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THREE-SYLLABLE VISUALISATION: A
CHINESE BUDDHIST SĀDHANA TEXT
FROM TENTH CENTURY DUNHUANG**

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THE VAJRAGARBHA BODHISATTVA THREE-SYLLABLE
VISUALISATION: A CHINESE BUDDHIST SĀDHANA TEXT
FROM TENTH CENTURY DUNHUANG*

AMANDA K. GOODMAN

Abstract

This paper presents a translation and study of an unidentified Chinese Buddhist visualisation text based on the four known copies recovered from the Mogao Caves (Chin. Mogao ku 莫高窟) near Dunhuang (敦煌) in Eastern Central Asia. It begins with an examination of the text's title and principal deity, Vajragarbha, and considers its immediate manuscript contexts. Next, the paper examines the language, structure, and contents of the text, and goes on to compare it to three Tibetan Mahāyoga works from the same site: one commentary on a brief Chan (禪) meditation text and two ritual commentaries on the same root *sādhana*. In lieu of a formal identification of the Chinese text, the paper situates all seven manuscripts, four Chinese and three Tibetan, within the wider manuscript matrix of 10th century Dunhuang, and speculates on what these textual sources can tell us about the local reception of Tantric Buddhism in the Dunhuang region during the late Guiyijun (851–1036?, 歸義軍, Return-to-Allegiance Army) period.

1. *Introduction*

In a 2004 paper, Sam van Schaik and Jacob Dalton identified a set of five Tibetan Buddhist manuscripts from Dunhuang (敦煌) that, taken together, demonstrate a consistent pattern of combining techniques from, as they put it:

two normally distinct traditions: the Chinese lineages of Chan (from the Sanskrit *dhyāna*, 'contemplation,' and 'Zen' in Japanese), and the yogic meditation practices of Mahāyoga, derived from the Indic tantras.¹

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This paper accomplishes several things at once. First, it links all five ‘hybrid’ manuscripts to what was likely the same Dunhuang author or scribe, redirecting decades-old speculation about a Chan-Tantra connection in both China and Tibet to a single hand at a single site.²

referenced in this study. I would also like to thank Sam van Schaik, Jessica Lockhart, Annie Heckman, Luther Obrock, and Robert Sharf, as well as the anonymous reviewer, for their helpful comments and suggestions, and Henrik H. Sørensen and Carmen Meinert for sharing their unpublished work. Funding for this research was provided by a Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Insight Development Grant.

¹ See van Schaik and Dalton, “Where Chan and Tantra Meet: Tibetan Syncretism in Dunhuang,” in *The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War and Faith*, ed. Susan Whitfield and Ursula Sims Williams (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2004), 63.

² The five manuscripts are part of the Pelliot tibétain (P. T.) collection at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, manuscript nos. 322, 626, 634, 699, and 808. On these five works, see also Sam van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen: Discovering a Lost Tradition* (Boston: Snow Lion 2015), 176. Additional manuscripts that appear to be written in this same hand include IOL Tib J 689 housed in the Stein Dunhuang collection at the British Library. Jacob P. Dalton, *Conjuring the Buddha: Ritual Manuals in Early Tantric Buddhism* (Columbia University Press, forthcoming), identifies what appears to be the same scribe’s *uchen* (Tib. *dbu can*) or cursive hand in IOL Tib J 320; this manuscript includes the same decorative marker found in the manuscripts discussed in van Schaik and Dalton, “Where Chan and Tantra Meet.”

Speculation about the Chan-Tantra connection is nearly as old as Chan studies itself. By the 1970s and 80s, Chan specialists were openly discussing the relationship between the Chan and Esoteric Buddhist traditions of the Tang Dynasty (618–907, 唐) based on evidence from transmitted sources and select Dunhuang manuscripts. See, for example, Ueyama Daishun, “The Study of Tibetan Ch’an Manuscripts Recovered From Tun-huang: A Review of the Field and Its Prospects,” in *Early Ch’an in China and Tibet*, ed. Whalen Lai and Lewis Lancaster (Berkeley: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1983), 327–349; Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山, “Goroku no rekishi: Zen bunken no seiritsu shiteki kenkyū 語録の歴史：禪文献の成立史的研究 [The History of the Recorded Sayings (Genre): A Study in the Historical Development of Chan Literature],” *Tōhō gakuhō* 東方学報 [Journal of Oriental Studies] 57 (1985): 211–663; Tanaka Ryōsho 田中良昭, “Tōdai ni okeru zen to mikkyō to no kōshō 唐代における禪と密教との交渉 [Interrelations between Chan and Esoteric Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty],” *Nippon Bukkyō gakkai nenpō* 日本仏教学会年報 [Journal of the Nippon Buddhist Research Association] 40 (1975): 109–124; Tanaka Ryōsho, *Tonkō Zenshū bunken no kenkyū* 敦煌禪宗文献の研究 [A Study of Dunhuang Chan Texts] (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1983); and Hirai Yūkei 平井宥慶, “Tonkō hon Mikkyō gikyō tenkō” 敦煌本密教疑經典考 [An Examination of Apocryphal Dunhuang Esoteric Buddhist Scriptures], *Mikkyō bunka* 密教文化 [Journal of Esoteric Buddhism] 150 (1985): 53–73.

The conversation quickly expanded to include developments in Tibet and southwest China, and the timeline extended to accommodate several post-Tang finds. See for example Helen B. Chapin and Alexander Coburn Soper, “A Long Roll of Buddhist Images,” *Artibus Asiae* 32.2/3 (1970): 157–199. More recently, scholars have begun to weave these disparate

Secondly, the paper provides an overview of Mahāyoga ritual as it was being worked out in 10th-century Buddhist circles, highlighting tantric developments during Tibet's so-called time of fragmentation (9th–10th c., Tib. *sil bu'i dus*), as well as the place of Dunhuang in the dissemination of Tantric Buddhism.³ Finally, by situating the five Tibetan manuscripts within the wider manuscript matrix of the Guiyijun period (851–1036?, 歸義軍, Return-to-Allegiance Army), the paper offers a brief sketch of a vibrant regional Buddhist centre notable for its rich archive of exegetical and ritual works, many of which appear to have been locally produced.⁴

textual threads into coherent historical narratives. See for example Bernard Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy of Northern Chan Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Pei-ying Lin, "A Comparative Approach to Śubhakarasiṃha's (637–735) 'Essentials of Meditation': Meditation and Precepts in Eighth-Century China," in *Chinese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism*, ed. Yael Bentor and Meir Shahar (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 121–146; John R. McRae, "Daoxuan's Vision of Jetavana: The Ordination Platform Movement in Medieval Chinese Buddhism," in *Going Forth: Visions of Buddhist Vinaya*, ed. William M. Bodiford (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 68–100; Carmen Meinert, "The Conjunction of Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Thought: Reflections on the Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts IOL Tib J 689–1 and PT 699," in *Contributions to the Cultural History of Early Tibet*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein and Brandon Dotson (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 239–301; Robert Sharf, "Buddhist Veda and the Rise of Chan," in *Chinese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism*, ed. Yael Bentor and Meir Shahar (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 85–120; Henrik H. Sørensen, "Esoteric Buddhism at the Crossroads: Religious Dynamics at Dunhuang, 9th–10th Centuries," in *Transfer of Buddhism across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*, ed. Carmen Meinert (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 250–284; and Henrik H. Sørensen, "The Meeting and Conflation of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism During the Tang," in *Chan Buddhism in Dunhuang and Beyond*, ed. Christoph Anderl and Christian Wittern (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 329–362.

³ On the so-called time of fragmentation or 'dark period' of Tibetan Buddhist history see Samten Gylatsen Karmay, *The Great Perfection: A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 8–10; Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*; and Jacob P. Dalton, *The Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011). Tibetan control of the Hexi region, including the Dunhuang oasis, extended from c. the late 750s/early 760s–848. On these dates, see Bianca Horlemann, "A Re-evaluation of the Tibetan Conquest of Eighth-century Shazhou/Dunhuang," in *Tibet, Past and Present: Tibetan Studies I, PIATS 2000*, ed. Henk Blezer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 49–66.

⁴ On the significance of the Tibetan Dunhuang manuscript finds, many of which date to the post-Tibetan imperial period, see Imaeda Yoshirō, "The Provenance and Character of the Dunhuang Documents," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 66 (2008): 82–102; and Takeuchi Tsuguhito, "Old Tibetan Buddhist Texts from the Post-



The present paper considers the Chinese side of this regional Buddhist scene. Here I am referring not to the Chan works that served as the possible source texts for these hybrid Tibetan works—even though a number of early Chan texts were discovered at Dunhuang, and Chan teachings were influential in Tibet.⁵ Rather, I am referring to works *composed in Chinese* that reveal patterns of combined Chan and tantric elements, patterns similar to those found in our Tibetan Dunhuang sources. More specifically, I am referring to meditation sequences written in Chinese that appear to be organised according to the “structural grid of the three *samādhi* system” characteristic of the generation stage (Skt. *utpattikrama*; Tib. *bskyed rim*) of Mahāyoga meditation practice, a system virtually unknown in medieval China.⁶ These sequences incorporate the same Chan techniques, at roughly the same points in the meditative sequence, that appear on manuscripts circulating at roughly the same time and place, as the Tibetan tantric works surveyed by van Schaik and Dalton.

To make this comparison—and there are, in fact, a number of such comparisons to be made between the excavated Chinese and Tibetan tantric Buddhist manuscripts from Dunhuang—I focus on a single unattested and unattributed Chinese visualisation (Chin. *guanxiang* 觀想; Skt. *sādhanaopāyikā*, lit ‘means of accomplishing’) text, a short evocation or *sādhana* titled *Jingangzang pusa sanzi guanxiang* 金剛藏菩薩三字觀想 [The Vajragarbha Bodhisattva Three-syllable Visualisation]; hereafter *Vajragarbha Visualisation*.⁷ One of several unidentified and anonymous

Tibetan Imperial Period (Mid-9th C. to Late 10th C.),” in *Old Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the IATS, 2003*, ed. Cristina Scherrer-Schaub (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 204–215.

