-samaya-vyūha*, as I have noted at that point. One also has the feeling that the block of chapters dealing with the Hundred Letters (XXI–XXV), the three chapters, VII–IX, which the standard canonical Tibetan version has transposed from the end of the text where they were originally located, and also Chapter XXIX (The *Homa* Rituals) were later added to the MVT as it was developed and expanded. The earliest core of the MVT most probably comprised the three blocks of chapters dealing with the Body Mandala (II–VI), the Speech Mandala (X–XII), and the Mind Mandala (XIII–XVI), together with some of the remaining chapters which cover related general topics.

Whatever the truth of the matter is, the earliest version we now have is that preserved in the Chinese translation of the text and its commentary based on an oral exegesis given by Śubhakarasiṃha, probably using Wu-xing's Sanskrit copy which he obtained in India prior to 674. For the following stages in its evolution, we have to turn to the materials preserved in Tibetan, which include four documents we must consider. These are the Tibetan translation of the MVT itself, the unrevised and the revised versions of Buddhaguhya's commentary and his summary guide to the MVT, the *Piṇḍārtha*. The version embedded in the unrevised commentary is closer to the Chinese in order of chapters and phrasing than the Tibetan translation of the MVT itself. This can be seen from the accompanying chart (Table 2). Therefore, the version of MVT used by Buddhaguhya as the basis for his commentaries represents the second known stage in the development of the MVT. To what extent the differences in phrasing are due to Tibetan stylistics is not clear, but the text contained in the unrevised commentary often makes better sense than the 'official' translation of the MVT itself. The Tibetan translation of the MVT itself was based on a text which had undergone further re-organization and so gives us the third and final version available<sup>8</sup>. It is conceivable that this re-organization was done by the translators Śilendrabodhi and dPal brTsegs themselves, or else by later redactors of the Kanjur. Later, gZhon-nu dPal incorporated this translation into Buddhaguhya's commentary when he revised it in 1461 CE. The situation is explained in the supplementary colophon to the revised commentary thus:

'When the available Tibetan translations of commentarial literature (*bstan-bcos*) were assembled at sNar-thang, it was apparent that the recent exemplars of this running commentary on the *Vairocana-abhisambodhi-[tantra]* available in all the *bTan-'gyurs* are unfortunately corrupt and not redacted against the Tantra and the new standards of language (*skad gzar-bcad*), being based on a copy that was corrupt, with portions out of place, and slightly incomplete. Hence, in 1461 at the rTse-thang monastery, the central Tibetan *bande* gZhon-nu-dpal compiled this revision by comparing the text with the words of the Tantra as translated by sKa-ba dPal-brtsegs who had mastery of both languages and by amending the language to the new standards.'

**Table 2: Comparative Chart of MVT Chapters**

T		B		V		C
1	->	1	->	1	->	1
2		2		2		2
3		3		3		3
4		4		4		4
5		-		-		5
6		5		5		6 + 7
7		6		24		28
8		7		25		29
9		8		26		30
10		9		6		8
11		10		7		9
12		11		8		10
13		12		9		11
14		13		10		12
15		14		11		14
16		15		12		13
17		16		13		15
18		17		14		16
19		18		15		17
20		19		16		18
21		20		17		19
22		21		18		20
23		22		19		21
24		23		20		22
25		-		-		23
26		24		21		24
27		25		22		25
28		26		23		26
29		27		27		27 + 31

This shows the sequence of chapters in each version relative to the standard Tibetan version (T) of the MVT. The chapter numbers are those of each translation of the MVT. The main difference is the placing of Chapters 7/8/9 of the standard Tibetan version towards the end of the Unrevised Commentary (V) and the Chinese MVT (C), which must be the earlier arrangement. The earlier location of these chapters suggests that they might not have formed part of the initial compilation of the MVT. Note also that the Chinese version makes two chapters out of both Chapters 6 and 29 of the Tibetan version. some text

This chronology may be summarized as follows:

Wu-xing's copy of MVT	pre	674
Uttara-tantra	714?	
Śubhakarasiṃha's translation of MVT		724
Śubhakarasiṃha's commentary on MVT		724
Buddhaguhya's copy of MVT	pre	760
Buddhaguhya's Piṇḍārtha	c.	760
Buddhaguhya's Commentary	c.	760
MVT translated by Śīlendrabodhi & dPal brTsegs	pre	812 <sup>A</sup>
Buddhaguhya's Commentary revised by gZhon-nu dPal		1461

## ii. Place of Compilation

Over the years, scholars in Japan and elsewhere have suggested a variety of locations for the composition of the MVT, ranging from Valabhī in western India, Ajaṅṭā in central India and Orissa in the east. But, although there is actually no clear evidence regarding the place of compilation, I feel everything points to somewhere in north eastern India, especially the region between Nālandā and the Himalayan foothills a hundred miles or so to its north, though there are some grounds to favour northern Orissa as a second choice. The great university-monastery of Nālandā flourished as one of the main centres of Mahāyāna Buddhist learning from the 5th century CE onwards. During the centuries of its existence, many of the greatest Buddhist teachers lived and taught there. All the people who we know were connected with the transmission of the MVT resided there. Śubhakarasiṃha received teachings on the MVT at Nālandā from Dharmagupta and later carried on his teaching career in that area. Wu-xing was based there during his stay in India and so it is probable that he also obtained his copy of the MVT there. Later Buddhaguhya also resided at Nālandā, where he was visited by the Tibetan delegation bringing an invitation from King Khri-srong lde-bstan to go to Tibet. A powerful piece of additional evidence is provided by the area of distribution of plants and trees mentioned in the MVT and its Continuation Tantra. These are identified as far as possible in the endnotes. Although these are individually found in several different regions, it is interesting to note that the only area where the majority of them are found together is in the foothills of the eastern Himalayas. If we accept that such texts as the MVT were composed by humans, albeit under divine inspiration, we might posit the following scenario. Nālandā itself would have been bustling with the large numbers of students and teachers resident there, so I think it is hardly likely that the initial compiler or compilers of the MVT sat in a back room at the monastery writing it. Actually, there is no particular reason why we should even assume that the originator of this text was even a monk: on the contrary, as it seems to have been written with lay devotees in mind, the compiler may also have been a well-educated lay-person. It is more reasonable to suppose that people particularly

A This translation is listed in the Den-kar-ma Catalogue which is thought to have been compiled in 812 CE or perhaps 800 CE according to how one interprets the Tibetan dating cycle.



interested in meditation went on retreats to remote areas of the forest and mountains to engage in their practice, as they have always done throughout the history of Buddhism. Indeed, the MVT itself recommends secluded places for the rituals connected with the mandalas and subsequent meditational practices. These people may well have gone up to the southern slopes of the Himalayas and were inspired to compose such texts as the MVT while there. After all, these practices reflect the kinds of meditational techniques they had evolved against an intellectual and devotional background which at this time was undergoing considerable ferment. Once these texts had been composed, they would have been brought back to places like Nālandā as new revelations, rather like the *gTer-ma* discoveries of later Tibetan tradition, to be promulgated, practised, expanded and commented upon by a larger audience.

### iii. People involved in the transmission of the MVT

We have already mentioned most of the key figures connected with the transmission of the MVT. However, it may be of interest to give lengthier biographical details of some of these people as they are not as well known as they ought to be. Of these, some mention should first be made of Wu-xing, although he does not directly figure in the lineages of the MVT. As I have previously related, there are strong grounds for believing that the Sanskrit text of the MVT used by Śubhakarasiṃha was one of those collected by Wu-xing in India and forwarded to China upon his death around 674 CE. There is a biography of him in Yi-jing's 'Record of Eminent Monks', from which we learn the following details. In 667, Wu-xing went to India via the southern sea route, like Yi-jing. After residing a while in Sri Lanka and Harikela in Bengal, he made his way to Nālandā. There he studied Yogācāra, Mādhyamika and the *Abhidharma-kośa*, and the works on logic by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti at the nearby Tiladhāka monastery. He translated parts of the Sarvāstivādin Āgama dealing with the Buddha's Parinirvāṇa and sent these back to China. After a further period of residence at Nālandā during which time he and Yi-jing became friends, he decided to start the journey back to China via northern India and so in 674, at the age of fifty-six, he parted from Yi-jing. We know from the 'Song Biographies of Notable Monks' (*Song-gao-seng-zhuan*) that sadly he never completed the journey, but died in India soon afterwards. (In passing, we might also pay tribute to the many other courageous and talented Chinese monks who perished in India – of the fifty six monks mentioned by Yi-jing in his Record, over fifty died of sickness before they could return to China!) It is recorded that the books he had collected were forwarded to China where they were stored in the Hua-yan Temple. Among these were the *Mahāvairocana Tantra*, the *Subāhu-pariṣecchā* and the *Susiddhi-kāra Tantra*, which were all translated later by Śubhakarasiṃha.

Śubhakarasiṃha, who translated the MVT into Chinese, is said by Chinese sources to have been born as a prince in Oḍra in 636 CE. Because of his outstanding abilities and popularity, he was named successor to the throne by his father, but when he ascended to the throne at the age of thirteen, his disgruntled brothers organized an armed rebellion. Śubhakarasiṃha defeated them, but was so dismayed by the misery of the war that he decided to transfer the throne to his eldest brother instead of punishing his brothers and to become a monk himself.

Based on his name, is commonly assumed by scholars that he had familial connections to early representatives of the Bhauma-kāras<sup>9</sup> who migrated from Assam (*Kāmarūpa*) to northern Orissa. However, there are some problems with this theory. It is not certain when the Bhauma-kāras arrived in Orissa but their emergence as dynastic rulers of Orissa is normally dated much later, probably around 736 with the accession of Kṣemañkaradeva. Moreover, although some of the early Bhauma-kāra kings were called Śubhākara, it should be remembered that in Śubhakara-siṃha's case the name is monastic rather than personal and therefore makes a connection with the Bhauma-kāra dynasty less likely. Apart from this, one should also bear in mind that the area known during Śubhakara-siṃha's youth and thereafter as Oḍra (corresponding to much of present-day Orissa) was the name of a region rather than a specific kingdom. At that time, the region was divided up into a number of smaller kingdoms, satrapies and principalities. Hence, though the region known as Oḍra would have been familiar to the Chinese in the eighth century since it was described by Xuanzang, it only gives a somewhat vague indication of Śubhakara-siṃha's true birthplace. It may therefore be useful to consider political situation in that region during the latter half of the seventh century CE.

At this time the northern portion of present-day Orissa was divided up into Uttara-Toṣali, Dakṣiṇa-Toṣali and Utkala while much of southern Orissa was known as Koṅga oḍa. At beginning of 7<sup>th</sup> century, both Utkala and Uttara-Toṣali formed part of Oḍra-viṣaya under the rule of the Datta dynasty founded by Somadatta. His successor Bhanudatta ruled over Utkala and Daṇḍabhukti as suzerain of Śāsāñka during first quarter of 6<sup>th</sup> century, and his descendants seem to have ruled after death of Śāsāñka around 625 CE. The conquest of Orissa by Harṣavardhana in 642 brought downfall of Datta dynasty. The subsequent rulership of Uttara-Toṣali is unclear though its kings were probably feudatory of the later Guptas. Their rule ended in 725 due to invasion by Yaśovarman of Kaunaj. Thereafter, the Bhauma-kāras rose to power, established a kingdom in Toṣali around 736 CE. The region of Dakṣiṇa-Toṣali which lay to the south of the Mahānādi River was ruled by Śailodbhavas as part of Koṅgoḍa until they were ousted by the Bhauma-kāras around 744 CE. Similarly, shortly after the fall of the Datta dynasty in 642, Utkala is thought to have been incorporated in the kingdom of South Kośala which was ruled by Tivaradeva of Mekala, founder of the Pāñḍuvaṃśi dynasty. Finally, the kingdom of Koṅgoḍa occupied much of southern Orissa was ruled by Śailodbhava dynasty during the sixth and seventh centuries.