⁵ On the Tibetan Chan texts from Dunhuang, see Sam van Schaik, *The Tibetan Chan Manuscripts: A Complete Descriptive Catalogue of Tibetan Chan Texts in the Dunhuang Manuscript Collections* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2014); Sam van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen*; Sam van Schaik, “Reconsidering Tibetan Chan,” in *Chan Buddhism in Dunhuang and Beyond*, ed. Christoph Anderl and Christian Wittern (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 194–226. The scholarly literature on the Chinese Chan Dunhuang documents is considerable. Tanaka Ryōshō 田中良昭 and Cheng Zheng 程正, *Tonkō zenshū bunken bunrui mokuroku* 敦煌禪宗文獻分類目錄 [A Catalogue of Dunhuang Chan Texts by Category] (Tōkyō: Daitōshuppansha, 2014), provide an updated list of Dunhuang Chan works.

⁶ van Schaik and Dalton, “Where Chan and Tantra Meet,” 66.

⁷ The text is not recorded in transmitted East Asian Buddhist sources, nor is it listed among the local Dunhuang inventories examined by Fang Guangchang 方廣錫, *Zhongguo xieben Dazangjing yanjiu* 中國寫本大藏經研究 [A Study of Chinese Manuscripts of

Chinese Buddhist works preserved at Dunhuang, this short ritual text circulated in at least two distinct manuscript contexts, including one extended ritual sequence with parallels to rites observed in Tibetan tantric works from the site. I treat the extended Vajragarbha sequence in detail elsewhere.⁸ In the pages that follow, I present the text of the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, together with an analysis of its language, structure, and contents. Along the way, I compare our text to the above-mentioned Tibetan tantric manuscripts, and to three texts in particular, the first being a Mahāyoga commentary on a short Chan work on meditation, with the second and third being ritual commentaries on the same Mahāyoga *sādhana*.⁹ I do so because these Tibetan sources are the closest textual parallels to the Chinese *Vajragarbha Visualisation* that I have found in any language. We will return to the possible significance of such a finding in the conclusion below.

Before turning to our text, allow me to briefly address its title and central deity. The title of the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* identifies it as a *guanxiang* (觀想), a curiously understudied Chinese Esoteric Buddhist ritual genre that typically combines meditation instructions and ritual protocols.¹⁰ The Chinese term *guan* (觀), lit. ‘to see’, ‘to observe’, ‘to

Canonical (Buddhist) Texts] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006). For overviews of the Chinese Esoteric Buddhist texts from Dunhuang, see Li Xiaorong 李小荣, *Dunhuang mijiao wenxian lungao* 敦煌密教文獻論稿 [Essays on the Dunhuang Esoteric (Buddhist) Manuscripts] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2003); Neil Schmid, “Dunhuang and Central Asia (With an Appendix on Dunhuang Manuscript Resources),” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Richard K. Payne, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 365–378; and Sørensen, “Esoteric Buddhism at the Crossroads.”

⁸ For a translation and study of the complete collection of Vajragarbha Dunhuang ritual texts, see my forthcoming article, “The Vajragarbha Practice Texts: Chinese Tantric Works from Dunhuang.”

⁹ The three texts are found in P. T. 699, P. T. 626, and P. T. 634, respectively.

¹⁰ A comprehensive study of Chinese Esoteric Buddhist ritual genres, including *guanxiang*, has yet to be written. Translated into tantric terms, a *guanxiang* refers to a *sādhana* or meditation text used to visualize a deity or set of deities. In the transmitted Chinese Buddhist tradition, the term *guanxiang* rarely appears in the titles of stand-alone texts. More often, it is used to designate the ‘methods sections’ of longer works, what are called ‘visualisation practices’ (Chin. *guanxiang fa* 觀想法; lit. ‘visualisation protocols’) or ‘methods for achievement’ (Chin. *chengjiu fa* 成就法) used to invoke or generate the principal deity or *benzun* (本尊) (also called Chin. *benshi* 本師 or *benfo* 本佛; see the



analyse’, appears frequently in compounds that denote contemplative and discursive practices, with meanings that range from ‘imagining’ to ‘visualising’ to ‘discerning’.¹¹

entries for all three terms by Iain Sinclair and Griffith Foulk in the *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*) of the rite.

Exceptions to this rule include several Northern Song (960–1126, 北宋) translations that feature the term *guanxiang* in their titles. On these translations, see Charles D. Orzech, “Translation of Tantras and Other Esoteric Buddhist Scriptures,” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Richard Payne (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 439–450. One such example is the *Foshuo huanhuawang da yuqie jiao shifennu mingwang daming guanxiang yigui jing* 佛說幻化網大瑜伽教十忿怒明王大明觀想儀軌經 [Ritual Manual of the Ten Wrathful Wisdom Kings Visualisation [Based on] the Scripture on the Net of Illusions, the Great Yoga Teaching Spoken by the Buddha] (T. 891.18) attributed to the Kashmiri translator Dharmabhadra (d. 1001?, Chin. Faxian 法賢); there is some confusion over the identity of this monk, who appears to have also worked under the name Devasāntika (Chin. Tianxizai 天息災), or Dharmadeva (Chin. Fatian 法天).

T. 891.18 is in fact a *sādhana* text belonging to the cycle of the *Foshuo yuqie dajiaowang jing* 佛說瑜伽大教王經 [The Scripture on the Yoga Great Teaching King Spoken by the Buddha] (T. 890.18; Iain R. Sinclair, “Iconography in the Chinese Māyājāla-tantra” (M.A. thesis, University of Western Sydney, Nepean, 2000) includes a translation of chapters 1–4 of this text), Dharmabhadra’s translation of the *Māyājālatantra*. The *sādhana* is dedicated to the ‘ten wrathful deities’ (Skt. *mahādaśakrodha*) featured in the tantra. Tanaka Kimiaki, *An Illustrated History of the Maṇḍala from Its Genesis to the Kālacakratāntra* (Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2018), 193–195, discusses the ten wrathful deities in the context of both the *Māyājālatantra* and the *Guhyasamājatantra*. We find a set of ten wrathful deities depicted in at least one Dunhuang sketchbook, P. 4009, 3r.

¹¹ The Chinese term *guan* appears frequently in Chinese Buddhist writings on meditation, both on its own and as part of verbal compounds, including ‘to visualise’ (Chin. *guanxiang* 觀想), ‘to analyse’ (Chin. *guanxing* 觀行), ‘to contemplate’ (Chin. *guannian* 觀念), ‘to observe’ (Chin. *guanचा* 觀察), and ‘to ascertain’ (Chin. *diguan* 諦觀). Related verbal compounds include ‘to ponder, to think’ (Chin. *siwei* 思惟), ‘to think, to imagine’ (Chin. *nianxiang* 念想), and ‘to mindfully recite’ (Chin. *niansong* 念誦). According to Eric M. Greene, *The Secrets of Buddhist Meditation: Visionary Meditation Texts from Early Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2021), 31, the term *guanxiang* does not occur in the Chinese Buddhist contemplation scriptures (the so-called *guanjing* 觀經), suggesting that the term came into general use sometime after the fifth century when those texts first circulated. Robert Sharf, “Visualization and Mandala in Shingon Buddhism,” in *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, ed. Robert H. Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 151–197, queries the relationship between the seemingly discrete methods of ‘recitation’, ‘meditation’, ‘contemplation’, and ‘visualisation’ denoted by the term *guan* based in part on his own ethnographic observations of contemporary Shingon training and practice communities.

With respect to the text's three-syllable structure, we are hard-pressed to find more than a handful of comparable examples in the transmitted canons of East Asia, none of which, to my knowledge, contain a *mantra* sequence that corresponds to the one found in our text.¹² That said, the structure and logic of the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*—a preliminary purification paired with progressive stages of meditative insight and development—are central to any number of Chinese Buddhist meditation systems. Regardless of its provenance, the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* raises a number of interesting, if intractable, questions about the relationship between Mahāyāna contemplation practices and later tantric meditative techniques. These questions are especially important, perhaps, for understanding Chinese Esoteric Buddhist traditions, traditions that did

¹² Three-syllable Chinese-language visualisation practices are rare. More common are five-syllable visualisations, structured around five-syllable *mantra* sequences (Chin. *wuzi zhenyan* 五字真言, *wuzi zhou* 五字咒). These include practices centered on the root *mantra* of Mahāvairocana, where the five syllables are the seed syllables of the five elements, namely *A vi ra hūm kha[m]* (Chin. *A bei luo huo qian* 阿卑羅吽欠), as well as practices associated with the Five-syllable Mañjuśrī Arapacana (Chin. *wuzi Wenshu* 五字文殊). See texts T. 1171–1173.20. See also Rolf W. Giebel, “Taishō Volumes 18–21,” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Richard K. Payne (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 34.

An example of a three-syllable visualisation can be found in the *Daweili Wushusemo mingwang jing* 大威力烏樞瑟摩明王經 [Scripture of the Great and Mighty Wisdom King Ucchuṣma], T. 1227.21, (**Mahābalavajrakrodhasūtra*), a translation in three fascicles by the eighth century figure Ajitasena (阿質達霰). The text concludes with a short visualisation sequence in which the practitioner places the three syllables *OM HŪM PHAT* at the forehead, heart, and feet, respectively, in preparation for union with the principal deity of the rite. My tentative translation of the sequence reads as follows (T. 1227.21: 157c23–29): “Next is the visualisation method. [First,] place your fingers at your forehead. Imagine the syllable *OM* [(Chin. *an* 唵)], which is red. Next, place your fingers at your heart [and imagine] the syllable *HŪM* [(Chin. *hong* 吽)], which is blue. Then touch your feet with your fingers [and visualise] the syllable *PHAT* [(Chin. *fazha* 發吒)], which is pure white. [Having] imagined yourself as the principal deity, recite the *mantra* of protection twenty-one times. Establish the [ritual] space as you like, not allowing Māra’s armies to penetrate. Visualise these syllables as clearly as you would [objects in] a lucid dream. This three-syllable visualisation method can also be used in the performance of recitation practices for members of the *vajra* class of deities.” (復次觀門法。以指拄額。想唵字在中作赤色。次拄心。吽字在中作青色。後拄足。發吒字在中作潔白色。想己身同本尊。誦守護密言二十一遍。隨意至處為界。成護持魔眾不近。欲眠為之夢想清淨。此三字觀門亦通諸金剛部念誦時用。)



not incorporate the ‘highest’ forms of tantric Buddhist *yoga*, but which did see the continued use of visualisation practice, at least for a time.¹³

The text’s principal deity, Vajragarbha (Chin. Jingangzang 金剛藏; lit. ‘*vajra* store’ or ‘*vajra* matrix’, a reference to the indestructible wisdom of realised beings), figures prominently in both Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature and tantric Buddhist texts.¹⁴ In fact, Vajragarbha Bodhisattva appears in dozens of Mahāyāna *sūtras* as an interlocutor of the Buddha and expounder of the *dharma*. This includes such key works as the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*,¹⁵ the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (T. 670.16; T. 671.16; T.