With this brief overview of the political situation of the region around the time of Śubhakara-siṃha's birth and youth, we may wonder where he was actually born as there is no obvious candidate for his homeland. However, if we assume that his Chinese biography is merely using the place-name Oḍra since it was well known to them, then it is possible that he was born in one of the component kingdoms of the region mentioned above. Bearing in mind the story related about the power struggle which occurred during Śubhakara-siṃha's youth, we should look for somewhere in the region where such events as described took place. Remarkably, a series of epigraphical inscriptions on copper plates<sup>A</sup> surviving from Koṅgoḍa do describe

A The *Kondenda Grant* Ep. Ind. XIX pp 265-270, the *Nivina Grant* Ep. Ind. XIX pp 265-70 and the *Puri Grant* JBORS XVI pp 176.

events, although from a different perspective, very similar to those leading to Śubhakara-siṃha's abdication, though there are possible difficulties in reconciling dates derived from these copper plates and those derived from Śubhakara-siṃha's biography. According to the epigraphical inscriptions, Madhyamarāja II, also known as Yaśobhita II, of the Śailodbhava dynasty ruled Koṅgoḍa during the third quarter of the seventh century. After his death, the throne was usurped by Mādharāja III from the elder son. Although not the eldest son, Mādharāja was the son of Madhyamarāja's chief queen and apparently based his claim to the throne on that relationship to the late king. It is not known for how long he reigned but his elder brothers did not accept the situation. This led to a bitter war in which the elder son Mānabhīta (said by some scholars to have eventually reigned from around 695 to 730) defeated Mādharāja in the battle of Phasika. Mādharāja took flight and was sheltered by King Tivaradeva in neighbouring South Kośala. Though these two united forces against Mānabhīta, they were decisively defeated in a battle near the Vindhya. It is known that Mādharāja was not killed in this battle and is generally assumed to have passed his remaining years in the court of Tivaradeva.

The parallels with the version given by Śubhakara-siṃha's biographers is striking. We know from this that he was the son of the queen mother, that he had elder brothers who rebelled against his kingship and that he ceded the throne to one of his elder brothers. It is also mentioned in passing that later in his life, when he was a monk, he visited a certain unnamed king of central India who was married to one of his sisters. This king of central India may well have been Tivaradeva himself. Unless identical dynastic struggles were commonplace in Orissa during the later half of the seventh century, we have strong grounds for assuming that the monk Śubhakara-siṃha was in fact Mādharāja III, though further research will be needed to resolve the dating difficulties – according to the Chinese sources Śubhakara-siṃha was born in 636 and became a monk in 654 after ceding the throne. If this was the case, one wonders whether Śubhakara-siṃha's Chinese colleagues were aware of his true identity or whether Śubhakara-siṃha himself engaged in a degree of obfuscation. It is interesting to note in this connection that although he met Vajrabodhi who was also resident in Chang-an at the time of his arrival, one has the impression that they did not establish cordial relations. Among other reasons. it may have been that Vajrabodhi, who was a native of south-eastern India, was well aware of Śubhakara-siṃha's identity which led to problems.

Whatever the truth of this matter, his Chinese biographers state that he studied and travelled widely during his youth, until he finally arrived at Nālandā. There he became the disciple of the Master (*ācārya*) Dharmagupta. Not much is known about Dharmagupta, but it is said that he was an expert in meditation and mantra practice. According to Chinese biographical records, he appeared to be only about forty years of age but was actually over eight hundred. Xuan-zang is also said to have met him while he was in India, when he looked about thirty, but was actually over seven hundred. Nobody of that name is known from Tibetan sources, although there was a Śrī-gupta at Nālandā at the beginning of the eighth century. It is just possible that they were the same person. Śubhakara-siṃha was taught the mantras, *mudrās*, mandalas and *samādhis* connected with the MVT lineage by Dharmagupta and was given the initiations (*abhiṣeka*) by him. Afterwards, Śubhakara-siṃha travelled around the central Indian area, teaching and debating with non-Buddhists, and generally

working for the benefit of the populace. Eventually, he was told by his teacher Dharmagupta that he had a profound karmic link with China, so he should go there and spread the teachings. This exhortation need not surprise us too much when we remember that there were a considerable number of Chinese monks at Nālandā around this time, including Yi-jing, as well as an imperial ambassador.

Śubhākara-siṃha set out from Nālandā and began the long overland journey to China. He travelled through Kashmir and then went on to Udyāna, where he taught at the court of the ruler of the region<sup>10</sup>. After he left Udyāna, he did not take the normal route through Central Asia along the Silk Road as he probably found his way blocked by Arab military activities in the region. Instead he went through Tibet and reached China that way. When he finally reached the borders of China he found an official reception party sent to meet him by the Emperor Rui-zang, as his fame had preceded him. It was in 716 CE that Śubhākara-siṃha finally arrived at the Chinese capital, Chang An. It is noteworthy that he was already eighty years of age when he arrived there. He busied himself visiting famous monks in Chang An and familiarized himself with the problems that he would face in translating Sanskrit texts into Chinese. The following year, having taken up residence at the Xi-ming Temple, he received an imperial command to begin translating. After he had translated a first short text, his reputation increased but unfortunately he was ordered to hand over all the Sanskrit texts he had brought from India to the imperial court, possibly for political reasons: the new Emperor, Xuan-zang, may have been under pressure from the Taoists who had lost prestige with the increasing influence of Buddhism. Whatever the reason, Śubhākara-siṃha was left without anything to work on, so he went with the Chinese monk and mathematician Yi-xing who had become his disciple, to the Hua-yan Temple where the texts collected by Wu-xing before his death some thirty years earlier were stored. Here he obtained several texts including a copy of the MVT. In 724, the Emperor went to Lo Yang and Śubhākara-siṃha was settled in the Fa-xian Temple in that city where he began his translation of the MVT. By the next year, he and Yi-xing had completed the MVT and the appendix volume<sup>11</sup>. While work was progressing on the translation of the MVT, he also lectured simultaneously on the text itself and a record of these lectures was kept by Yi-xing, which forms the basis of the main Chinese commentary on the MVT, the *Da-ri-jing-shu*. Following the MVT, Śubhākara-siṃha also translated the *Subāhu-pariprechā*, the *Susiddhi-kāra* and some works connected with the *Tattva-saṃgraha*. In 732 he petitioned the Emperor to permit him to return home to India, but permission was refused. Finally, at the age of ninety nine, on 7th November 735, Śubhākara-siṃha died in the meditation room and was buried with great honour, mourned by all up to the Emperor himself. He had been a monk for eighty years.

Of his character, it is said that he was a quiet and gentle person, fond of meditation and simplicity in his life. When people saw his face they said it was as though they were seeing a lotus open before their eyes and when they heard him speak it was as though their hearts were bathed in nectar. His biographies indicate that he was a man of many talents and had such compassion that he is said to have treated even plants as though they were his children. He was also skilled in rain-making, which he is said reluctantly to have done at the insistence of the Emperor in his presence on one occasion.

Following the deaths of Yi-xing and Śubhakarasiṃha, the lineage of the MVT in China was passed by one of Śubhakarasiṃha's disciples, the Korean monk Hyun-cho, on to Hui-guo (746–805). Hui-guo was probably responsible for much of the unique Sino-Japanese synthesis of the MVT and the *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṃgraha Tantra*. Moreover, like so many of the early tantric masters, he must have been an Master of great ability as his fame spread to many East Asian countries. Not only did he have several Koreans among his disciples, but some even came from as far away as Java. However, the most noteworthy of his followers must be the Japanese monk Kūkai (775–834). Although the MVT had arrived in Japan within ten years of being translated into Chinese, it was little understood there. The young Kūkai, who realized its importance, set out to China with the intention of studying it there. He met Hui-guo within a year of arriving in Chang An. After having received complete instructions and initiations in the MVT as well as many other tantric scriptures, he was appointed by the dying Hui-guo as his successor. Despite his original plan to stay in China for twenty years, Kūkai was instructed by Hui-guo to return home to Japan and spread the teaching there. Though only in China for less than three years, the sights and people he encountered in Chang An must have made a profound impression on the young man. Apart from receiving teachings from Hui-guo, he also met the Indian monks Prajñā<sup>12</sup> and Muniśri from whom he learnt some Sanskrit. Indeed, he was honoured by Prajñā with the gift of his new translation of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. Additionally, it must be remembered that Chang An was an extremely cosmopolitan city at that time, with representatives of many countries living there. As well as Buddhist temples, there were also Nestorian Christian, Manichaean and possibly Muslim establishments there which certainly would have attracted the attention of the inquisitive Kūkai. Following his return to Japan, Kūkai was responsible for the establishment of the Shingon School, with its head-quarters on Mount Koya where it blossomed and has flourished to the present day. However in China itself, Hui-guo's tantric lineage unfortunately did not prosper for long and had probably died out by the time of the Northern Song Dynasty.

The one major figure we should consider on the Indo-Tibetan side of the tradition is Buddhaguhya. In stark contrast to the detailed biography we have of Śubhakarasiṃha, we know next to nothing about Buddhaguhya. Apart from his authorship of commentaries on the MVT and other tantric texts, we have only one piece of reliable information about him. We do not even know the precise dates of his birth and death. There are a few inconsequential details about him given by such Tibetan sources as Bu-ston, Tārānātha and the Blue Annals, mainly of interest to the hagiographer rather than the historian.

However, putting together these fragments we can form the following outline biography. Buddhaguhya was probably born in about 700 CE or a little before then and he lived mainly in the Vārāṇasī area. He seems to have been a somewhat senior contemporary of Buddhajñānapāda who is believed to have been deeply involved in the early development of the *Guhya-samāja Tantra*, since Buddhaguhya is said to have received some teachings and initiations from him — though given the disparity in their ages, this seems a trifle unlikely. He is also said to have received teachings from Līlavajra on the *Māyājāla* cycle of texts, especially the *Guhya-garbhā Tantra*. The teachings of this lineage were passed on to Vimalamitra, who went to Tibet and passed them on there. Later in his life, when he was an established and respected teacher,

King Khri-srong-lde-bstan sent a delegation, which included dPal-brTsegs and others, to Buddhaguhya to invite him to Tibet to teach. This invitation is thought to have been made early in the reign of Khri-srong-lde-bstan, around 760. He declined the invitation, telling the Tibetans that his protector, the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, had warned him that he would die if he went to Tibet, hence it is likely that he felt unable to undertake the journey because of his advanced age. Instead, he wrote a letter addressed to the Tibetan King and people (*Bhoṭa-svāmi-daśa-guru-lekha* Q5693). Most of this letter is taken up with teachings and admonitions to the Tibetans in the tradition of Nāgārjuna's '*Precious Garland*' (*Ratnāvalī*), but Buddhaguhya mentions in passing that he instructed the visiting Tibetans on the MVT and other texts. It is presumably then that these texts were taken to Tibet to be translated later by dPal brTsegs himself, aided by Śilendra-bodhi.

Looking at the commentaries and other works ascribed to Buddhaguhya in the Tanjur<sup>13</sup>, it will be seen that he mainly specialized in the Kriyā and Yoga tantras. However, a number of other works are attributed to him in the Kang-xi Edition of the Tanjur, all connected with various aspects of the *Guhya-garbha-tantra*, and we also know from other sources that Buddhaguhya figures importantly in the transmission of the rNying-ma tantras, especially the *Guhya-garbha* cycle. Whether these works are genuinely his or not must await further study, though certainly there is no intrinsic reason why they should not be so. Nevertheless, the works belonging to this group which I have briefly examined do seem stylistically different to Buddhaguhya's other writings on the Kriyā and Yoga tantras in which one cannot find any reference at all to the *Guhya-garbha-tantra*, even where this might have been appropriate. It is also noteworthy that in his general discussion of tantras at the beginning of his commentary on the MVT and in his related summary (*piṇḍārtha*) of the same text, he speaks only of Kriyā and Yoga tantras, putting the MVT in a special category that bridges these two groups, which he calls by his term '*ubhaya*' (dual). This implies that any tantras in existence at that time, now treated as Anuttara-yoga tantras, were not yet considered to be a separate class of works. He lists such texts as *Susiddhi-kāra*, the *Guhya-sāmānya*, the *Tri-samaya-rāja*, the *Tri-kāya-uṣṇīṣa*, the *Vajrapāṇy-abhiṣeka* and the *Vidyādhara Collection* as representative of the Kriyā tantras, while he speaks of the *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṃgraha* and the *Śrī-paramādyā* as representative of the Yoga tantras. It is strange that he makes no mention of the *Guhya-garbha-tantra* at this point. One possible solution is that he became involved in the *Guhya-garbha-tantra* later in his life, some time after having written those commentaries. This would also make sense if we accept the tentative sequence and chronology of tantric texts given above, in which case it is quite likely that the *Guhya-garbha-tantra* had not been widely disseminated outside its place of origin prior to the middle of the eighth century. However, a detailed study of all the works attributed to Buddhaguhya would be necessary in order to make a definitive statement regarding his involvement with texts like the *Guhya-garbha-tantra*.