¹³ On the ‘deep continuities’ between Esoteric Buddhist visualisation practices and other Buddhist meditation systems, see Paul Copp, “Visualization and Contemplation,” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Richard K. Payne (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 141–145. See also Charles Orzech, “Tantric Subjects: Liturgy and Vision in Chinese Esoteric Ritual Manuals,” in *Chinese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism*, ed. Yael Bentor and Meir Shahar (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 17–40; and Koichi Shinohara, “The Ritual of the Buddhōṣṇīṣa Vijaya Dhāraṇī Maṇḍala,” *Hualin International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 1.2 (2018): 143–182.

¹⁴ Henrik H. Sørensen, “Central Divinities in the Esoteric Buddhist Pantheon in China,” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Richard Payne (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 90, identifies a number of deities popular in both mainstream and Esoteric Buddhist traditions, observing that “in many cases the context and type of ritual procedures used to worship or invoke these deities determine their exoteric or esoteric nature.” Vajragarbha is one such deity.

¹⁵ Vajragarbha appears to have made his debut in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* or *Sūtra on the Ten (Bodhisattva) Stages*. This text circulated in several Chinese recensions, including as part of the *Dafangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 [Great Extensive Sūtra of the Buddha’s Flower Garland] (Skt. **Mahāvaiṣṭvāyabuddhāvataṃsakasūtra*; hereafter *Huayan jing*), a Mahāyāna *sūtra* compilation. Popular recensions of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* include the *Shidi pin* 十地品 [Book of the Ten Grounds] that appears in Buddhahadra’s (358–429, 佛陀跋陀羅) sixty-fascicle *Huayan jing* (T. 278.9; book 22, fascicles 23–27), as well as a text by the same title that appears in Śikṣānanda’s (652–710?, 實叉難陀) eighty-fascicle *Huayan jing* (T. 279.10; book 26, fascicles 34–39). Additional translations of what appear to be alternate versions of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* include the *Jianbei yiqie zhide jing* 漸備一切智德經 [Sūtra on Gradually Obtaining the Virtue of Omniscience] (T. 285.10), the *Shizhu jing* 十住經 [Sūtra on the Ten Stages] (T. 286.10), as well as the *Shidi jing* 十地經 [Sūtra on the Ten Grounds] (T. 287.10).

The *Daśabhūmikasūtra* is set in the palace of the *Paranirmitavaśavartin* god-realm (Chin. *tahua zizai tian* 他化自在天). Here, Vajragarbha, identified as the head (Chin. *shangshou* 上首) of the bodhisattva assembly, enters a state of deep concentration called the ‘Luminous meditative absorption of the bodhisattva’s great wisdom’ (Chin. *pusa da zhihui guangming sanmei* 菩薩大智慧光明三昧). All the buddhas of the ten directions then appear before Vajragarbha to explain the past causes and conditions that led to his present accomplishments. In order to certify or seal these accomplishments, all the buddhas then

672.16;), the *Dasheng miyan jing* 大乘密嚴經 [Mahāyāna Secret Adornment Sūtra] (T. 681.16; T. 682.16; **Ghanavyūhanāmamahāyāna-sūtra*), and the *Yuanjue jing* 圓覺經 [Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment] (T. 842.17), to name but a few.

Vajragarbha also appears in a number of Esoteric Buddhist works that circulated in Chinese. This includes the mid-7th century *Tuoluoni ji jing* 陀羅尼集經 [Collected Dhāraṇīsūtras] (T. 901.18; **Dhāraṇīsamgraha-sūtra*), an early Esoteric Buddhist ritual compendium in which Vajragarbha is named the leader of the *vajra* class of deities.¹⁶ Vajragarbha appears in the *garbhadhātu maṇḍala* or Womb Maṇḍala outlined in the

anoint Vajragarbha by rubbing their right hands on the crown of his head. So empowered, Vajragarbha expounds the ten bodhisattva stages at the behest of one Liberation Moon Bodhisattva (Chin. Jietuoyue pusa 解脫月菩薩; Skt. Vimukticandra Bodhisattva). See T. 279.34, 179b3–14; Thomas Cleary, trans., *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), 697.

¹⁶ Compiled and translated by the central Indian translator Atikūṭa (fl. 651–654, 阿地瞿多). On the significance of the *Tuoluoni ji jing* in the development of Buddhist *tantra*, see esp. Ronald Davidson, “Studies in Dhāraṇī Literature III: Seeking the Parameters of a Dhāraṇī-piṭaka: The Formation of the *Dhāraṇīsamgrahas*, and the Place of the Seven Buddhas,” in *Scripture, Canon, Text: Context Essays Honoring Lewis Lancaster*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Berkeley: Institute of Buddhist Studies and BDK America, Inc., 2014), 119–180. Koichi Shinohara, *Spells, Images, and Maṇḍalas: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), examines the central role of this text in the development of an Esoteric Buddhist pantheon, where *vajra* deities become standard and Vairocana becomes the central deity.

Vajragarbha appears in the opening section of the *Tuoluoni ji jing* (T. 901.18, 803b25–c16; see Koichi Shinohara, “The All-Gathering Maṇḍala Initiation Ceremony in Atikūṭa’s Collected Dhāraṇī Scriptures,” *Journal Asiatique* 298. 2 (2010): 389–420, esp. 409–412), and is the focus of fascicle 7, which contains the ‘Chapter on the Buddha’s teaching on the *mudrās* and spells of the *samādhi* method [that activates] the great powers of Vajragarbha’ (Chin. *Foshuo Jingangzang dawei shenli sanmeifa yinzhou pin* 佛說金剛藏大威神力三昧法印咒品, T. 901.18, 841a3–851c5; see Shinohara, *Spells, Images, and Maṇḍalas*, 37–44). In this chapter, Vajragarbha is identified as head (Chin. *shangshou* 上首) of the *vajra* family (T. 901.18, 841a16). The term *shangshou* used here is the same term used to describe the bodhisattva Vajragarbha in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* cited above. Within the *Tuoluoni ji jing*, Vajragarbha is referred to by several additional titles or designations: Vajra (Chin. Jingang 金剛, T. 901.18, 844b19; 851b5), Vajra King (Chin. Jingang wang 金剛王, T. 901.18, 844b26), Vajra Bodhisattva (Chin. Jingang pusa 金剛菩薩, T. 901.18, 851b14), Vajragarbha King (Chin. Jingangzang wang 金剛藏王, T. 901.18, 851b20), as well as the Great King Vajrapāṇi (Chin. Mohebazheluoboniluoshe 摩訶跋折羅波尼囉闍, T. 901.18, 841a15–16; Skt. *Mahāvajrapāṇirāja).



Mahāvairocanābhisambodhisūtra (T. 848.18).¹⁷ In this foundational work of Esoteric Buddhism, Vajragarbha appears as an alternate name for Vajrapāṇi (Chin. Jingangshou 金剛手).¹⁸ In addition, Vajragarbha appears in works belonging to the *Vajrasēkahra* [Vajra Pinnacle] (Chin. *Jingangding* 金剛頂) corpus and its satellite texts. This includes Amoghavajra's (705–774, Chin. Bukong 不空) *Jingangding jing* 金剛頂

¹⁷ The Chinese translation of the *Mahāvairocanābhisambodhisūtra* (hereafter MVS) (*Dari jing* 大日經 [Great Sun Sūtra], or *Dapiluzhena chengfo shenbian jiachi jing* 大毗盧遮那成佛神變加持經 [Sūtra on the Manifest Enlightenment of the Great Resplendent One, His Transformations and Empowering Presence]) was produced by Śubhakarasiṃha (637–735, Chin. Shanwuwei 善無畏) with the assistance of Yixing (683–727, 一行) in the year 724. Rolf Giebel, *The Vairocanābhisambodhi Sutra* (Berkeley: Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai and Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2005), provides an English translation of their collaboration found in T. 848.18. The MVS opens with a dialogue between Vairocana Buddha and Vajrapāṇi, Lord of Mysteries (Chin. Jingangshou mimi zhu 金剛手秘密主). Vajrapāṇi is identified as the leader of the *vajradharas* (Chin. *zhi jingang* 執金剛; lit. ‘vajra holders’), a class of beings who carry the *vajra* (Chin. *jingang* 金剛) or *vajra-mallet* (Chin. *jingang chu* 金剛杵), ritual weapons capable of destroying all ignorance and afflictions. In this same section Samantabhadra Bodhisattva (Chin. Puxian pusa 普賢菩薩), is identified as the leader of the bodhisattva assembly.

¹⁸ The name ‘Vajragarbha’ appears as an alias for Vajrapāṇi in chapter 2 of the MVS, in the ‘Section on the full accoutrements and *mantras* for entering the *maṇḍala*’ (*Ru mantuluo juyuan zhenyan pin* 入漫荼羅具緣真言品, T. 848.18, 7a29; see Rolf Giebel, *The Vairocanābhisambodhi Sutra*, 30). In fact, Vajrapāṇi (lit. ‘vajra-in-hand’) is referred to by several designations throughout the MVS, including Holder of Adamantine Wisdom (Chin. Chi Jinganghui zhe 持金剛慧者), Vajrasattva (Chin. Jingangsatuo 金剛薩埵), and the bodhisattva Vajradhara (alt. Vajradhāra, who should be distinguished from the general class of *vajradharas* mentioned above).