Beyond this, there is little we can say with certainty about Buddhaguhya himself, but we may however get some idea of Buddhaguhya's intellectual milieu, if not of the man himself, by considering in passing other teachers active around that time, some of whose names are linked with Buddhaguhya. It is clear from many of Buddhaguhya's comments to the MVT that he was strongly influenced by Yogācāra concepts. Given the period of his teaching life, he was perhaps affiliated to the

synthesis of Yogācāra and Mādhyamika thought of the type that Tibetans would later dub Svātantrika-Yogācāra. Several people connected with him show such tendencies in their writings. For example, Jñānagarbha (700-770?) wrote a number of commentarial works and other writings of Yogācāra-Mādhyamika inspiration, in which his debt to MVT concepts are quite clear<sup>14</sup>. He is also said to have been taught by a Śrī-gupta<sup>15</sup>, who Tārānātha says was likewise a Yogācāra-Mādhyamika. Jñānagarbha in his turn was the teacher of Śāntarakṣita (710-779?) who is also well-known for his Yogācāra-Mādhyamika position. We have already mentioned Vimalamitra who, according to the rNying-ma tradition, was also a pupil of Buddhaguhya and Lilavajra, as was Vairocana (the teacher of Haribhadra?) who received the Mahāyoga (*Māyā-jāla* Cycle) transmission from Buddhaguhya. Unfortunately, if we are ever to know the precise relationship of these various teachers who were active in the revolutionary period which was the eighth century, an enormous amount of research still needs to be done on their writings and tantric texts produced then, so I can only offer here a translation of the MVT and Buddhaguhya's commentary on it, which may be used as a starting point for further study.

### III ABOUT THIS TRANSLATION

I am presenting here a complete English translation of the *Mahā-vairocanābhisambodhi-vikurvitādhiṣṭhāna-vaipulya-sūtrendra-rāja nāma dharmaparyāya*, its Continuation Tantra (*uttara-tantra*), together with the Commentaries by Buddhaguhya. Now, it might not be out of place to review briefly the problem of translating Buddhist works in general. 'Translation' has been usefully defined as 'a process of expression in another language, systematically retaining the original sense or meaning'<sup>16</sup>. I take 'meaning' here to imply the conceptual content of the original rather than the literal meaning of its words. This presents any prospective translator with a task of great complexity, especially when dealing with religious or philosophical texts, for a detailed knowledge of the conceptual range of the vocabulary in both the source and the target language is required. The difficulties are multiplied when, for example, we are obliged to use Tibetan and/or Chinese translations of Sanskrit texts, for then we often have to take into consideration the semantic decisions made by the translators of those works, should we wish to convey the likely intentions of the original compilers!

Surveying the translations of Buddhist texts now available, it immediately becomes evident that several contrasting techniques have been adopted, with greater and lesser degrees of success. In the case of Tibetan texts, I feel the results are generally unsatisfactory apart from a few honourable exceptions. More often than not, such translations are almost incomprehensible or unreadable, each in their own way. On one hand we have the 'literalists' who try to translate all words in a text based on the strict etymological meaning of the Tibetan words, apparently forgetting that the sum is greater than the whole. Or else there is the other camp which interprets and translates Buddhist texts utilizing the terminology of the latest philosophical fashions, be it phenomenology or Teutonic existentialism, and so produces impenetrable gobbledegook of another kind<sup>17</sup>. The concepts in Buddhist texts, especially the tantras, are difficult, but what is the advantage in making them more difficult than they really are? Apart from this, it is regrettable that the value of an elegant and concise style seldom seems to be given much consideration.

Like it or not, apart from fairly basic works, many Buddhist texts are difficult to understand and were clearly written for people of the highest acumen. Some texts parallel the most recondite modern works on nuclear physics or bio-chemistry in their complexity and subtlety. Unfortunately, this presumes the effort of constant study and possibly practice on the part of the reader. Bearing all this in mind, I have tried to produce a balanced translation which is reasonably accurate, avoiding the extremes of paraphrasing and metaphrasing, which does not mislead the reader by the use of concepts alien to the original and which is readable though perhaps requiring some effort. The reader will note that I have used a certain number of Sanskrit words, instead of attempting to translate them. This is not very fashionable at present in some circles, but my experience in teaching Buddhism for a number of years suggests that this approach is acceptable if people are prepared to make a little effort to learn the connotations of such words. A simple literal translation of such words would usually be inadequate, while a full interpretative translation to do them justice would be too prolix. For the benefit of the non-specialist reader, I have included a glossary of my terminology, giving glosses that in many cases use the words



of Buddhaguhya himself. It should also be noted that although I have found it more natural to use the pronoun 'he' in reference to the Master and the practitioner to avoid awkward circumlocutions, this should be understood as shorthand for 'he or she'. Whatever might be said of the Sanskrit original, neither the Tibetan nor the Chinese versions specify a sex for these people. Indeed, the MVT itself makes clear that it is addressed to both 'sons and daughters' of the Buddha and values both sexes equally.

As already mentioned, no Sanskrit manuscript of the MVT has come to light, apart from a few dozen lines quoted in other works, so in preparing my translation, I have used the Tibetan and Chinese versions, in the following editions:

T: *rNam-par-s nang-mdzad chen-po mngon-par-rdzogs-par-byang-chub-pa nam-par-sprul-pa byin-gyis-rlob-pa shin-tu-rgyas-pa mdo-sde'i dbang-po'i rgyal-po zhes-bya-ba'i chos-kyi rnam-grangs* Qian-long 126, Narthang *Ta* 301a-455a, British Museum Ms OR 6724.73, sTog Palace 454

C: *Da-bi-lu-zhe-na cheng-fo shen bian jia-chi jing* Taishō 848

Apart from their intrinsic value, the commentaries preserved in Tibetan and Chinese proved invaluable for understanding the often obscure text of the MVT itself, so constant reference was made to them in the course of preparing the initial translation of the MVT. Those used were:

Buddhaguhya's Commentary (Tib. text)

V: a. Unrevised version Q 3487, Narthang *Ngu* 73–302

B: b. Revised version Q 3490, Narthang *Gu* 1–233, Derge *Nyu* 65a - 351a

P: Buddhaguhya's *Pinḍārtha* (Tib. text) Q 3486, Narthang *Ngu* 1–73, Derge *Nyu* 1b-65a

CC: Śubhakarasiṃha's Oral Commentary as recorded by Yi-xing:  
Unrevised version<sup>18</sup> (大疏) 20 *juan*, Manji-zoku Vol 36, 27–253

As is often the case, this book is the result of many years of research. If I were to be starting afresh, it is quite likely that a different strategy would be adopted. In particular, the landscape of Tibetan textual studies has changed radically over the last few years, thanks to the efforts of Dr Helmut Eimer, Dr Paul Harrison and others. In contrast to the present work, which can be seen as a kind of 'critical translation', I now think it would be highly desirable to first compile a fully collated edition of the Tibetan version using the much larger range of Tibetan Kanjur editions now available, possibly also linking this with the various divergent readings that exist in the Chinese MVT and its commentaries. The bifurcation of the Old Narthang Kanjur into the Them-spangs-ma and the Tshal-pa lineages with their derivatives is now fairly well understood in general terms. However, old manuscript editions such as the newly available Phug-brag Kanjur and the Tawang Kanjur, which preserve a textual tradition divorced from the Old Narthang Kanjur and all its subsequent editorial amendments, are of especial interest for texts such as the MVT with its transmissional problems<sup>19</sup>. Such Tibetan manuscript editions are often the sole witnesses to very old and more accurate readings, which can be confirmed by

reference to parallel Chinese versions, despite the welter of scribal errors usually found in them.

However, for better or worse, this book contains a complete translation of the MVT itself, together with Buddhaguhya's Commentary and his *Pinḍārtha* based on the above mentioned editions. I have also included the Continuation Tantra, which survives only in Tibetan and lacks any kind of commentary. As mentioned above, my translation of the MVT is slightly hybrid, for though I have used the above Tibetan version of the MVT as the basic text, variant readings have been adopted from the Chinese version or the lemmata in the various commentaries where there are reasonable grounds for supposing that these are closer to the original sense. There are several probable reasons for these variants. First, some must have arisen as intentional amendments to the original text as it developed, while others will have come about due to undetectable scribal errors as the manuscripts were copied. In such cases, it is difficult to decide which version is the more authentic as often each one fits the context quite well. For example, *bija* (seed) regularly occurs in the Chinese text where the Tibetan has *jīva* (life) and either of these would be acceptable. What we seem to have here is merely a reversal of the syllables of the two words (*b* and *v* being virtually indistinguishable in many Indian scripts). Another fertile breeding ground for many apparently variant readings in the Tibetan and Chinese texts must have been the often considerable range of meanings contained in a single Sanskrit word. If we examine the Tibetan and the Chinese equivalents, we frequently find that they are likely to have had the same underlying Sanskrit original word which has been interpreted differently by the commentators and translators. A good example of this is the Sanskrit word *saṃjñā*, which has been interpreted both as 'perfect awareness' and as 'idea' at the same place by the different translators<sup>20</sup>. I have noted the occurrence of such cases where they seem important.

Obviously it will often be impossible to reconstitute many of the key words and their intended meanings that were found in the original Sanskrit text with any great certainty and indeed there will be those who question the value of any attempt to do so, but as some interesting results can be achieved by a careful comparison of the available materials, I have tried to convey in the translation given here what seems likely to have been the original intention of the compilers of the MVT. So while using the Tibetan version noted above as the basis for my work, I have sometimes given priority to the readings contained in the Chinese version (C) and to the Tibetan text embedded in the unrevised commentary (V) by Buddhaguhya, when these have the same reading of a line which differs to that given by the standard Tibetan translation (T) and the revised commentary (B).

As very few translations are available in English of commentarial literature, especially of that concerning Tantric Buddhism, I felt it would also be most desirable to include both of Buddhaguhya's commentaries on the MVT in this book – the main Commentary and the *Pinḍārtha* – to present the general reader with an authentic explanation of the meaning of the MVT, though this is naturally dependent upon Buddhaguhya's understanding of the text. The translation of the Commentary given here represents about ninety percent of the complete text, as I have cut out a certain amount of material which either is repetitious or merely duplicates the words of the MVT itself<sup>21</sup>. Such omissions occur almost entirely in the first two chapters of the Commentary and although I do not specifically draw the reader's attention to such

cases, these can be detected by a close scrutiny of the page numbers incorporated in the translation – a particularly short run of text between two numbers indicating that something has been cut out. However, the reader may rest assured that nothing of import has been omitted. Also, because of the way this edition is arranged, it has not been necessary to repeat all the passages from the MVT which Buddhaguhya cites for comment.

Ideally, an accompanying translation of the Chinese commentary to complement that of Buddhaguhya should have been included, but this has not proved possible as it would have added at least another seven or eight hundred pages to an already lengthy book. Therefore, although frequent use was made of it during the process of translation, only brief extracts from it could be given in the notes. It should also be remembered that quite apart from containing the kind of alternative readings mentioned above, a considerable divergence in interpretation of many passages of the MVT is reflected in these two commentaries, which would often necessitate separate translation to fit the comments.

#### IV THE THEMES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MVT

In considering the textual history of the MVT, we have seen that it is an product of the early tantric phase of Buddhism in India. In fact, I believe it is likely to have been one of the first, if not actually the first *fully* developed tantra to be compiled, that has survived in some form to the present day. Nevertheless, it appears to be a very sophisticated text both doctrinally and practically. As I have suggested earlier in this Introduction, there are a number of elements that are characteristic of all tantras. All of these elements are present in the MVT, with the exception of an overt interest in the feminine *per se* as in later tantras, although a large number of female deities are mentioned<sup>22</sup>. As we have also seen, these elements were at first fairly disparate and are encountered separately in texts that date several centuries before the MVT itself. Indeed some of them, such as the *homa* fire sacrifices, have their roots in the pre-Buddhist Vedic culture. Furthermore, apart from the specifically tantric elements which I have mentioned, there are many echoes in the MVT of earlier Mahāyāna teachings, which place it well within the mainstream of Buddhist tradition. Hence we can see clear links between the MVT and the *Sad-dharma-puṇḍarika Sūtra*, the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, the *Buddha-bhūmi Sūtra*, as well as Yogācāra works such as the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra* and the *Dharma-dharmatā-vibhāga*. Unfortunately a full length treatment of all the sources of the MVT would probably require a book to itself, so for lack of space I must leave this for another occasion.