Sørensen, “Central Divinities,” 100, identifies Vajrapāṇi as an “important bodhisattva and polyform divinity” who first entered Buddhist lore as a minor guardian deity, a *yakṣa* or *guhya* who holds a *vajra* to protect the Buddha. Vajrapāṇi is sometimes known as Guhyapati (Chin. Jingang miji 金剛密迹) or ‘Vajra Warrior Hidden Tracks,’ which might also be translated as ‘Vajra[-being] Secret Traces’ (Chin. Miji jingang lishi 密跡金剛力士). Michel Soymié, “Notes d’iconographie bouddhique—des Vidyaraja et Vajradhara de Touen-houang,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 3 (1987): 9–26, discusses these *vajra* warriors who protect the Buddha and know his secrets.

Vajrapāṇi was gradually ‘elevated’ to the status of a bodhisattva and eventually incorporated into the Esoteric Buddhist pantheon where he became a major figure. By contrast, Vajrasattva (lit. ‘adamantine being’) is a bodhisattva exclusive to Esoteric Buddhism, where he is associated with the mind of awakening or *bodhicitta*, as well as the goal of tantric initiations in which the practitioner seeks to accomplish *vajrasattva*, that is, to attain the adamant-like state of Vajrasattva. See Giebel, *The Vairocanābhisambodhi Sutra*, 100. On the relationship between Vajrapāṇi and Vajrasattva, see Rob Linrothe, “Mirror Image: Deity and Donor as Vajrasattva,” *History of Religions* 54.1 (2014): 5–33.

經 [Vajra Pinnacle Sūtra] (T. 865.18), a partial translation of the Sanskrit *Sarvatathāgatātattvasaṃgraha* [Compendium of the Reality of All Tathāgatas], hereafter STTS.¹⁹ In this seminal work of Tantric Buddhism, Vajragarbha is given the consecration name of Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattva (Chin. Xukongzang pusa 虛空藏菩薩), with both names, Vajragarbha and Ākāśagarbha, linked to Vajraratna (Chin. Jingangbao 金剛寶), one of the sixteen great bodhisattvas (Chin. *shiliu da pusa* 十六大菩薩) that populate the *mahāmaṇḍala* or *vajradhātu maṇḍala* outlined in the text.²⁰

¹⁹ The *Vajrasekhara* corpus is one of two early tantric ‘canons’ referenced in eighth-century Buddhist sources; the second is the *Māyājāla* corpus which came to be associated with the Mahāyoga class of *tantras*. On these early tantric canons, see Kenneth Eastman, “The Eighteen Tantras of the Tattvasaṃgraha/Māyājāla,” *Transactions of the International Conference of Orientalists in Japan* 26 (1981): 95–96; and Carmen Meinert, “Assimilation and Transformation of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet and China: A Case Study of the Adaptation Processes of Violence in a Ritual Context,” *Zentralasiatische Studien* 45 (2016): 341–360, esp. 344–346. Both corpora are said to contain eighteen core *tantras*, some of which overlap. Amoghavajra’s *Jingangding jing shibahui yuqie zhigui* 金剛頂經瑜伽十八會指歸 [Synopsis of the Eighteen Assemblies of the Vajrasekhara Yoga] (T. 869.18); Rolf W. Giebel, trans., “The Chin-kang-ting ching yü-ch’ieh shi-pa-hui chih-kuei: An Annotated Translation.” *Journal of Naritasan Institute for Buddhist Studies* 18 (1995): 107–201, presents an overview of the eighteen-part *Vajrasekhara* corpus.

According to Kazuo Kano, “Sarvatathāgatātattvasaṃgraha,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Vol. 1: Languages and Literatures*, ed. Jonathan Silk (in chief), Oskar von Hinüber, and Vincent Eltschinger (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 373–381, Amoghavajra’s *Jingangding jing* corresponds to chapters 1–5 (Chin. *Jingangjie pin* 金剛界品) of the STTS, the basic text of the *Vajrasekhara* corpus, and the root text of the Yogatantra class of scriptures, according to later doxographical schemes. Additional Chinese treatments of the STTS include Vajrabodhi’s (671–741, Chin. Jingangzhi 金剛智) *Jingangding yuqiezhong lüechu niansong jing* 金剛頂瑜伽中略出念誦經 [Recitation Sūtra Abridged from the Vajrasekhara Yoga] (T. 866.18) and the *Jingangding yuqie xiuxi Piluzhena sanmodi fa* 金剛頂瑜伽修習毗盧遮那三摩地法 [Vairocana Meditative Absorption Method, a Vajrasekhara Yoga (Practice)] (T. 876.18). Dānapāla’s (d. 1018?, Chin. Shihu 施護) *Yiqie rulai zhenshishe dasheng xianzheng sanmei dajiaowang jing* 一切如來真實攝大乘現證三昧大教王經 [The Compendium of the Reality of All Tathāgatas and the Meditative Stabilisation of the Realisation of the Great Vehicle, Being the Scripture of the Great King of Teachings] (T. 882.18) is a translation of the complete STTS prepared in 1015.

²⁰ Vajragarbha is linked to both Ākāśagarbha and Vajraratna in section one, fascicle one, of Amoghavajra’s *Jingangding jing*, the ‘Section on the extended rites for the great *vajradhātu maṇḍala*’ (Chin. *Jingangjie damantuluo guangda yigui pin* 金剛界大曼荼羅廣大儀軌品; T. 865.18, 207a10–212b3). Within the *Jingangding jing*, Vajragarbha resides in the southern quadrant of the great *maṇḍala*, this being the circle or domain of Ratnasambhava (Chin. Baoshengfo 寶生佛), head of the Jewel Family. Lokesh Chandra and David L. Snellgrove, ed., *Sarva-Tathāgata-Tattva-Saṃgraha: Fascimile Reproduction of a Tenth Century Sanskrit Manuscript from Nepal* (New Delhi: Mrs. Sharada Rani, 1981),



Later in this same text, Vajragarbha is given as one of the 108 names of Vairocana Buddha who is identified as “Lord of all *tathāgatas*, Vajrasattva, without beginning or end, the Great Vajradhāra”.²¹ Vajragarbha also appears in texts classified by later doxographers outside of China as the Yoganiruttaratantras (Tib. *bla med rnal ’byor rgyud*), texts that were translated into Chinese, but which never gained currency in China.²²

Indeed, the conflation of Vajrapāṇi, Vajragarbha, Vajradhara, and Vajrasattva is well-documented in tantric sources.²³ This same practice or

65, note that within the STTS, “other Bodhisattva names are occasionally introduced, and Vajrapāṇi (alias Vajradhara) is liable to replace Vajragarbha for the Gem [Jewel] Family.” A third reference to Vajragarbha appears in the section on the ‘Exposition of the great *vajradhātu maṇḍala*’ (Chin. *Shuo jingangjie da mantuluo* 說金剛界大曼荼羅) found in fascicle two of the *Jingangding jing* (T. 865.18, 217c16; see Rolf W. Giebel, *Two Esoteric Sutras: The Adamantine Pinnacle Sutra, the Susiddhikara Sutra* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2001), 68–69. In this section, Vajragarbha represents the four *vajra* deities of the southern quadrant, namely Vajratna (Chin. Jingangbao 金剛寶), Vajrateja (Chin. Jingangguang 金剛光), Vajraketu (Chin. Jingangfan 金剛幡), and Vajrahāsa (Chin. Jingangxiao 金剛笑), four of the sixteen great bodhisattvas that populate the *vajradhātu maṇḍala*. On this *maṇḍala* assembly, see also Geoffrey C. Goble, *Chinese Esoteric Buddhism: Amoghavajra, the Ruling Elite, and the Emergence of a Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 79–80.

²¹ T. 865.18, 216b7–8: *yiqie rulai zhuzai Jingangsatuo wushi wuzhong dachi jingang* 一切如來主宰金剛薩埵無始無終大持金剛. See Giebel, *Two Esoteric Sutras*, 65–66.

²² The three Nyingma (Tib. *nying ma*) classes of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga teachings are classified elsewhere in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as the Yoganiruttara or Anuttarayoga teachings. On the date and provenance of these doxographical categories, see Jacob Dalton, “A Crisis of Doxography: How Tibetans Organized Tantra During the 8th–12th Centuries,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28.1 (2005): 113–181. As was noted above, several texts belonging to the Yoganiruttara class of tantric scriptures were transmitted to China in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. This includes Dānapāla’s 1002 translation of the *Guhyasamājatantra*, the *Foshuo yiqie rulai jingang sanye zuishang mimi dajiaowang jing* 佛說一切如來金剛三業最上祕密大教王經 [Scripture on the Supreme Secret of the Vajra]-like Body, Speech, and Mind of all the Tathāgatas, the Great King of Teachings] (T. 885.18). The *Guhyasamājatantra* is classified as a Mahāyoga scripture by the Nyingma tradition and is well-represented among the Tibetan tantric Dunhuang manuscripts; the text is not documented in Chinese at Dunhuang. On these Song translations and their translators, see Charles D. Orzech, “Esoteric Buddhism under the Song,” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Richard Payne (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 421–430.

²³ The interchangeability of these specific deity names and identities is rooted in the language of the *vajra*, an indestructible diamond or adamant that represents the state of full realisation, and the logic of tantric buddhology, according to which all the deities of the

convention appears to have been applied locally by individual practice communities. For instance, in an attempt to account for the parallel bodies of Chinese Vajragarbha texts and Tibetan Vajrasattva texts preserved at Dunhuang, Ueyama Daishun raised the possibility of the local conflation of Vajragarbha and Vajrasattva by members of Dunhuang's diverse Buddhist community.²⁴

maṇḍala are ultimately aspects of the *dharmakāya* (Chin. *fashen* 法身). In the esoteric traditions of the Mahāyāna, the *dharmakāya* is identified as either Vairocana Buddha or Mahāvairocana Buddha, with both buddhas understood as being identical to the *dharmadhātu* (Chin. *fajie* 法界) or realm of absolute truth.

We see a similar type of conflation in the visual record, where clear iconographical distinctions are not always made. For example, Michelle C. Wang, *Maṇḍalas in the Making: The Visual Culture of Esoteric Buddhism at Dunhuang* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 108–109, identifies a now-lost image of a figure that might be Vajragarbha in Yulin Cave 25 (based on an inscription bearing the name Jinggangzang (金剛藏) visible in a photograph from the Lo Archive) as a form of Vajrapāṇi. At least one painted image of Vajragarbha was found in Mogao Cave 17 on a double-sided tenth-century portable painting now at the British Museum (OA 1919,0101,0.71). The item contains an image of Bhaiṣajyaguru flanked by two bodhisattvas identified in separate cartouches as Cintāmaṇicakra (Chin. [Rul]yilun pusa [如]意輪菩薩), on the buddha's left, and Vajragarbha (Chin. Jinggangzang pusa 金剛藏菩薩), on the buddha's right. See Roderick Whitfield and Anne Farrer, *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas: Chinese Art from the Silk Route* (New York: George Braziller, Inc, 1990), 88–89.

²⁴ Ueyama Daishun 上山大峻, “Tonkō shutsudo Chibetto bun Mahāyoga bunken Kongōsatta mondō wayaku 敦煌出土チベット文マハーヨーガ文献「金剛薩埵問答」和訳 [A Translation of the Catechism ‘The Questions and Answers of Vajrasattva’, A Tibetan Mahāyoga Text Excavated from Dunhuang],” in *Zengaku kenkyū no shosō: Tanaka Ryōshō Hakushi koki kinen ronshū* 禅学研究諸相：田中良昭博士古稀記念論集 [Aspects of Zen Studies: Essays in Commemoration of Professor Tanaka Ryōshō on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday] (Tōkyō: Daitō Shuppansha, 2003), 3–22. While no Chinese Vajrasattva texts were discovered at Dunhuang, several are recorded in the Taishō canon: T. 1119.20, T. 1120A.20, T. 1121.20, T. 1124.20, T. 1125.2. On these texts, see Ian Astley-Kristensen, “An Example of Vajrasattva in the Sino-Japanese Tantric Buddhist Tradition,” *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions* 1 (1988): 67–87; Ian Astley-Kristensen, “The Five Mysteries of Vajrasattva: A Buddhist Tantric View of the Passions and Enlightenment,” in *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Reprint, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 119–136. Contrast this with the Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts, which include a number of Tibetan Mahāyoga *sādhanas* dedicated to self-visualisation as Vajrasattva (Tib. rDo rje sems dpa’); to my knowledge, no Tibetan works dedicated to Vajragarbha (Tib. rDo rje snying po) were preserved at the site. On the Tibetan Vajrasattva practice texts, see Sam van Schaik, “A Definition of Mahāyoga: Sources from the Dunhuang Manuscripts,” *Tantric Studies* 1 (2008): 45–88, esp. 53, fn. 29.

In addition to the textual finds from Dunhuang, images of Vajrasattva are found in both murals and portable paintings produced in the region. See for example Freer Gallery of Art painting F1935.11 discussed in Rong Xinjiang, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, trans. Imre



2. The Manuscript Copies of the Vajragarbha Visualisation

2.1. Vajragarbha Visualisation as Part of the *Jingangjun jing* 金剛峻經 [Vajra Peak Scripture]

Four copies of the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* have been identified at Dunhuang.²⁵ Three of the four copies circulated as part of a local ritual compendium titled the *Jingangjun jing* 金剛峻經 [Vajra Peak Scripture], an obvious play on the title of the *Vajra Pinnacle Sūtra* mentioned above.²⁶ Both works are attributed to Amoghavajra, although internal textual evidence, in combination with physical manuscript evidence, dates the former text at least one full century after Amoghavajra's death in 774.²⁷ The four-fascicle *Vajra Peak Scripture* is divided into two main parts, with both parts comprised of numerous subtexts. Part one contains thirty-five ritual texts spread across three fascicles, accounting for roughly three-quarters of the overall text. Vajragarbha Bodhisattva serves as the Buddha's chief interlocutor in fifteen of those texts.²⁸ Part two comprises all of fascicle four, or roughly one quarter of the received compendium, and contains an extended lineage text (item 36) that documents the

Galambos (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 93–95, and Henrik H. Sørensen, “Donors and Esoteric Buddhism in Dunhuang during the Reign of the Guiyijun,” in *Buddhism in Central Asia I: Patronage, Legitimation, Sacred Space, and Pilgrimage*, ed. Carmen Meinert and Henrik H. Sørensen (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 114–117. Vajrasattva also appears on at least one ritual implement recovered from the site, IOL Tib J 1364. These finds suggest that Vajrasattva was popular among local Buddhist patrons, including Chinese patrons, in the tenth century. On this topic, see van Schaik, “A Definition of Mahāyoga,” and Sam van Schaik, Agnieszka Helman-Ważny, and Renate Nöller, “Writing, Painting, and Sketching at Dunhuang: Assessing the Materiality and Function of Early Tibetan Manuscripts and Ritual Items,” *Journal of Archaeological Science* 53 (2015): 110–132.

²⁵ The four manuscript copies of the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* are: (1) P. 3913 (38), fol. 169, l. 3, to fol. 170, l. 5; (2) GB 015, ll. 789–803 (pages 40–41 in the *Gansu cang Dunhuang wenxian* 甘肅藏敦煌文獻 [Dunhuang Manuscripts Preserved in Gansu], vol. 4 (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1999)); (3) S. 2144v (2), ll. 48–59; and (4) P. 3835v (9a), fols. 42–44, ll. 1–21.

²⁶ The complete title of the *Vajra Peak Scripture* can be found in note 30 below.

²⁷ A dated reference in section 36 establishes a terminus post quem of 899 for the *Vajra Peak Scripture*. Codicological evidence places the extant manuscript copies even later, in the 970s or 980s.

²⁸ Vajragarbha appears as the chief interlocutor in sections 1, 2, 5, 11, 14, 15, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 35 of the *Vajra Peak Scripture*. Samantabhadra serves as the Buddha's main interlocutor in several additional sections, including 4, 20, 21, and 22.

BuddhistRoad Paper 2.5. Goodman, “The Vajragarbha Bodhisattva Three-Syllable Visualisation”

transmission of Buddhism, and the *Vajra Peak Scripture* itself, from India to China. Appended to this lineage text are two short meditation texts, an untitled text (item 37), followed by the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* (item 38).²⁹ One of the three extant copies of the compendium includes an additional item (item 39), a liturgical text for conducting an elaborate altar rite on behalf of an unnamed Guiyijun ruler. An outline of the *Vajra Peak Scripture* based on the three known Dunhuang copies is provided in appendix I.³⁰

Part one of the *Vajra Peak Scripture* is a collection of roughly three dozen altar methods (Chin. *tanfa* 壇法), with *tan* (壇) here referring to a multipurpose (and often multistoried) physical structure that simultaneously functions as precepts platform, ritual altar, and deity *maṇḍala*.³¹ The subtexts comprising part one begin with short preambles that outline the circumstances of the teaching and the transmission of each method or rite; this is followed by a set of ritual protocols (Chin. *yize* 儀

²⁹ Sørensen, “The Meeting and Conflation of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism During the Tang,” provides a discussion and translation of both visualisation texts found in part two of the *Vajra Peak Scripture*, including the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*.

³⁰ The *Vajra Peak Scripture* is often referred to in scholarship by the abbreviated title, *Tanfa yize* 壇法儀則 [Altar Methods for Ritual Proceedings; alt. Ritual Protocols for Altar Methods]. The text is preserved in two Dunhuang recensions, A and B. Recension B appears on scroll BD 02074 and corresponds roughly to part one of recension A. The *Vajragarbha Visualisation* does not appear in recension B, which is not treated here. Recension A is extant in three copies: (1) a complete copy found on *pothi* booklet P. 3913; (2) a partial copy now divided between two scroll fragments, BD 15147 and GB 015; and (3) a partial copy preserved on the verso of five recycled scrolls: BD 02301, S. 2316v + BD 02431, BD 06329, S. 2144v. See Hou Chong 候冲, comp., “*Jingangjun jing, jingangding jing yiqie rulai shenmiao mini jingangjie dasanmeiye xiuxing sishi'erzhong tanfa jing zuoyong weiyi faze, Dapilushenafo jingang xindi famen mifajie tanfa yize* 金剛峻經, 金剛頂一切如來深妙秘密金剛界大三昧耶修行四十二種壇法經作用威儀法則, 大毘盧遮那佛金剛心地法門秘法戒壇法儀則 [The Vajra Peak Scripture, Ritual Protocols for the Forty-two Altar Methods for Conducting the Profound and Secret Vajradhātu Mahāsamaya of All Tathāgatas of the *Vajra Pinnacle Sūtra*, Being the Ritual Protocols for the Secret Precepts Platform Ceremonies for Transmitting Mahāvairocana Buddha’s Vajra Mind-ground Dharma Gate]”, in *Zangwai fojiao wenxian* 藏外佛教文獻 [Buddhist Texts not contained in the Tripitaka] 11 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2008), 17–144. For translations of both recensions of the *Vajra Peak Scripture*, see my forthcoming book, *The Chan-Tantra Connection: Esoteric Buddhism and Ritual Exchange in Late Medieval Dunhuang*.

³¹ On the multivalence of the term *tan*, see Kuo Liying, *Confession et contrition dans le bouddhisme chinois du Ve au Xe siècle* (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1994); Schmid, “Dunhuang and Central Asia,” 373; and Sharf, “Buddhist Veda and the Rise of Chan.”