Now, we might ask ourselves why the tantras were developed and ultimately achieved such popularity. Although certain social conditions prevailing in India around that time could be identified as contributory causes, I believe that the main reason is to be found in a particular characteristic of Buddhism. As the reader will be aware, Buddhism as a whole has always lacked a centralized authority which imposes its views upon the faithful, dictating what is or is not acceptable. So within certain general limitations, Buddhism was able over the centuries to undergo constant change, adaptation and renewal without hindrance, both in India and in the many countries to which it was transmitted<sup>23</sup>. It is for this reason that we see a variety of schools in Buddhism quite unparalleled in any other religion, though an underlying common core is always evident. Indeed, the MVT itself speaks of this, when it repeatedly states that Buddhas teach the Dharma to *all* beings throughout the universe in whatever manner is most suited to their needs. It is therefore likely that the tantras were first developed unconsciously as a part of this process of renewal. The early centuries of Mahāyāna were overshadowed by the *Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtras* and the Mādhyamika school of Nāgārjuna which derived from them. One can imagine the impact of these teachings when they were first taught – just read the Heart Sutra and consider what a shock it must have been to the Abhidharma-orientated monks of the time to be told that all their cherished categories and systems did not really exist! Yet as time went by, many must have felt unsatisfied by the austere teachings of the Mādhyamikas which seemed to cut away everything from under one's feet and not replace it with anything. As though in answer to this discomfort, the complex Yogācāra system was established around the fourth century CE by Maitreya, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. This system has unfortunately been badly misunderstood by later Buddhist scholars both in Tibet and in the West. It attempted to retain the basic insight of the *Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtras* concerning emptiness (*śūnyatā*), while combining

it with a new analysis of the nature of the universe and a structured path to liberation, which was designed to insure the practitioner against naive realism and the dangers of nihilism present in Mādhyamika teachings. As time went by, the Mādhyamikas and the Yogācārins became established as the two rival camps within Mahāyāna, each no doubt claiming that *theirs* was the correct viewpoint. While their respective scholars engaged in polemics that became more and more abstruse, especially with the emergence of the Buddhist schools of logic, the desire for a new approach must have been felt by the majority of people who were no doubt by then thoroughly confused. There was evidently a need for a kind of Buddhism that was inspiring, not so difficult to understand or practice, and which got you liberated quickly. Judging by the rapidity of its development once it had gained general acceptance in the main centres of Buddhism, it would seem that Tantric Buddhism answered this need very well. Yet despite its popular appeal, Tantric Buddhism was also remarkably sophisticated in its theories and practices, as will be seen from the MVT itself. All religions have been faced with a similar contradiction: how to explain the relationship between the infinite and the finite, and express that which is inherently inexpressible. Each have attempted to answer this problem in their own way. The Buddhist tantras do this brilliantly with their use of innovative theories and techniques of meditation. To understand something of this, let us look in outline at the main themes and aims of the MVT.

First, the central theme of the MVT is quite simple – what is Perfect Enlightenment and how does one achieve it? Throughout the MVT, Perfect Enlightenment is personified as Mahā-vairocana, so actually the aim of the practices prescribed is to become Mahā-vairocana. This central idea is said to have three interconnected aspects – the causal basis, the nature and the result of Perfect Enlightenment. Of these, the causal basis is twofold: the immediate cause and the indirect cause. The immediate cause is understood to be the fact that Enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) is inherent in all beings and so guarantees the attainment of Perfect Enlightenment by them. Naturally this concept does not originate with the MVT, for it first occurs several centuries before in such writings as the Lotus *Sūtra* and reaches its full flowering in the *Tathāgata-garbha* (Buddha Matrix) cycle of texts. The indirect cause is the aspiration to become enlightened together with the path, from the first glimmerings of spirituality onwards, which includes the eight mundane minds, the sixty types of mind and the supra-mundane levels of the Śrāvakas, Pratyekabuddhas and Bodhisattvas, described in Chapter One. Though the mantra path is singled out as being the most effective method, it is noteworthy here that the MVT adopts an extremely conciliatory attitude to all religious beliefs. The shortcomings of some are criticized, yet as Buddhaguhya says ‘*through relying upon the self of ordinary foolish people and upon the gods, people seek liberation and even the bliss they seek as liberation should be viewed as a cause linking them with the Bhagavat Vairocana*’ (ad I.20). This is because the MVT considers all spiritual teachers who lead us towards reality to be manifestations and embodiments of the great compassion of Mahā-vairocana himself, present in all places at all times.

The nature of Perfect Enlightenment is succinctly defined in the MVT thus: ‘*It is to know your mind as it really is. That is the supreme, full and perfect Enlightenment*’ (I.7). This definition is noteworthy because it highlights the importance of the mind in this text, so we ought to spend some time considering its various implications. In keeping

with Buddhism in general, the MVT and its commentators have a sophisticated conceptual apparatus for describing various aspects of what we loosely call the mind. In particular we should note the use of the terms *citta* and *manas*. I have normally translated *citta* as ‘mind’, as in the above quotation, while reluctantly leaving *manas* untranslated due to the range and complexity of its meaning. Of these two, let us first examine the term *citta*. This word is derived from the verbal root √ *cit* which means ‘to recognize / observe / perceive’, ‘to be bright, to shine’ and ‘to amass, to accumulate’. Although there are different usages of the word *citta* which reflect these meanings, the basic sense of *citta* in the MVT seems to refer to the general and comprehensive cognitive ground underlying the dynamic system of psychological operations. In its natural state it is said to be primordially existent and free from the artificial division into a perceiving subject and perceived objects, which characterizes the mind of a being still involved in *samsāra*. When in this natural state, *citta* is often described as being luminous and pure by nature (*prakṛti-prabhāsvara*). Though it has not generally been noted, this view of the mind has a long history in Buddhism, for the term *prakṛti-prabhāsvara-citta* (mind which is luminous by nature) is already found in a number of Pali *suttas* belonging to the earliest phase of Buddhism, such as the striking passage in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* I.10: ‘*The mind is luminous, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. Ordinary people who are unaware of it do not know it as it really is (yathā-bhūtam)*’<sup>24</sup>. The mind is also said to be like gold which is intrinsically pure yet has become adulterated with impurities such as iron, copper, lead and so forth. This concept of the intrinsic purity or luminosity of the mind can be traced down the centuries as it makes its appearance in many major sutras, especially those associated with the *Tathāgata-garbha* theory. For our purposes we may also note the passage which occurs in the *Aṣṭasahasrika-prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra* where the Buddha says ‘*Moreover, when a Bodhisattva Mahāsattva engages in the Perfection of Insight and cultivates it, he should train himself so that he does not take pride in that bodhicitta. Why is that? Because that mind is actually non-mind and is luminous in its intrinsic nature*’. In his commentary which deals with this Sūtra, the *Abhisamaya-āloka*, Haribhadra tells us that the mind is non-mind because it is intrinsically free from all attachments and conceptualizing and hence is luminous. *Citta* may therefore be understood as an abbreviation for, or equivalent to, the intrinsic *bodhicitta* (the *citta* which is *bodhi*). This view is confirmed by the discussion centring on the nature of the mind in Chapter One of the MVT itself, as well as in many Mahāyāna sutras which describe the mind (*citta*) as being without dualistic concepts (*nirvikalpa*), pure, radiant and mirror-like.

However, this inherently pure mind is usually obscured by adventitious defilements arising from a dualistic split imposed upon it, just as the sun is obscured by clouds in the sky, so we also see the term *citta* used in the MVT in the sense of our normal everyday mind. Due to this dualistic split and all that arises from it, the mind which is intrinsically unbounded like space becomes limited to a particular viewpoint or attitude. It is these attitudes that are described at length in sections 18 – 23 of Chapter I. Yet, although they are limited fragments of the primordial mind, they are also seen as possible causes for regaining that natural state of mind due to the nature of their relationship with it, just as the fragments of a broken mirror still have something in common with the whole mirror<sup>25</sup>. So when the MVT speaks of knowing your mind as it truly is, it means that you are to know this inherent natural state of

the mind by eliminating the split into a perceiving subject and perceived objects which normally occurs in the world and is wrongly thought to be real. This also corresponds to the Yogācāra definition adopted by Buddhaghūya, that emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is the absence of this imaginary split. In other words, Enlightenment, which is the natural state of the mind, is characterized by non-duality and emptiness, for as the MVT states '*there is neither that which becomes enlightened nor that to which one is enlightened*' (I.7).

We may further elucidate the meaning of Perfect Enlightenment, and hence of the intrinsic nature of the mind, by correlating terms Buddhaghūya treats as synonyms. For example, he defines emptiness (*śūnyatā*) as suchness (*tathatā*) and says that suchness is the intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) of the mind which is Enlightenment (*bodhi-citta*). Moreover he frequently uses the terms suchness (*tathatā*) and Suchness-Awareness (*tathatā-jñāna*) interchangeably. But since Awareness (*jñāna*) is non-dual, Suchness-Awareness is not so much the Awareness of Suchness, but the Awareness which is suchness. In other words, the term Suchness-Awareness is functionally equivalent to Enlightenment. Finally, it must not be forgotten that this Suchness-Awareness or Perfect Enlightenment is Mahā-vairocana. In other words, the mind in its intrinsic nature is Mahā-vairocana, whom one 'becomes' (or vice versa) when one is perfectly enlightened. We shall return to this later.

Apart from *citta* (mind), the other key psychological term used in the MVT is *manas*. Although the *manas* was not always clearly distinguished from *citta* or *viññāna* (consciousness) in some Buddhist schools, its main function is generally to distinguish and experience both sensory and non-sensory data, in the form of phenomena (*dharma*). Here we may possibly consider the term '*dharma*' to mean 'image'. In fact, it is the function of the *manas* to synthesize the input of bare sensory data, in conjunction with the images held in memory, into fresh perceptual images (*ākāra*)<sup>26</sup>. Hence the conscious perception of an object is not the object in itself but a synthetic image of it. Indeed, it should be noted that early Buddhist texts often did not make any distinction between internal images and external objects, to the extent that they were frequently confused. This no doubt paved the way for the insight of later Yogācāra thinkers who saw that one actually cannot distinguish objects of perception from the internal perceptual images<sup>27</sup>. For to say that the *manas* perceives objects is equivalent to saying that it creates them, for all perception is a synthetic creation<sup>28</sup>. In this sense we can understand the *manas* to indicate an image-making process similar to the Sufi term *himma*, creative imagination, discussed by Henri Corbin<sup>29</sup>.

The relationship between *citta* and *manas* is indicated by Buddhaghūya who regularly defines *manas* as the mind having, or being associated with, perceptual images (*sākāra-citta*). The term *citta* in this context could be interpreted in several ways, but I think it makes most sense if we take it to mean the fragmented mode of *citta* which has become so because it is associated with perceptual images. As the reader will recollect, the mind in its natural state is pure and luminous, free from the dualistic split (*vikalpa*) into a perceiving subject and perceived objects. In fact, Buddhaghūya explicitly states that the perceptual images (*ākāra*) are synonymous with and symptomatic of this falsely imagined dualistic split. As we have already seen, these perceptual images are synthetic creations of the *manas* that are substituted for, or superimposed upon, the pure sensory data, which is precisely what is implied by

the dualistic split (*vikalpa*) into a perceiving subject and perceived objects<sup>30</sup>. We should also remember here that when the MVT says the primordial mind is *śūnyatā* (emptiness) in nature, it makes use of the Yogācāra definition which states that *śūnyatā* is the absence of the falsely imagined duality.

Finally there is the result of Perfect Enlightenment. This is mentioned several times with specific reference to Mahā-vairocana. Basing himself on the MVT, Buddhaguhya states that '*at the moment of his Perfect Enlightenment, [Mahā-vairocana] spontaneously pervaded all of the Three Realms ... with the Adornments of his Inexhaustible Body [Speech and Mind]*' (3a) and acted for the benefit of all beings by revealing the Dharma. These Adornments are the self-revelation of the qualities or 'content' of Perfect Enlightenment on the physical, verbal and mental levels in structured patterns throughout the universe. It is because of their meaningful configuration in this way that these Adornments are also termed '*cakras*' or '*maṇḍalas*'. This revelation of the Dharma is said to occur spontaneously at the moment of Vairocana's Perfect Enlightenment by virtue of his compassion and so the three mandalas described in the MVT are collectively said to be '*arisen from the matrix of compassion (karuṇā-garbodaya)*'. However in keeping with the general Mahāyāna concept of a Buddha's three modes of being or embodiment (*tri-kāya*), this expression of the 'content' of Perfect Enlightenment operates on two levels according to the ability of the beings to be assisted. The first of the three modes of being is the *dharmakāya* which forms the ground for the other two and is equivalent to Perfect Enlightenment itself or Vairocana's Mind. Not only does it transcend all perceptual forms and so cannot be directly manifested or perceived, it is also said to be primordially existent. From the *dharmakāya*, two other modes of being arise, the *sambhoga-kāya* and the *nirmāṇa-kāya* which are equivalent to Vairocana's Speech and Body respectively. According to the MVT, these two modes of being form the intrinsically existent mandala and as such are the Inexhaustible Adornments of Body, Speech and Mind mentioned above. The *sambhoga-kāya*, as Vairocana's Speech aspect, is especially concerned with communication of the Dharma and appears in the form of various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, though these are beyond the perceptual range of ordinary beings. To cater for their needs and abilities, Vairocana further creates various *nirmāṇa-kāyas*, a lower order of manifestation, in the physical form of Śākyamuni and other spiritual teachers. Moreover, those manifestations of the qualities of Perfect Enlightenment, the Inexhaustible Adornments of Vairocana's Body, Speech and Mind, are transformed by Vairocana into what we normally think of as mandalas, mantras and *mudrās*. These transformations act as a bridge between ourselves and Vairocana by which we may identify ourselves with and indeed actually become Vairocana. It is noteworthy that the title itself of the MVT summarizes these three modes of Perfect Enlightenment: *abhisambodhi*, *adhiṣṭhāna* and *vikurvita*.