則) narrated by the Buddha. These protocols are presented in standardised sequences and include the procedural knowledge one might expect to find in collections of lore on tantric initiations (Skt. *maṇḍalavidhi*, *abhiṣekavidhi*): instructions on site selection, construction of the physical platform, rules for purification and consecration, recitation and meditation instructions, and so on. The majority of the altars or *maṇḍalas* are explicitly identified as four-storied *vajradhātus* and arranged according to the five Buddha scheme promoted in the Yogatantras, albeit with a unique colour-directional scheme found in a number of Dunhuang texts and images. Table 1 provides the directional colour scheme of the *maṇḍalas* described in part one of the *Vajra Peak Scripture*.³²

³² This same colour scheme is found in a number of *maṇḍala* sketches and portable paintings recovered from Dunhuang. See Kuo Liying, “Maṇḍala et Rituel de Confession à Dunhuang,” *Bulletin de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient* 85 (1998): 227–256, esp. 237–239; Kuo Liying, “Dessins de maṇḍala Dunhuang: le manuscrit Pelliot chinois 2012,” in *La Sérinde, terre d’échanges—Art, religion, commerce du Ier au Xe siècle*, ed. Jean-Pierre Drège (Paris: La Documentation Française, 2000), 49–78; Tanaka Kimiaki 田中公明, *Tonkō mikkyō to bijutsu 敦煌密教と美術* [Dunhuang Esoteric Buddhism and Art] (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2000), 39–71; Tanaka, *An Illustrated History of the Maṇḍala from Its Genesis to the Kālacakra Tantra*, 270–274; and Valérie Zaleski, “À propos d’un ‘maṇḍala’ de Dunhuang conservé au musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet,” *Arts Asiatiques* 70 (2015): 123–130. This colour-directional scheme differs from the colour scheme found in the STTS, but corresponds to the scheme found in Dharmabhadra’s 996 translation of the *Dasheng guanxiang mannaluo jing zhu’equ jing* 大乘觀想曼拏羅淨諸惡趣經 [Sūtra of the Mahāyāna Meditation Maṇḍala that Purifies (Transgressions and Stops) All Evil Rebirths] (T. 939.19). Rolf W. Giebel, “Tantric Ritual Manuals in East Asia,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Vol. 1: Languages and Literatures*, ed. Jonathan Silk (in chief), Oskar von Hinüber, and Vincent Eltschinger (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 684–691, identifies this text as a translation of Ānandagarbha’s *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanamaṇḍalavidhi* (Tōh. 2626), and not a translation of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra* as some scholars have assumed. Tadeusz Skorupski, *The Sarvadurgatipariśodhana-tantra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), includes an English translation of the Sanskrit and Tibetan editions of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra*; on the significance of this text at Dunhuang, see Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 63; and Wang, *Maṇḍalas in the Making*, 187–191.

Buddha	Direction	Colour
Mahāvairocana (大毗盧遮那佛) or Rocana (盧舍那佛)	Center	Yellow
Akṣobhya (阿閼佛)	East	White
Ratnasambhava (寶生佛)	South	Blue
Amitābha (阿彌陀佛)	West	Red
Amoghasiddhi (不空成就佛) ³³	North	Green

Table 1. Colour-directional scheme of the *maṇḍalas* in the *Vajra Peak Scripture*.

Part two of the compendium introduces something of a plot twist. It begins with a lineage text titled the *Fu fazang pin* 付法藏品 [Chapter on Entrusting the Dharma Repository].³⁴ In this text, which has long confounded scholars, we learn that the *Vajra Peak Scripture* can be traced back not to Śākyamuni Buddha (Chin. Shijiamouni fo 釋迦牟尼佛) but to Mahāvairocana Buddha (Chin. Dapiluzhena fo 大毗盧遮那佛), progenitor of an unbroken line of realised saints that culminates in a list of twenty-eight Indian and six Chinese patriarchs.³⁵ This list of patriarchs

³³ The name of the buddha of the North varies across the Yogatantra corpus. This variation appears to be tied to the developmental history of the four directional buddhas who were incorporated into Buddhist *maṇḍala* schemes, together with the gradual shift from three to five buddha families that occurs in the Yogatantras specifically. On these topics, see Tanaka, *An Illustrated History of the Maṇḍala*, 23–29. In certain sections of the *Vajra Peak Scripture* (recension A, sections 18 and 29; recension B, sections 7, 16; see appendix I), the buddha of the North is identified as Karma Buddha (Chin. Jiemofu 羯磨佛).

³⁴ This title is derivative of an earlier title popular in Chan Buddhist circles, the *Fu fazang [yinyuan] zhuan* 付法藏[因緣]傳 [Chronicle of the Successive Transmission of the Dharma Repository] (T. 2058.50). On this text and its relationship to the *Vajra Peak Scripture*, see Tanaka, *Tonkō zenshū bunken no kenkyū*, 61–106.

³⁵ The opening section of the *Fu fazang pin* reads: “The ninety-nine koṭis of previous buddhas successively transmitted, from one generation to the next, the *Scripture on Attaining Buddhahood, Mahāvairocana Buddha’s Teaching on the Profound and Secret Vajradhātu Mahāsamaya of the Unsurpassed Great Vehicle, the Great King of Teachings that has been entrusted by All the Tathāgatas of the Vajraśekhara*. This true dharma was inherited from all previous buddhas, and ultimately from Mahāvairocana Buddha.” (一代傳於一代，從過去九十九億恒河沙諸佛，遞代相傳《大毗盧遮那佛最上乘金剛頂一切如來深妙秘密金剛界大三昧耶總持大教王承受付囑成佛經》。從河沙諸佛盡，從大毗盧遮那佛承受正法。)



is in fact a classic Chan lineage that was fixed no later than the early ninth century, and which is here subject to certain ‘esoteric’ revisions: in contrast to ‘typical’ Chan transmission accounts, in which the dharma heir receives the ‘eye of the true *dharma*’ (Chin. *zhengfa yan* 正法眼) from the senior patriarch in his private chamber, our text restages these transmission scenes in the awakened realm of Mahāvairocana, a realm identified in esoteric Buddhist sources, including the *Vajra Peak Scripture*, as the *vajradhātu* or *vajra* realm (Chin. *jingangjie* 金剛界). The object of these transmissions, we are told, is the “secretly transmitted mind-seal” (Chin. *michuan xinyin* 密傳心印).³⁶ These rescripted scenes of transmission might best be described as empowerment ceremonies, wherein the ritual investiture of buddha mind, and hence the conferral of buddha status, is witnessed by Mahāvairocana, the original buddha and original patriarch, and head of the secret lineage. Here, we might speculate that the *vajradhātu* platforms or *maṇḍalas* outlined in part one of the *Vajra Peak Scripture* were understood as the literal stages for the empowerment ceremonies narrated in part two.³⁷

In fact, two separate lineages are included in part two of the *Vajra Peak Scripture* (sections 36a and 36d), underscoring the composite nature of the received text. On these two lineages, see Tanaka Ryōshō, “Relations between the Buddhist Sects in the T’ang Dynasty through the Ms. P.3913,” *Journal Asiatique* 269 (1981): 163–69; Tanaka, *Tonkō zenshū bunken no kenkyū*, 135–168. As Tanaka makes clear, these lineages reflect developments in Chan, Esoteric, Pure Land, and apocalyptic Chinese Buddhist circles of the eighth century; certain Daoist ideas might also be at play, highlighting the truly Chinese flavour of our text. On this topic see also Robert H. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 268–270; Wendi L. Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission: On an Early Chan History and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 105; and Sørensen, “The Meeting and Conflation of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism,” 347–356.

³⁶ The empowerment scenes in part two of the *Vajra Peak Scripture* describe how each patriarch, as he ‘approaches *parinirvāṇa*’ (Chin. *lin banniepan shi* 臨般涅槃時), transmits the teachings to the next generation. As part of the transmission proper, the *dharma* heir ‘ascends to Mahāvairocana’s *vajradhātu*’ (Chin. *deng Dapilu jingangjie* 登大毗盧金剛界), where he achieves full and complete awakening. On these scenes, see Christoph Anderl, “Introduction: Chan Buddhism in an Inter-religious and Cross Linguistic Perspective,” in *Chan Buddhism in Dunhuang and Beyond: A Study of Manuscripts, Texts, and Contexts in Memory of John R. McRae*, ed. Christoph Anderl and Christian Wittern (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 6–7.

³⁷ One will recall that the majority of *maṇḍalas* described in the *Vajra Peak Scripture*, like the main *maṇḍala* in the STTS, are referred to as *vajradhātu maṇḍalas*.

The *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, together with a separate, untitled visualisation text, is appended to this hybrid transmission account. With no paratextual or commentarial guidance, we are left to speculate as to why the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, together with its companion text, was included in the compendium. Might it be because Vajragarbha, principal deity of our contemplation, serves as the chief interlocutor in part one of the compendium? Or might it be because we see the same combination of Chan and tantric elements in the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* that we see in the transmission accounts presented in part two of the *Vajra Peak Scripture*? We will return to the topic of Chan and tantric elements in the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* below.

2.2. *Vajragarbha Visualisation in P. 3835*

A fourth copy of the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* is found on a concertina now held in the Pelliot collection at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (P. 3835).³⁸ Appendix II contains an outline of the contents of this complicated ritual miscellany.

³⁸ Concertina P. 3835 measures 12.5 × 9.2 cm and is comprised of ninety-one accordion-style folded pages fashioned from twenty-two sheets of fibrous, beige paper. A cover page appears on the *verso* of sheet one and contains two inscriptions, the first of which appears to be an ownership formula that might be translated: “This is the booklet of...” (Chin. *ci shi jing cezi* 此是經策(冊)子.); on a separate line we find the phrase: “victorious” (Chin. *zunsheng* 尊勝). I thank Imre Galambos for helping me interpret this formula.

As with many manuscript miscellanies from Dunhuang, the layout of P. 3835 makes it difficult to determine where one text ends and another text begins. On the issue of textual units and textual division in composite manuscripts, see Sam van Schaik, “Manuscripts and Practices: Investigating the Tibetan Chan Compendium (P. Tib. 116),” in *One-Volume Libraries: Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts*, ed. Michael Friedrich and Cosima Schwarke (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 287–304. Several scholars have theorised the relationship between the form and function of the Dunhuang composite manuscripts, beginning with Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮, *Gikyō kenkyū* 疑經研究 [A Study of (Buddhist) Apocryphal Scriptures] (Kyoto: Kyōto Daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1976). See also Henrik H. Sørensen, “Observations on the Characteristics of the Chinese Chan Manuscripts from Dunhuang,” *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions* 2 (1989): 115–139; Sørensen, “The Meeting and Conflation of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism”; Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008); Paul Copp, “Manuscript Culture as Ritual Culture in Late Medieval Dunhuang: Buddhist Talisman-Seals and Their Manuals,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 20 (2011): 193–226; Paul Copp, “Writing Buddhist Liturgies in Dunhuang: Hints of Ritualist Craft,” in *Language and Religion*, ed. Robert A. Yelle, Courtney Handman, and Christoph I. Leirich (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 68–86; and



This concertina booklet is fashioned from local Dunhuang paper, including two recycled sheets, and contains close to two dozen unique items. The colophon appearing at the end of item 5 on the *recto* dates the manuscript to the year 978. This detail is significant, for it allows us to isolate the circulation date of this copy of the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* to the final decades of the tenth century. The *Vajragarbha Visualisation* appears as the ninth item on the *verso* of this accordion-style booklet, the first of four short contemplation texts copied in succession. Together these four texts, two of which are presented in unique tabular layouts, form an extended Vajragarbha sequence. They are listed here in order of their appearance on the manuscript:

- (1) Vajragarbha Bodhisattva's Three-Syllable Contemplation (P. 3835v (9a))
- (2) Self-empowerment sequence (P. 3835v (9b))
- (3) Five-syllable contemplation, table A1 (P. 3835v (9c))
- (4) Five-syllable contemplation, table A2 (P. 3835v (9d))

Imre Galambos, *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture: End of the First Millennium* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 23–24.