It is noteworthy that the cause, nature and result of Perfect Enlightenment we have just examined implies a three stage process. Vairocana goes through the normal career of a Bodhisattva gradually dissolving the obscurations (*āvaraṇas*), achieves Enlightenment, and then in the instant following this, spontaneously manifests all his qualities as the tripartite, intrinsically existent mandala (*svabhāva-maṇḍala*) and its transformation into forms accessible to ordinary beings. However, this process conceals an interesting problem regarding the nature of Vairocana. As we know, the 'content' of Perfect Enlightenment is suchness. In several places in his commentary,



Buddhaguhya indicates that suchness is synonymous with the continuum of reality (*dharmadhātu*). This complex term basically implies the universal 'matrix' which is space-like or emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in nature, from which all phenomena arise. This is elaborated by Buddhaguhya when he says that the continuum of reality has two aspects, the Profound which is the core of Enlightenment (*bodhi-maṇḍa*), the 'beholding' of reality, and the Extensive which is the intrinsically existent mandalas formed by the Inexhaustible Adornments of Vairocana's Body, Speech and Mind. Presumably, Buddhaguhya is referring to the second aspect of the continuum of reality when he also states that it is the universe with all its world systems and societies of beings. But the continuum of reality must also be identical to Perfect Enlightenment, for as we have already seen, the 'content' of Perfect Enlightenment is identical to Perfect Enlightenment itself, because it transcends all duality. This is confirmed when Buddhaguhya says that the Profound aspect of the continuum of reality is the core of Enlightenment (*bodhi-maṇḍa*). In this case, our universe and ourselves must in some way form part of Perfect Enlightenment. This is borne out by passages in the MVT where it is said that the Buddha realm or mandala which Vairocana manifests (actually he *is* the mandala) is the 'Universe of World-systems Adorned with a Lotus-base Matrix' (*Kusuma-tala-garbhā-alamkāra-lokadhātu*), which includes our part of the universe known as the *Sahā* world system. This realm is mentioned in several earlier Mahāyāna texts such as the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* and the *Brahma-jāla Sūtra*, but unfortunately there does not seem to be a consistent definition of its nature. That is to say, at times it is thought to be just one of a number of vast Buddha realms, while at other times it seems to be the entirety of all Buddha realms. These interpretations depend upon the status of Vairocana. According to the Sino-Japanese tradition derived from Subhakarasiṃha and the views of some Indian exegetes mentioned by Buddhaguhya in his *Piṇḍārītha* (57a), Mahāvairocana is considered to be the primordial Buddha (*ādi-buddha*). In my view, this is clearly implied by many passages in the MVT, so we can assume that the term 'Universe of World-systems Adorned with a Lotus-base Matrix' in the MVT actually indicates the entirety of all Buddha realms. Consequently, we seem to reach the interesting conclusion that we and our universe are a manifestation or 'theophany' of Vairocana!

If this is indeed the case, then we encounter a further complication. For if the universe arose as a manifestation of Vairocana's Perfect Enlightenment, then where was he when he was still a Bodhisattva? In other words, some place must have existed for Vairocana to engage in the Bodhisattva practices during the vast amount of time needed to reach Enlightenment. Though this situation is puzzling, I think a tentative solution can be suggested which has quite profound implications for our conventional ways of understanding later Buddhism. First, it must be remembered that 'Vairocana' is really a symbol, a personification of Perfect Enlightenment, and that Perfect Enlightenment is the all-pervading cognitive state which is identical to its content. In other words, Perfect Enlightenment is the totality of the *dharmadhātu* and *vice versa*. If we also consider Mahāvairocana as the sum total of Perfect Enlightenment "attained" by beings at the end of time when all beings have in fact become enlightened, then though Mahāvairocana may be thought of as eternally existing outside of time, he only truly becomes an actuality at the end of space and time. This is reminiscent of Schelling's concept of God evolving and becoming enhanced as the

universe proceeds through time. Additionally, this final point of the universe must also be its beginning, the point where it witnesses itself, as Mahā-vairocana, coming into being. Surely this is what is meant by the MVT when it uses the phrases ‘*the billowing forth of emptiness*’ (XXIV.10)<sup>31</sup> and ‘*the billowing forth of the continuum of reality*’ (XIII.1), or when it says that Mahā-vairocana manifested the intrinsically existent mandala the moment he became enlightened. In effect, he projects the beginning of the universe back into time and in a circular process begins the task of becoming perfectly enlightened again. If a large piece of glass that has been imprinted with a hologram is broken, each fragment of the glass stills retains the complete holographic image, though in a somewhat less distinct and clear form. Could this be a modern way of understanding the potentiality for Enlightenment or Buddha nature (*tathāgata-garbha*) which inheres in all beings? In other words, does Mahā-vairocana (Perfect Enlightenment) become fragmented when he returns to the beginning of time as the universe itself and all its inhabitants?

Moreover, the yogin’s tantric practice parallels, or perhaps we might even say partakes in this threefold process by means of the three phases of *bodhicitta* known as the ‘three minds’ – the entering phase in which the yogin dissolves all beliefs in the substantiality of phenomena and the subject-object polarity, the abiding phase in which he abides in emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and then the arising phase in which he spontaneously generates the mandala and acts for the benefit of beings. At that moment, he remains in the emptiness of all phenomena (= *dharmakāya*) on the absolute level and at the same time he operates in the world, treating all phenomena as illusions (= *sambhoga-kāya* and *nirmāṇa-kāya*) on the relative level. In fact, the MVT stresses that the yogin achieves complete identity with Vairocana through this process.

It now remains for us to look briefly at the variety of methods prescribed in the MVT for attaining Perfect Enlightenment. These fall into two separate groups: those described in the first chapter and those in the remaining chapters. According to the Sino-Japanese tradition, three main techniques are taught in the first chapter: i) The meditative observation in order to know the mind as it really is, ii) the meditative observation of the mind’s lack of perceptual images and iii) the meditative observation of the three types of deluded mind. One can engage in any one of these three, though the meditation to ‘*know the mind as it really is*’ contains all the others.

The first technique is the meditative observation in order to know the mind as it really is (I.7). This technique utilizes the process described by Vasubandhu in his *Trimśika* to eliminate the false idea of a perceiving subject and perceived objects:

‘As long as consciousness does not abide in the state of representation-only, the tendency towards the twofold grasping will not cease to operate. (26)

Though one may think ‘This is representation-only’, one is still regarding it as something placed before one. One is therefore still not abiding in the state of representation-only. (27)

However, when consciousness no longer perceives objects (*ālambana*), one is then abiding in the state of representation-only, because where there is nothing to be perceived [as an object] there is also nothing perceiving it.’ (28)

The aim of the second technique (I. 9–13) is to make it clear that the mind in its natural state cannot be found in any of the perceptual images with which it is

mistakenly identified. At the end of this process, it should be realized that the mind is unborn, unceasing and primordially pure. Because it is unborn, the mind cannot be found in any phenomenon, yet because it is unceasing, the mind is not separate from all phenomena. This is like space which is unconnected with all things and their perceptual images and yet pervades all things, acting as their 'location'. According to Śubhākara-siṃha, this technique is the most profound and is called the 'Dharma Gate to Swift Realization'.

The third technique is the meditative observation of the three types of deluded mind. This differs from the previous two techniques as it is more elaborate and requires a greater span of time to accomplish, since one can only embark upon it after the different types of mundane mind have been transcended. Moreover, this technique involves three stages: i) The analysis of the person into the five skandhas and so forth, by which it is seen that one cannot identify these with a self (*puḍgala-nairātmya*). As there is a danger of concretizing these as really existing, one must also understand that these are relative and illusory by interdependent arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*) and also realize emptiness (*śūnyatā*) with regards the individual (I.23). ii) As this is not yet true emptiness, one must establish the absence of autonomous existence in phenomena (*dharmā-nairātmya*). The MVT again utilizes a Yogācāra method to do this. By meditating on the six similes of magical illusions and so forth, one understands that phenomena do not really exist but just appear to do so. This leads one to the realization of consciousness-only, which then in its turn is also abandoned (I.24-25). iii) Finally, though one has realized the true emptiness of the individual and phenomena, one does not yet realize that the natural state of mind is the Tathāgata's inherent Awareness and that it is the all-pervasive Body of Vairocana with all the manifested Buddha realms. Therefore one must transcend even emptiness with the emptiness of emptiness (*śūnyatā-śūnyatā*), when it is seen that the mind is primordially unborn and unarisen<sup>32</sup> (I.26).

The second group of techniques are taught in Chapter II onwards and are more specifically 'tantric' in nature. Buddhaguhya summarizes the subject matter of these chapters into the twenty one topics which may be seen in Table 3, but following the standard sequence for tantric practice, we may divide these topics into three sections: the preliminary practices, the application practices and the effectuation practices. In turn, these practices are each sub-divided into two parts. Although each of these are dealt with by Buddhaguhya in his commentary, it may be helpful to the reader if I give an outline guide to them here.

The preliminary practices are divided into outer and inner practices. As their name suggests, the intention of these practices is to prepare the yogin physically and mentally for the main practices. The outer practices comprise all the rituals required to purify the yogin and to enable him to engage in the subsequent stages, such as the initiations into the three mandalas and the acceptance of the *samaya* commitments. These are mainly covered by Chapters II, X, XIII, XIV, XV and XVI, with some supplementary material in other chapters.

The inner preliminary practice is also twofold – with perceptual forms and without perceptual forms. The yogin must first engage in the preliminary practice without perceptual forms. This involves the repeated cultivation of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) or bodhicitta, which is understood here to mean the purity of mind in its natural state. Various methods can be employed, such as the processes described in Chapter VI.<sup>47</sup>

**Table 3: Summary of Topics in MVT**

- 1 Indication of the mandala Master's attributes.
- 2 Specification of trainees' attributes.
- 3 The attributes of the mandala site, its purification and taking hold of it.
- 4 Description of the ritual for the preparation of the trainees.
- 5 The specifications for the marking-out of the mandala, the attributes of its sections and of its gateways.
- 6 Description of the transformation of the Inexhaustible Array of the Bhagavat's Body by the arrayed bodies of the mandala deities in the *Mahā-karunodaya* Mandala.
- 7 Arrangement of the mandala deities with the letters of their seed-syllables which are transformations of the Inexhaustible Array of the Bhagavat's Speech in the Mandala of the Revolving Wheel of Letters.
- 8 The distinct arrangements of the deities of the mandalas of earth etc. by the different types of *mudrās* which reside in earth, water, fire and wind mandalas which are transformations of the Inexhaustible Array of the Bhagavat Vairocana's Mind, in the Secret Mandala.
- 9 The different types of pigments to be used.
- 10 The practice of transformation of the mandala deities after having drawn the mandalas.
- 11 The branches of worship (internal and external).
- 12 Description of the ritual to accept the trainees.
- 13 The ritual to make the *samaya* known to them.
- 14 The ritual to initiate them.
- 15 The ritual to cause them to uphold the *vidyās*.
- 16 Detailed description of the different types of *vidyās*, mantras and *mudrās*.
- 17 The specifications for the branches of *sādhana*.
- 18 The branches of *sādhana* such as the mandalas for the accomplishment of the *vidyās* and mantras.
- 19 The signs of accomplishment (internal and external attainments).
- 20 The ritual to be done with fire (*homa*).
- 21 The specifications for the branches of *sādhana*.

and Chapter VIII, but the aim is for the yogin's mind to achieve stability and be able to rest equipoised in a *samādhi* from which all perceptual forms are absent. Unless one-pointedness of mind is attained in this way, the yogin will find it impossible to engage in the practices involving creative imagination and recitation.

When the yogin has attained some skill in this practice without perceptual forms, he is then able to engage in the four-branched recitation. Normally at this stage of his development, the yogin will use the so-called 'external' version of the four-branched recitation in which the Buddha or any other deity is imagined to be outside and separate from himself. This corresponds to what is now generally known as front-generation, in contrast to the 'internal' recitation in which the deity is imagined seated within the yogin's own heart. The basic technique for this 'external'

kind of meditative recitation is described at length in Chapter V and can be used in conjunction with any mantra and deity. In general terms, the yogin should imagine a moon-disc which is the manifestation of *bodhicitta* on the relative level. The mantra letter should be placed upon that moon-disc sounding forth its own sound. This is the first ground which the yogin should use to generate a divine body for himself, transforming himself into that deity by means of the appropriate mantras and *mudrās*. Then he should imagine the body-image of the deity before him and contemplate the mantra in a moon in the deity's heart. This forms the second ground. When this has been done, the yogin should train himself by controlling his breath and one-pointed recitation in silence until he reaches the stage when that deity appears with clarity and stability.

When the yogin has prepared himself sufficiently, he is ready to embark on the application practice to achieve union with the deity. Once again we find the twofold division into practice with perceptual forms and practice without perceptual forms. For the first, the yogin should use the 'internal' four-branched recitation. A typical example of this is described in VII.23 and may be summarized as follows. The yogin transforms himself into the body-image of Śākyamuni and then generates Vairocana within the moon-disc in Śākyamuni's heart. Next he places the mantra within a second moon-disc located in Vairocana's heart and then does the recitation after having regulated his breath. In the application practice without perceptual forms, the yogin should transform himself into the *dharmakāya* mode of his tutelary deity and then do the recitation. This is summarized by Buddhaghūya in his *Piṇḍārtha* (66a) as follows: '*First you should actualize all the four branches of [external] recitation for a while as before and then analyze the manifestation of the imagined (parikalpita) colour, shape and so on of your tutelary deity who is identical to yourself, breaking them down into atoms. Or it is also acceptable to do this by way of the reasoning that [the mind] is unborn and unarising from the very beginning, or likewise by way of the technique of re-uniting the vital-energy (prāṇa) through the yoga of turning your mind inside, or by way of not focusing on its appearance [as colour and shape]. In accordance with that realization, you should actualize the mind which is just self-aware, free from the body-image of your tutelary deity and without appearance [as subject and objects] and mentally recite your vidyā mantra as appropriate. In order to teach this, the text says:*

*The supramundane is that done mentally.  
Having completely left off drawing-in and so on,  
you should make yourself one with the deity,  
perceiving both to be identical,  
it should be inseparable from the nature of your manas.  
In no other way should it be done.'*

Finally when he has concluded the application practice, the yogin may engage in the practice for the application or effectuation of the power gained through union with the deity. The manifestations of this power are the ordinary and the special attainments. Generally speaking, these are the various kinds of mundane attainments described in detail in the MVT, especially in Section 43 onwards of Chapter VI, and the supramundane attainments which are the Five Supernatural Cognitions and ultimately Enlightenment itself. These two types of attainments are respectively attained by way of the practices with perceptual forms and without perceptual forms.

The MVT recommends that the yogin should devote his efforts to achieving the special attainments which arise from the *samādhi* with perceptual forms, because this will also give him access to the ordinary attainments.

Having concluded this brief survey of the wide range of practices taught in the MVT, it would probably be best to bring this introduction to a close and let the reader turn to the MVT itself. However as a footnote, I should like to mention the role of the *manas* and creative imagination in the MVT. We have already had occasion to examine the nature of the *manas*, but in the MVT it has another aspect of crucial importance in tantric practice which should be noted. For despite the suspect nature of the *manas* and the perceptual images it constructs, many passages in the MVT indicate that they may also be put to use in a positive way by those unable to break through to reality in the more direct manner described in Chapter I. For although our normal view of the world is unsatisfactory, the image-making function of the *manas* can also be used to construct a liberating alternative view of things by which we approximate ourselves to the structure of reality which is manifested by Vairocana as the intrinsically existent mandala. First the ordinary world of *samsāra* and its structures are dissolved into non-dual emptiness – the slate is wiped clean. Then, emerging from that *samādhi*, a new world is generated by the use of creative imagination, using the images of the deities, the mantra sounds and so forth as the blue-print. The validity of such images is vouchsafed by the transformational power (*adhīsthāna*) of Vairocana. Vairocana continually interpenetrates the universe with his Body, Speech and Mind in order to reveal the true nature of things to beings, who for their part must reciprocate and reach out to make contact with the illuminating power of Vairocana. All the mandalas, mantras and *mudrās* taught in the MVT were revealed in order to act as bridges between ourselves and Vairocana.

This view that the *manas* can play a valuable role in reshaping one's spiritual life had a long history in India. For example, we can find echoes or even the origins of many 'tantric' ideas and practices in the Vedas. There, such terms as *manas* and other related words derived from the root √ *man* are used with great frequency to indicate the process by which the Vedic seers achieved illumination. For example, *manīṣā* is used to indicate the visionary perception which may be roused by Soma and finds its expression in sacred speech (= *mantra*). Thus according to Jeanine Miller (1985), revelation comes through the heart as the seat of synthesis, where the power of intelligence resides which combines awareness, understanding and intuitive perception and yields higher vision. It is interesting to note here the importance of the heart as the centre for creating the illuminating vision. In the MVT it is clearly stated that the *manas* is located in the heart. Here the term 'heart' should probably be understood as the core of man's inner dimension. Of course this idea is not unique to the MVT even in Buddhism, for the Theravādin school posited a 'heart-base' (*hadaya-vatthu*) as the location of the *manas*. While the great commentator Buddhaghosa in his Path of Purity (*Visuddhi-magga*) understands this quite literally as the physical heart, other Theravādins understood it as the interior core of the person.

There is also a very striking passage in the Ṛg Veda which states that Agni sits in the secret place (*guhā niśīdan*), 'where men find him whilst meditating and reciting their mantras which they fashion in their hearts' [RV I.67.2]. The secret place is the interior of the heart, which is also like a cave<sup>39</sup>. Indeed, this is made explicit in the Upaniṣads where

the heart is the hidden cave in which abides the unborn *ātman*, the essence of the whole universe. Such statements can be compared with the words of the MVT such as: '*The second ground is the perfect Buddha who sits upon a great royal lotus within that same mirror disc, abiding in samādhi, [as though] within in a cave*' [VI.23]. The similarity of idea is even more remarkable when we realize that Agni symbolizes the immortal light of spiritual illumination in the Vedas and so is equivalent to Vairocana whose own name means 'illuminating'. Of course, this would not seem at all surprising for the compilers of the MVT, because to them Mahā-vairocana is the source of all that is valuable!

**Part II**

**THE MAHĀ-VAIROCANA-  
ABHISAMBODHI TANTRA WITH  
BUDDHAGUHYA'S COMMENTARY**





## INTRODUCTION

Having first attained All-knowing Awareness, the Bhagavat then saw with it that there are two types of trainees: those who are mainly orientated to teachings involving cognitive objects and those who are mainly orientated to the Profound and Extensive teachings. There are also two types of practice for those trainees: they can engage in practice with the Perfection Method or they can engage in practice with the Mantra Method. There are also two ways of engaging in practice with the Perfection Method: that of those beings who are mainly orientated to practice involving cognitive objects and that of those beings who are mainly orientated to the Profound and Extensive. The Vinaya, the Sutras, the Abhidharma and likewise Mahāyāna Sutras such as the *Vīradatta-grhapati* and so on, were taught for the sake of those trainees who engage in practice by way of the Perfection Method, and who are mainly orientated to that involving cognitive objects. On the other hand, the Profound and Extensive Sutras such as the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, the *Daśabhūmi*, the *Samādhirāja* and so forth, (2b) were taught for those trainees who are orientated to the Profound and Extensive.

In the same way, there are also two types of trainees who engage in practice with the Mantra Method: those beings who are mainly orientated to that involving cognitive objects and those beings who are mainly orientated to that which is Profound and Extensive. Such Kriyā Tantras as the *Susiddhikāra Tantra* and the *Vidyādhara Collection* were taught for the sake of those who are mainly orientated to engaging in practice with cognitive objects. On the other hand, such Tantras as the *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṃgraha* and so on, were taught for the sake of those beings to be trained by the Profound and the Extensive.

Although we speak of 'beings who are mainly orientated to practices involving cognitive objects', it is not that they are uninterested in the Profound and Extensive and do not engage in it, but it means that a greater part of their interest is to engage in the practice which relies on cognitive objects. In the same way, it is not the case that those who are mainly orientated to the Profound and Extensive do not engage in practice which relies on cognitive objects, but that a greater part of their practice relates to the Profound and Extensive.

In this way, although the *Tattvasaṃgraha* and so on are mainly about inner yoga, outer practice also is not lacking. Likewise, although the Kriyā Tantras are mainly concerned with outer practice, they also do not lack inner practice. In the *Vidyādhara Collection*, immersion in the Three Gates of Liberation and so forth is spoken of, and you should understand this in a similar manner for those who engage in practice by way of the Perfections, according to the circumstances.

Thus, although the *Mahā-vairocana-abhisambodhi-vikurvatī-adhiṣṭhāna-tantra* is a Yoga Tantra which deals mainly with expedient means (*upāya*) and insight (*prajñā*), it also teaches practices which accord with the Kriyā Tantras (3a) so that those trainees who are orientated towards rituals may also be attracted. Hence it can be considered as a Kriyā Tantra or as a Dual (*ubhaya*) Tantra.

The Bhagavat also taught this Tantra for the sake of superior, middling and inferior types of beings to be guided: those who comprehend it by mention of the title (*udghaṭita-jñā*), those who comprehend it by analysis into topics (*vipaṅcita-jñā*) and those who refer to the words of the text.

Of these, those who comprehend it by mention of the title are those whose intelligence is extremely sharp and who have heard much, who understand the entire meaning of this Tantra by just hearing the words ‘*Vairocana-abhisambodhi-vikurvita-adhiṣṭhāna*’ following the meaning of the words.

By the word ‘*Vairocana*’, they know that the Bhagavat Vairocana is the *sambhoga-kāya*, the perfect accumulation of merit and awareness, all-knowing in nature.

‘*Abhisambodhi*’ is to know one’s mind as it is in reality. It is also to realize that emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is the attribute (*lakṣaṇa*) of all phenomena, just as it is of space.

*Vikurvita* (manifested/displayed): They understand that at the moment of his Perfect Enlightenment, he spontaneously pervaded all of the Three Realms, unsurpassed by anyone, with the Adornments of his Inexhaustible Body which he naturally attained by the power of his previous aspirations and, with whatever embodiment of *sambhoga-kāya* or *nirmāṇa-kāya* needed to train suitable beings, acted for their benefit. So to beings to be guided by the Body of a Buddha, he manifested himself in the Body of a Buddha and to those to be guided by the form of a Śrāvaka, a Pratyekabuddha, Śakra, Brahmā and so on, he manifested in those forms and benefited them. (3b) Likewise the Adornments of his Inexhaustible Speech also pervaded all of the Three Realms with the sacred Speech of the Buddha and taught the Dharma. And in the same way, the Adornments of his Inexhaustible Mind manifested as the various *cakras* of earth, water and so on, which arise from the mind with perceptual images.

In the same way, they understand by the word ‘*adhiṣṭhāna*’ (transformation) that the manifestations of the Adornments of the [Bhagavat’s] Inexhaustible Body, Speech and Mind pervading all of the Three Realms are within the perceptual range (*gocara*) of the completely pure Bodhisattvas such as Samantabhadra and so on. But they are not within the perceptual range of trainees, so those same Adornments of his Inexhaustible Body and so on are revealed for the sake of trainees as physical, verbal and mental attributes, by means of the mandalas, mantras and *mudrās* in the Tantra. ‘*Adhiṣṭhāna*’ means he caused them to be present in the nature and the guise of body, speech and mind, by means of mandalas, mantras and *mudrās*.