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Several features distinguish this extended ritual sequence on the manuscript, including the use of distinctive red-ink punctuation and highlighter marks on the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* specifically (see figs. 1 and 2).³⁹

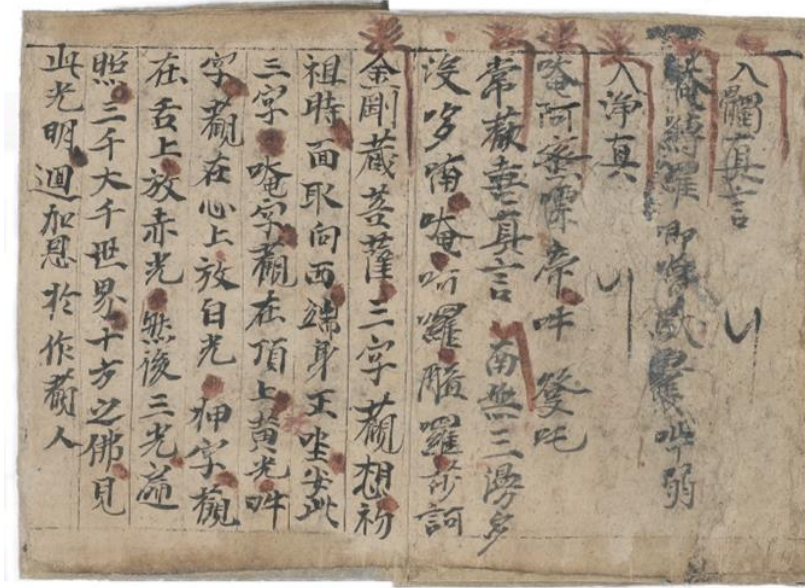


Figure 1. Vajragarbha Visualisation, opening section. Dunhuang, 10th c. P. 3835v (9a), fol. 42, BnF. Concertina, ink on paper, approx. 42.8 × 48 cm.

³⁹ On these distinctive red markings, see my forthcoming article, “Traces in Ink and Color: Additional Reading Marks in the Dunhuang Ritual Manuscripts.”

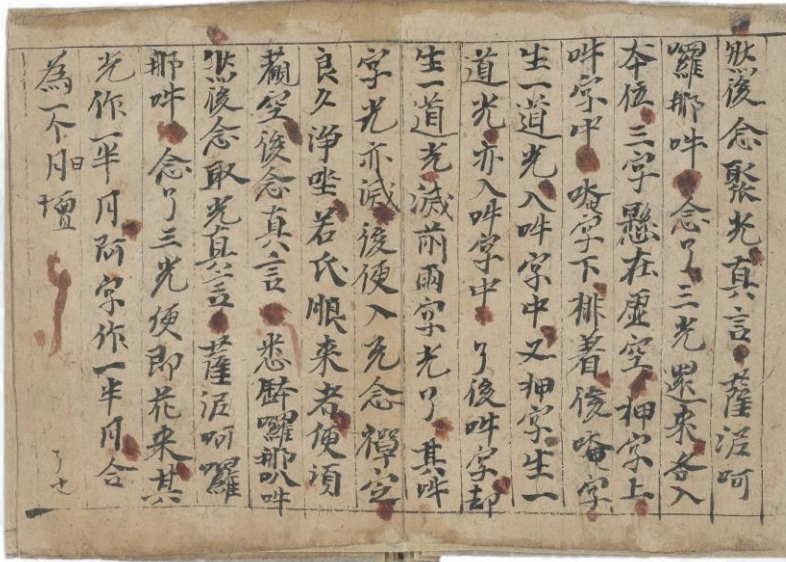


Figure 2. Vajragarbha Visualisation, final section. Dunhuang, 10th c. P. 3835v (9a), fols. 43–44, BnF. Concertina, ink on paper, approx. 42.8 × 48 cm.

Equally striking are the tabular forms that the third (fig. 3) and fourth (fig. 4) items take.⁴⁰ In both tables (tables A1, A2) we see sets of five syllables linked, by way of wavy red lines, to short passages that describe the visualisation.

⁴⁰ Copp, “Manuscript Culture as Ritual Culture,” 201–202, briefly notes the meditation tables in P. 3835.

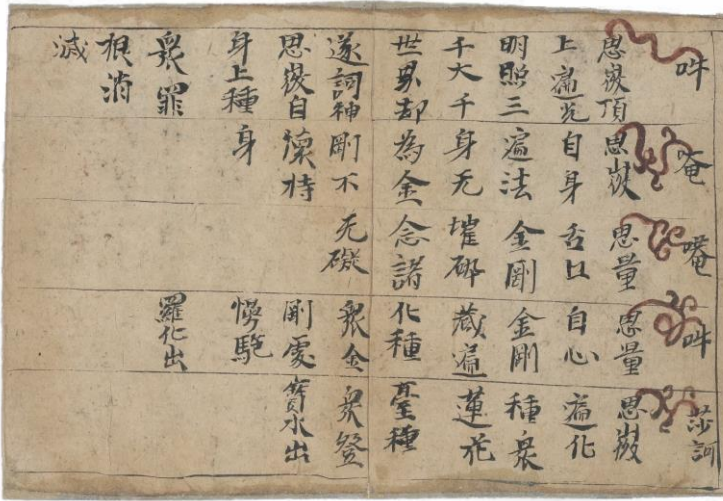


Figure 3. Meditation table, A1. Dunhuang, 10th c. P. 3835v (9c), fols. 47–48, BnF. Concertina, ink on paper, approx. 42.8 × 48 cm.

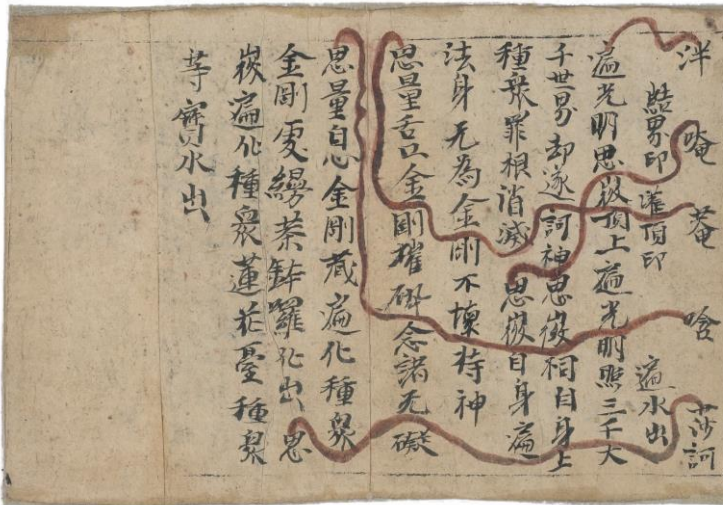


Figure 4. Meditation table, A2. Dunhuang, 10th c. P. 3835v (9d), fols. 49–50, BnF. Concertina, ink on paper, approx. 42.8 × 48 cm.



These lines, I should note, appear to have been produced from the same inkpot and brush, suggesting the intervention of a single reader, or the application of a common scribal convention, on disparate items in the manuscript.

I have identified an alternate recension of the extended *Vajragarbha Visualisation* sequence on a second dated manuscript housed in Paris (P. 2104). This recension is similarly organised into prose sections followed by tables that contain cycling *mantras* paired with short, descriptive passages (see fig. 5); the sequence found on P. 2104 does not include the short *Vajragarbha Visualisation* that is the focus of this paper. Two inscriptions date this manuscript to the year 980.⁴¹ This is a rather remarkable find when considered alongside the dated colophon found on P. 3835: together, these two dates suggest a narrow window of time during which the *Vajragarbha* practice texts likely circulated. What is more, there is compelling evidence to suggest that the same person composed all three dated items, a late tenth-century figure who can also be linked to at least one copy of the *Vajra Peak Scripture*.⁴²

⁴¹ Pelliot catalogers identify this as a recycled manuscript, the *recto* of which was inscribed in the sixth century. The two inscriptions in question—the first appears as the final item on the *recto*, the second appears as the first item on the *verso*—are dated to the fifth month of the *gengchen* (庚辰) era (980). Although the paper is damaged, the colophon on the *recto* of P. 2104 contains the name Yuanshou (fl. 978-980, 願受, alt. Yang Yuanshou 楊願受). This is the same name that appears in the dated colophon found in item 5 on the *recto* of P. 3835.

⁴² The back cover of P. 3913—again, a Chinese-style *pothi* booklet that contains a complete copy of the *Vajra Peak Scripture*—bears an inscription that includes the name Yuanshou, the same figure named in the dated colophons on both P. 3835 and P. 2104. On the figure of Yang Yuanshou, see Victor Mair, “Lay Students and the Making of Written Vernacular Narrative: An Inventory of Tun-Huang Manuscripts,” *CHINOPEL Papers* 10 (1981): 5–96.