Thus, those trainees who understand just by mention of the title, understand the meaning in this way by just the words and corresponding meanings of the title ‘*Vairocana-abhisambodhi-vikurvita-adhiṣṭhāna*’. You should understand that just the name of this Tantra was mentioned for their sakes. And they do not only understand it in that manner, but furthermore they will know that it reveals the causal relationship (*sambandha*), the subject matter (*abhidheya*) and the purpose (*prayojana*) of this Tantra. They will see that this Tantra is connected with the Bhagavat’s intrinsically existent mandala, the causal Inexhaustible Body and so on. It should be understood that this intrinsically existent mandala is the causal basis of this Tantra and this Tantra is the result. That is the causal relationship (*sambandha*). Likewise they will know that this Tantra (4a) indicates the manner of existence of the intrinsically existent mandala by revealing his Body, Speech and Mind as they actually are, by means of the mandalas, mantras and *mudrās* in this Tantra. Therefore, this Tantra is the discourse (*abhidhāna*) and the subject matter (*abhidheya*) is the intrinsically existent mandala. As for its purpose, one propitiates one’s tutelary deity (*adhidevatā*) by the practice of the *sādhana* according to the process explained in this Tantra and then one accomplishes the signs of success such as divine and human

pleasures, the attainments of the sword, *vidyādhara* and so forth. This is the purpose (*prayajana*). Then following on from that, the purpose should also be understood as the attainment of supreme All-knowing by the excellent Awareness of the Bhagavat Vairocana.

Those trainees who comprehend it by analysis into topics: they are able to understand all the topics of the Tantra merely by mention of the headings corresponding to the topics, so the analysis and explanation of the topics of the Tantra is for their sake. This is the explanation of the causal basis, nature and result of Vairocana, and the causal basis, nature and result of his Enlightenment and so forth. Now with regards the explanation of Vairocana, the causal basis of Vairocana is explained by the eight stages of mundane minds and so on, and the stages of the supra-mundane Levels, such as the Level of Practice with Devoted Interest and so on, up until the Level of Perfect Enlightenment. The nature of the Bhagavat Vairocana is explained by the attributes of his four Bodies, with the explanation of the reason for considering the *nirmāṇa-kāya* as two, so resulting in four Bodies. (4b) The result is explained as the pervading of all the Three Realms by the manifestation of the Adornments of his Inexhaustible Body, Speech and Mind, and the appearance in the bodies of beings and non-beings, in accord with their suitability. Furthermore, the causal basis of his *abhisambodhi* (Perfect Enlightenment) is stated by the words '*The cause is bodhicitta, the root is compassion and the completion is expedient means*' and so on. Its nature is spoken of with '*What is Enlightenment? It is to know your mind as it really is*' and so forth. Likewise its manifestation and transformation [as the result] are what is described [in the Tantra]. This has all been explained in detail in my *Piṇḍārtha*, so I shall not deal with them here.

Those trainees who refer to the words of the text do not understand the words and their significance, though they have been analyzed and explained here as cause, nature and result and so forth. In order to explain each word extensively for their sakes, I shall now comment in detail upon the entire Tantra from start to finish.

This Tantra teaches eleven perfections (*sampat*) of the Bhagavat Vairocana and these are i) the perfection of abandonment, ii) the perfection of place, iii) the perfection of entourage, iv) the perfection of revelation, v) the perfection of power, vi) the perfection of expedient means to benefit others, vii) the perfection of the causal basis of the Bhagavat Vairocana, viii) the perfection of his nature, ix) the perfection of the causal basis of Enlightenment, x) the perfection of its nature and xi) the perfection of the manifestation and transformation of Enlightenment. (5a)

The perfection of abandonment is indicated by the word '*Bhagavat*', because he is characterized by having abandoned all the obscurations of emotional afflictions and wrong understanding.

The perfection of place has eight qualities (*guṇa*) and these are as follows: i) the perfection of being the abode of all the Tathāgatas, ii) the perfection of being solid and extensive, iii) the perfection of being the place where the Great Enlightenment is realized, iv) the perfection of being the assembly of the Vajradhara Bodhisattva Mahāsattvas, v) the perfection of the extensiveness of the pinnacle, vi) the perfection of colour, vii) the perfection of shape, and viii) the perfection of the throne.

Of those, '*the abode of all Tathāgatas*' indicates the perfection of being the abode of all the Tathāgatas. '*Great and extensive vajra*' shows the perfection of being solid and extensive. '*The mansion of the continuum of reality*' is the perfection of being the

place where the Great Enlightenment is realized. '*The assembly of all the Vajradharas*' is the perfection of being the assembly of the Vajradhara Bodhisattva Mahāsattvas. '*A [domed] pinnacle with neither boundary nor centre, manifested with playful ease by the Tathāgata's inclinations*' is the perfection of the extensiveness of the pinnacle. '*Most splendidly adorned with royal jewels*' is the perfection of colour. '*Regally jewelled great residence*' is the perfection of shape. '*Seated upon a lion-throne formed from the bodies of Bodhisattvas*' is the perfection of the throne. These eight aspects form the second perfection [of place].

The perfection of the entourage should be known by the words '*Those Vajradharas were Vimala-ākāśa*' down to '*Mañjuśrī and Sarva-nīvarana-viṣkambhin*'. The entourage is headed by them.

The perfection of the revelation is the revelation of the Dharma as scripture and as realization, and that is indicated by the words '*The Sun of the Tathāgata, which transcends the three times, was transformed and manifested thus [as Vairocana], expounded the teachings of the Dharma Gate known as "The Ground of the Sameness of Body, Speech and Mind"*'.

The perfection of power is the perception by the chief mundane and supramundane yogins of the yoga emanations (*nirmāṇa*) they had not hitherto perceived and this is shown in this section by '*Then those Bodhisattvas, Samantabhadra and so on, and those Vajradharas such as Vajrapāṇi and so on, through empowerment by the Bhagavat, entered into the display of the treasury of the manifestations of the sameness of his Inexhaustible Body, and likewise they entered the display of the treasury of the array of the sameness of his Inexhaustible Speech and Mind.*'

The perfection of the expedient means to benefit others is shown in this section by the words from '*all the activities of his Body, all the activities of his Speech and all the activities of his Mind were seen by all of them to reveal the Dharma with the words of the secret Mantra Method continually throughout all realms of beings*' down to '*likewise the All-knowing Awareness also refreshes the world of men and gods*'. (4)

Moreover all the things explained in this Tantra are, as appropriate, the perfection of the causal basis of the Bhagavat Vairocana, the perfection of his nature, the perfection of the causal basis of Enlightenment, the perfection of its nature and the perfection of the manifestation and transformation of Enlightenment, but as these have already been explained, they will not be explained again. Therefore, you should understand that the whole of this Tantra is summarized by these eleven perfections of the Bhagavat Vairocana.

I  
THE ELUCIDATION OF THE TYPES OF MINDS

1. [Thus I have heard. At one time]<sup>1</sup> the Bhagavat was in the regally jewelled great residence, which is most splendidly adorned with royal gems, a domed pinnacle with neither boundary nor centre, manifested with playful ease by the Tathāgata's inclination, the assembly of all the Vajradharas, the mansion of the continuum of reality, a great and extensive vajra, and the abode of all Tathāgatas, seated upon a lion-throne formed from the bodies of Bodhisattvas.

In other sutras and tantras the words '*thus I have heard*' appear, but they are not mentioned in this Tantra because of the fixed nature of the teacher, time and place, and because the audience and compilers are such Bodhisattvas as Samantabhadra, Vajrapāṇi and so on who are mainly realization [orientated]. As for the teacher of this Tantra, it was expounded by the Bhagavat Vairocana as the *sambhoga-kāya* which is a transformation of the *abhisambodhi-kāya* since that [aspect] perpetually dwells in the core of Enlightenment (*bodhimaṇḍa*), and because he was definitely present there at that very time and place, the words '*at one time*' are not even mentioned<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore those who formed the audience such as Samantabhadra and so on are not essentially listeners [to scriptural Dharma] but are mainly [orientated to] realization, so the words '*thus I have heard*' are not mentioned. Furthermore the *sambhoga-kāya* of the Bhagavat does not reside in a fixed time and place in other sutras and tantras, for in some of them he resides in the Akaniṣṭha Heaven and expounds the Dharma, or in others he resides on the summit of Mount Sumeru and expounds the Dharma, or likewise some *nirmāṇa-kāyas* reside at Rājagrha or others reside in such place as Śrāvastī and teach the Dharma. (6b) In this way, such sutras have the words '*at one time*' because the time and place are not fixed. They also have the words '*thus I have heard*' because the audiences also are composed of the Noble Śrāvakas and so forth who are essentially listeners and not mainly orientated towards realization.

The eleven perfections of the Bhagavat Vairocana can be summarized into four aspects. What are those four? The individual, the place, the entourage and the purpose. Of those, the nature of the Great Being is indicated by the word '*Bhagavat*' for he has conclusively destroyed and brought to nothing the tendencies towards the obscurations of the emotional afflictions and wrong understanding with insight. Secondly, it also refers to one who has defeated the Māras. In brief, the *abhisambodhi-kāya* refers to one who is devoid of the obscurations of emotional afflictions and wrong understanding. Also, the manifestation of the Great Being is for the two kinds of beings who listen to the Dharma: for followers through Dharma (*dharma-anusārin*) and for followers through faith (*śraddhā-anusārin*). Of those, the followers through the Dharma are those who just distinguish good and bad Dharma, without judging the individual who gives the teaching, while the followers through faith only have trust in the teachings in dependence upon an eminent individual, therefore that eminent individual who is necessary for them, is manifested. The perfection of the place also is in order to attract beings who follow through faith, for by residing in such a place, the greatness or the eminence of the Bhagavat is shown. The perfection of the entourage means that he does not reside there alone, but resides surrounded by an

entourage and that also shows the greatness or eminence of the Bhagavat. When manifesting as an eminent individual, he manifests in order to attract the beings who follow through faith by encouraging them to listen without apprehension to such an individual. (7a) The description of the place is also for three reasons – because if the practitioner (*sādhaka*) has recollected the virtues of that kind of eminent individual and the place, he will be successful and because those places where Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have trod become a stūpa. The eminent individual has been explained above. The perfection of the entourage is also threefold: to show the eminent individual, the excellence of the Bodhisattvas and Vajradharas such as Vimala-ākāṣa and so on who listen to the Dharma and retain it, and to show that it is witnessed by those Bodhisattvas whom he has gathered together, since those most excellent of listeners are present. The individual has already been explained. As for the purpose, this Tantra is intended for the attainment of the bliss of prosperity and beatitude (*abhyudaya-niḥśreya-sukha*) when one has accomplished the causal basis and intrinsic nature of the Perfect Enlightenment of Vairocana according to the sequence in which the mandalas of earth, water and so forth and the actions are explained. In that way the eleven perfections are summarized in these four.

Now, *'the abode of all Tathāgatas'* refers to all the Tathāgatas of the past, present and future who are present in the core of Enlightenment. The word 'abode' (*adhiṣṭhāna*) means 'residence'<sup>3</sup>. To clear away the doubt that so many Buddhas could be present on this occasion since all the Buddhas of the past, present and future reside in the core of Enlightenment, I have explained the matter in detail in my *Pinḍārtha*<sup>4</sup>, so I shall not deal with this here. The *'great vajra'*: That vajra is not an ordinary one, but one which is most excellent or supreme, so it is called *'great'*. *Extensive*: This means either that the vajra-palace is broad and extensive, (7b) or else that those vajras are without number. The *mansion of the continuum of reality* (*dharmadhātu*): *Dharma* (phenomena): The psycho-physical constituents (*skandha*), the perceptual sources (*āyatanas*) and elements (*dhātu*). *Dhātu*: Intrinsic nature (*prakṛti*). Such phenomena as the psycho-physical constituents which belong to the relative level in character, cannot logically be maintained, for their intrinsic nature is emptiness (*sūnyatā*). The direct experience of that intrinsic nature which is emptiness is the *'mansion'*, or source. The *assembly of all the Vajradharas: 'Vajra'* is the insight which destroys incorrect views. The Bodhisattva who has that insight is a Vajradhara. The word *'assembly'* has already been explained in the section on the perfection of the place. It is not the case that Bodhisattvas who are not Vajradharas were not assembled there, but since this is an occasion when mantras are explained, the Vajradharas are emphasized. Moreover the Vajradharas are *'dhara'* (*√ dhr*)<sup>5</sup> for three reasons: because of *'revealing'* the Gate of the Pratimokṣa, *'upholding'* the observances of spiritual learning and *'maintaining'* the branches of offering. You should also know that such symbols as *utpalas* and lotuses held by the Bodhisattvas who arise through the Perfections indicate their individual gates of liberation. *Manifested with playful ease by the Tathāgata's inclination: Playful ease*: He attained and carried out whatever he aspired to, through having aspired and wished for such a place and so on as this while he was engaged in the practices of a Bodhisattva. A [domed] *pinnacle with neither boundary nor centre*: Because the two extremes cannot be perceived, there is also no objective basis to a centre. A [domed] *pinnacle*: It is like the *uṣṇīṣa* on the Tathāgata's head and does not appear like a point. *Most splendidly*

*adorned with royal jewels*: The perfection of colour refers to that palace which is constructed from jewels. (8a) ‘*The regally jewelled great residence*’ describes the form. *Seated upon a lion-throne formed from the bodies of Bodhisattvas*: This means either that the Bodhisattvas changed into the bodies of lions by their previous aspirations and formed a lion-throne, or that the bodies of the Bodhisattvas themselves formed the throne of the Bhagavat and acted as lions.

2. Those Vajradharas were Vimala-ākāśa, Ākāśa-vicāraṇa, Ākāśa-sambhava, Vicitra-vastra, Vicitra-carāṇa, Sarva-dharma-samaṭā-sthita, Pramāṇa-sattva-dhātva-anukampana, Nārāyaṇa-bala, Mahā-nārāyaṇa-bala, Suvajra, Paramavega, Vimala, Parama-vajra, Tathāgata-varma, Tathāgata-padodbhava, Niḥprapañca-pratiṣṭha, Tathāgata-daśa-balodbhava, Vimala-netra and Vajrapāṇi, the Lord of the Secret Ones, (116a) and so forth. They were present together with other Vajradharas equal in number to all the atoms in the ten Buddha Fields. Also there were the great Bodhisattvas assembled around, headed by Samantabhadra, Maitreya, Mañjuśrī and Sarva-nīvaraṇa-ṣṅkambhin.

As well as the Bhagavat residing in such a place, these Bodhisattva Vajradharas of the entourage such as Vimala-ākāśa and so on also reside there. He teaches the Dharma to these Bodhisattvas who encircled him, headed by those mentioned in the text whose names accord with their functions.

3. The Sun<sup>6</sup> of the Tathāgata, that transcends the three times, was transformed and manifested thus [as Vairocana] and revealed the teachings of the Dharma Gate known as ‘The Ground of the Sameness of Body, Speech and Mind’. Then those Bodhisattvas headed by Samantabhadra and those Vajradharas headed by Vajrapāṇi, being empowered by the Bhagavat, entered into the display of the treasury of the manifestations of the sameness of his Inexhaustible Body and likewise they entered into the display of the treasury of the array of the sameness of his Inexhaustible Speech and Mind, and yet they could not discern<sup>A</sup> any engagement [in activities] or disengagement on the part of the Body, Speech and Mind of the Bhagavat Vairocana. All the activities of his Body, all the activities of his Speech and all the activities of his Mind were seen by all of them to reveal the Dharma with the words of the Mantra Method continually throughout all realms of beings. Thus, teachers were seen resembling the bodies of the Vajradharas, the Bodhisattvas Samantabhadra, Padmapāṇi and so on, who taught the Dharma with the pure words (116b) of the Mantra Method in the ten directions. They taught it in order to perfect completely those beings who have nurtured lives of action, from the first generation of *bodhicitta* up to those who dwell in each of the Ten Levels, and to bring about the acquirement of the sprout of existence in those who have suppressed lives of action.

A C has 一切處起滅邊際不可得 ‘they could not discern any limit to the arising and disappearing in all places’.



There are two types of Dharma: the scriptural Dharma and the Dharma as realization. There are also two types of Dharma as realization: the absolute and the relative. Absolute Dharma as realization is defined as Suchness and is emptiness in nature. Relative Dharma as realization is manifested throughout all of the Three Realms by the Adornments of the Inexhaustible Body, Speech and Mind of the Tathāgata. The scriptural Dharma is the twelvefold set of scriptures such as the Sūtras, the *Udānas* and so forth. Which of these does he expound? In this case, he expounds scriptural Dharma, this very Tantra. He teaches the Dharma Gate known as '*The Ground of the Sameness of Body, Speech and Mind*'. Here, '*Sameness*' should be understood in three ways: i) Because the configurations (*cakra*) of the Bhagavat's Body, Speech, (8b) and Mind pervade the body, speech and mind of all beings. ii) When applied to the task of benefitting beings, the Bhagavat's Body, Speech and Mind each equally do the work of the other two. iii) The Bhagavat's Body, Speech and Mind and the body, speech and mind of beings are without distinction through both being empty in nature and being of one taste. *Dharma Gate*: It is a gate because it is the way of entry to the Dharma as realization, since it explains that ground of the Sameness of Body, Speech and Mind. Likewise, you should understand that other scriptural Dharmas are also ways of entry to the Dharma as realization. By which of the four embodiments (*kāya*) does the Bhagavat expound the Dharma? Because the *dharmakāya* and the embodiment which resides in the core of Enlightenment (*Bodhi-maṇḍa-kāya*) are unchanging and transcend words, they do not expound with words, but the Bhagavat expounds the Dharma through their transformational power (*adhiṣṭhāna*) with the *sambhoga-kāya* and the *nirmāna-kāya*. Now in this case, the *sambhoga-kāya*, the Bhagavat Vairocana, expounds the Dharma Gate known as 'The Ground of the Sameness of Body, Speech and Mind'.

Thus the Bhagavat [Vairocana] expounds the Dharma after the Sun of the Tathāgata which transcends the three times had been transformed. Because his *dharmakāya* shines like the sun in nature it is called '*the Sun of the Tathāgata*'. It '*transcends the three times*' because the *dharmakāya* transcends time as measured by the sun and moon. (9a) The '*three times*' are the past, present and future times. This indicates the perfection of the Teacher.

*Then those Bodhisattvas headed by Samantabhadra ... throughout all realms of beings.* This shows the perfection of power. Upon attaining the Tenth Level, such Bodhisattvas as Samantabhadra and so on, because of their *samādhis*, the power from their gates of liberation, the granting of supernatural power and the adornment of Buddha fields and so forth, joyfully think that there is nothing other than this to be done. Then they are struck on the heads by the excellent rays of light from the *Śrīvatsa* mark of the Bhagavat Vairocana. By that transformational power, Samantabhadra and those Bodhisattvas entered into the '*display of the treasury of the inexhaustible array of the sameness of his Body*' and likewise they entered into that of his Speech and Mind. '*Sameness*' has already been explained. *Array*: It appeared in many different forms. *Inexhaustible*: Through the transformational power of the *dharmakāya*, his Body, Speech and Mind will always abide as long as there is *saṃsāra*. (9b) *Treasury*: This refers to the Body of the Bhagavat Vairocana. There arise from that Body, *cakras* of his Body, Speech and Mind without end, which correspond to whatever being is to be guided. So, because those same *cakras* of his Body and so on carry out their specific actions without being surpassed by anyone, it is the '*display*'.

*Yet they could not discern any engagement [in activities] or disengagement on the part of the Body, Speech and Mind of the Bhagavat Vairocana:* There are four categories of beings to be guided: Those Bodhisattvas who have abandoned the obscurations of both the emotional afflictions and wrong understanding, but in whom just a small amount of obscuration due to selective concepts remain; those who have actualized the pure Level of Practice with Devoted Interest; the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas who have abandoned the obscurations of the emotional afflictions, but who have not yet abandoned the obscurations of wrong understanding; and the various beings who have neither abandoned the obscurations of the emotional afflictions, nor those of wrong understanding. Therefore if you should wonder whether the Bhagavat's Body and so on are accessible to the pure Bodhisattvas or not, since no '*engagement [in activities] or disengagement*' can be discerned or perceived in the Bhagavat's Body and so on, then in reply it should be said that at the moment of his perfect Enlightenment, the Bhagavat Vairocana by the power of his previous aspirations, naturally and spontaneously acted without any deliberation (*nirvikalpa*) in all places with the *sambhoga-kāya* and the *nirmāṇa-kāya* for the benefit of suitable beings, and so the text says, '*All the activities of the Bhagavat Vairocana's* (10a) *Body, Speech and Mind were seen by all of them to reveal the Dharma*' and so on. *Were seen:* These activities were accessible to Samantabhadra and so on, though they do not see them in all aspects. However, in measure with their vision and perceptual range, they are able to see or directly know the configurations of the Bhagavat's Body and so on. *The activities of the Bhagavat's Body, Speech and Mind:* (10b) The endeavours or functions of the Bhagavat's Body, Speech and Mind which cause the perfection of the Levels and the Perfections and which are thus the causal basis of the attainment of Enlightenment. The special types of power accumulated by them in the Bhagavat's Awareness are called '*activities*'. The actions characterized by that power are the practices embodied as deities in the Mandala.

*Taught the Dharma with the words of the Mantra Method:* The word '*mantra*' refers to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, because they are endowed with knowledge (*man-*) and protection (*-tra*). '*Mantra*' also refers to the words<sup>7</sup> of their gates of liberation and to the letters<sup>8</sup> and syllables which transform into the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The technique of achieving the causal basis, the intrinsic nature and the result of those mantras is the '*Method*'. The '*words*' are the words of the Dharma which bring about the knowledge and realization of that. It also refer to the words of the mantras. The Bodhisattvas Samantabhadra and so forth saw the activities of the Bhagavat, which appear as the mantra deities and so on, revealing the Dharma which expounds the characteristics of the Mantra Method. (11a) This has three facets : the embodiment as the deities of the Mandala of the activities of the Tathāgata; the correspondence of the ability to guide to the suitability of those to be guided; and the words of the Dharma and mantras which teach that.

*Thus teachers were seen ... (11b) ... those who have suppressed lives of action:* Through abiding in the Level of Devoted Interest, one comes to definitely know what sort of virtues there are in the practice of the Three Minds<sup>9</sup> and the Ten Levels and so on, and have devoted interest in them, so one strives to abandon the obscurations of the emotional afflictions, and by the power of such wholesome deeds as purification of the mind, one is born as whoever one desires, such as Indra, Brahmā and so forth, according to one's inclination. This is the '*nurturing of lives of action*'. This is also the

time from the first generation of *bodhicitta* up until the Tenth Level. The first generation of *bodhicitta* refers to the First Level, the Joyful One.

*Those who have suppressed lives of action:* The Śrāvakas who have abandoned the obscurations of the emotional afflictions at the moment of Nirvāṇa without remainder, reside for eighty eons (*kalpa*) in the heart of the sacred lotus; then Bodhisattvas cause those who have [thus] suppressed life to reject that suppression of life, and after the sprout of existence has been produced in them, they are made to enter and perfect the Ten Levels.

**4. Then Vajrapāṇi, the Lord of the Secret Ones, who was seated in that assembly of Vajradharas said to the Bhagavat, ‘Bhagavat! How do the Tathāgata Arhat Samyak-sambuddhas, having achieved the All-knowing Awareness themselves, reveal that All-knowing Awareness to beings<sup>A</sup> and teach [it to them] with various methods, intentions and expedient means. For they teach the Dharma to some beings with the Śrāvaka-yāna method, to some with the Pratyekabuddha-yāna method, to some with the Mahāyāna method, to some with the method of the Five Supernatural Cognitions, to some with activities in the shape of gods, to some in human shape, or in the shape of mahoragas, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas and kinnaras?’**

‘How is it that each of those beings to be guided sees them in the shape of a Buddha, or in the shape of a Śrāvaka, or in the shape of a Pratyekabuddha, or in the shape of a Bodhisattva, or in the shape of Maheśvara, or in the shape of Brahmā, or in the shape of Nārāyaṇa, or in the shape of Vaiśravaṇa, or in the shape of mahoragas, kinnaras and so on?’

‘How is it that they use the modes of speech appropriate to each being and are seen behaving in various ways, and yet the All-knowing Awareness has the sole taste of the Tathāgata’s liberation<sup>10?</sup>’

*Having achieved All-knowing Awareness:* They fully abide in the core of Enlightenment.

*All-knowing Awareness:* There are two types, the relative and the absolute. The relative type is to know in all forms the Ten Strengths, the Four Fearlessnesses, (13b) the Eighteen Uncommon Qualities of a Buddha and so forth. The absolute type is to know emptiness.

*Reveal:* Means to expound individually. The attributes of oneness of taste and perfection of All-knowing Awareness will be expounded below. Even those born as gods or men who have accomplished the ten mundane wholesome actions and the Śrāvakas and so forth, they are all aspects of All-knowing Awareness. Why? You should know that even the merits of mundane beings are the indirect causal basis of becoming All-knowing. They are the causal basis since they have a portion of All-knowing, and furthermore you should understand that of the two types of cause, direct and indirect, they are the indirect cause. (14a)

*The sole taste of the Tathāgata’s liberation:* Thus, many different body-images are projected through various methods, intentions and expedient means. Yet they all have in common the Tathāgata’s liberation, which is characterized by the abandonment of the obscurations of the emotional afflictions and wrong understanding and the

A C: 無量衆生 ‘countless beings’.