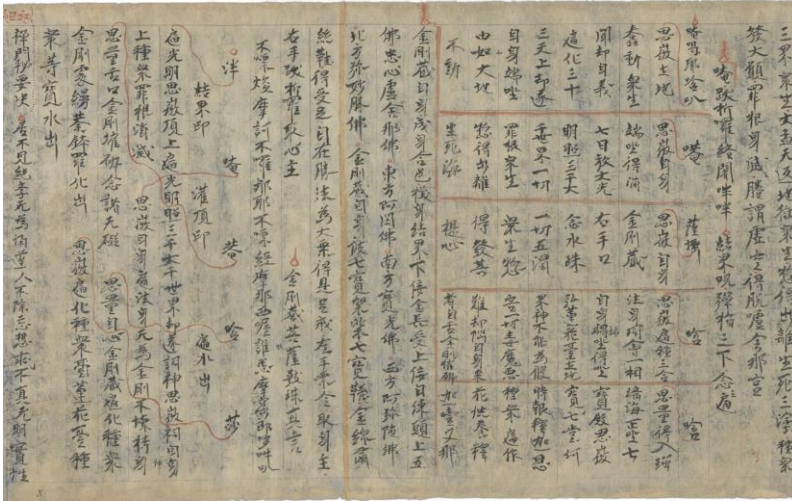


Figure 5. Meditation tables. Dunhuang, 10th c. P. 2104v (6), BnF. Recycled scroll, ink on paper, 27.1 to 27.4 × 1164 cm.

Equally noteworthy is the fact that both manuscripts contain related materials arranged in a similar fashion. P. 3835, a small portable booklet, and P. 2104, a recycled scroll, are both composite manuscripts that contain miscellaneous ritual texts, written in informal hands, presumably compiled for private study or practice. This is true of many 10th-century manuscripts from Dunhuang. Indeed, when we isolate the manuscripts produced in the decades just prior to the closure of Dunhuang Cave 17—and here we are relying on codicological considerations in combination with the colophons to date the manuscripts—we see striking continuities in both form and content, regardless of language. This holds true for the four Chinese manuscripts that contain copies of the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, the Chinese scroll P. 2104, as well as the Tibetan tantric manuscripts mentioned at the start of this paper.⁴³

⁴³ Sam van Schaik and Imre Galambos, *Manuscripts and Travellers: The Sino-Tibetan Documents of a Tenth-Century Buddhist Pilgrim* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 25, argue that a sizeable number of the manuscripts recovered from Mogao Cave 17 belong to the late tenth century.



3. The Text of the Vajragarbha Visualisation

The *Vajragarbha Visualisation* is a short work of just over one hundred characters. My translation of the text reads as follows:

When [contemplating] the original patriarch [(Chin. *chuzu* 初祖)],⁴⁴ sit upright in the correct meditative position and face west. Arrange these three syllables [in your mind]: visualise the syllable *OM* [(Chin. *an* 唵)] at the crown of your head,⁴⁵ emitting a golden light;⁴⁶ visualise the syllable *HŪM* [(Chin. *hong* 吽)] at your heart, issuing forth a white light; and visualise the syllable *ĀH* [(Chin. *ya* 押)] at your tongue, emitting a red light. Next, the three lights universally illuminate [(Chin. *bianzhao* 遍照)] all the worlds in the cosmos. The buddhas of the ten directions see these brilliant lights, which return, bestowing blessings onto the body of the practitioner. After that, call to mind the light-gathering *mantra*: *Samharaṇā hūm* [(Chin. *sa ni he luo na hong* 薩泥呵羅那吽)].⁴⁷ After reciting the *mantra*, the three lights return to their original positions on the body. [Next,] visualise the three syllables hanging in empty space, with *ĀH* on top, *HŪM* in the middle, and *OM* below. So arranged, the two syllables, *OM* and *ĀH*, emit streams of light that enter the syllable *HŪM*; with this step complete, a single stream of light radiates from the syllable *HŪM*, dissolving the other two syllables. Then the syllable *HŪM* itself dissolves. Afterwards, enter the meditation of no-thought [(Chin. *wunian* 無念)]. Sit quietly for a long time. If you become drowsy, you should contemplate emptiness.⁴⁸ After this, call to mind the light-projecting *mantra*: *Spharāṇa [hūm]* [(Chin. *xi bo luo na ba [hong]* 悉鉢囉那叭 [吽])].⁴⁹

⁴⁴ The phrase could also be translated as ‘first patriarch’ or ‘original ancestor’. Tanaka, *Tonkō zenshū bunken no kenkyū*, 164, reads ‘secret patriarch’ (Chin. *mizu* 祕祖) for ‘first patriarch’ (Chin. *chuzu* 初祖) in S. 2144v, but this appears to be incorrect.

⁴⁵ Where P. 3913 (fol. 169, l. 4), GB 015 (l. 790), and S. 2144v (l. 12), all read ‘on top of the head’ (Chin. *naoshang* 腦上), P. 3835v (9a, l. 3) reads ‘at the crown’ (Chin. *dingshang* 頂上). I have followed the text of P. 3835v (9a).

⁴⁶ The character *fang* 放, added in red ink, only appears in P. 3835v (9a).

⁴⁷ The Sanskrit *mantra* ‘*saṃharaṇā*’, which means ‘to gather’ or ‘to contract’, is often paired with the *mantra* ‘*spharāṇa*’, meaning ‘to expand’ or ‘to project’, in Indian tantric Buddhist works. This includes the STTS, where the *mantra* pair is used to refer to the expansion and contraction of the objects of visualisation. See Giebel, “The Chin-kang-ting ching yü-ch’ieh shi-pa-hui chih-kuei,” 136. This is precisely how the *mantras* function in the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*.

⁴⁸ Tanaka, *Tonkō zenshū bunken no kenkyū*, 164, proposes the character *hun* 昏 for *shi* 氏 in the clause *ruo shi yan lai zhe* 若氏眼來者, which might be translated as: ‘should one’s eyes lower’.

⁴⁹ The sixth syllable *HŪM* (吽) only appears in P. 3835v (9). As Sørensen points out in his article, “The Meeting and Conflation of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism,” 353, fn. 120, the

Thereafter, [again] recite the light-gathering *mantra*: *Samharaṇā hūṃ*. Having recited both *mantras*, the three lights are transformed, creating a half moon. The A-syllable [(Chin. A 阿)] also forms a half moon. Together they create a sun and moon *maṇḍala*.⁵⁰

The copy of the text found on concertina P. 3835 ends here, but the three copies appended to the *Vajra Peak Scripture* include an additional line of text:

[In closing, make the] [un]binding *mudrās*, [followed by] the purification *mudrās*. [Then do not make any further] *mudrās*.⁵¹

It is unclear whether this final line, which appears garbled, was a part of the original text of the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, or a ritual notation that made its way into one recension of the received text. It is tempting to read this line as a call to strike, and then release, the *mudrās* used to close the rite, where one would unseal the altar and perform the requisite bodily protections. Whether this would have included only the two identified *mudrās*, or some longer set of *mudrās*, we simply do not know. Either way, this marks the end of the text as we have it.

character *luo* (囉), a variant of *luo* (羅), only appears in the second occurrence of this *mantra* in our text.

⁵⁰ My translation is based on the editions of the text presented in Tanaka, *Tonkō zenshū bunken no kenkyū*, 164–165, and Hou, “*Jingangjun jing*,” 135–136. Unlike Sørensen, “The Meeting and Conflation of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism,” Hou does not seem to be aware of the copy of the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* found on P. 3835v (9a), fols. 42–44. I have consulted all four copies of the text, and follow the punctuation found in P. 3835v. The Chinese text reads: 初祖時，面取向西，端正坐。安此三字：唵字，觀在頂上，放黃光；吽字，觀在心上，放白光；押字，觀在舌上，放赤光。然後三光遍照三千大千世界。十方之佛見此光明，迴加恩於作觀人。然後念聚光真言：薩泥呵囉那吽。念了，三光還來，各入本位。三字懸在虛空，押字上，吽字中，唵字下排著。後唵字生一道光，入吽字中，又押字生一道光，亦入吽字中。了後吽字却生一道光，滅前兩字光了，其吽字光亦滅。後便入無念禪定。良久靜坐。若氏眼來者，便須觀空。後念真言：悉鉢囉那吽。然後念取此光真言：薩泥呵囉那吽。念了三光便即化來，其光作一半月。阿字作一半月，合為一个月日壇。

⁵¹ P. 3913, fol. 170, l. 5, GB 015, l. 803, and S. 2144v, l. 12, all read: *jiejie yin, jing yin, li wu yiqie yin* 結界印，淨印，李無一切印。The character *li* (李) here is unclear. I thank Robert Sharf for his help reading this line.



4. Analysis of the Vajragarbha Visualisation

As short as it might seem, as I currently understand the text, the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* can be divided into four ritual segments. They are:

- (1) Instructions for seated meditation;
- (2) Preliminary visualisation to purify the body, speech, and mind of the practitioner;
- (3) Entry into a non-conceptual meditation on emptiness;
- (4) Generation of a half moon, followed by the *A*-syllable, which together form a sun-moon *maṅḍala*.

How best to classify this rite? While its individual elements—instructions for seated meditation, a preliminary purification, meditation on emptiness, and guided visualisations—can be found in a number of Buddhist rites, I have found no Chinese-language text that corresponds to the outline above. This, of course, could be due to any number of reasons, including the loss (to time, to editorial bias) of possible source texts, or to the improvisational methods used by the text’s author-compilers. Regardless, the lack of supporting textual evidence is curious. The situation becomes all the more curious when we look beyond the Chinese textual record, transmitted and non-transmitted, to the Tibetan manuscript record, where we find several parallel ritual formulations. This includes three of the Tibetan tantric Buddhist manuscripts from Dunhuang mentioned at the start of this paper, namely P. T. 626, P. T. 634, and P. T. 699.⁵² What is more, several idiosyncratic features of these three Tibetan tantric texts are reflected in our Chinese text, a fact that suggests either a

⁵² In their 2004 paper, “Where Chan and Tantra Meet,” van Schaik and Dalton link P. T. 626 and P. T. 634 to the better-studied P. T. 699 for the first time. P. T. 626 and P. T. 634 are anonymous ritual commentaries on the same root text, an unidentified Mahāyoga *sādhana*. Dalton, *Conjuring the Buddha*, provides an outline of both commentaries, and includes a translation of the text found in P. T. 634; he surmises that P. T. 626 and P. T. 634 were composed either in Tibet or in the Tibetan-speaking areas around Dunhuang, a claim Carmen Meinert, “The Conjunction of Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Thought,” makes about the text found in P. T. 699. P. T. 699 contains a commentary on a short collection of meditation instructions referred to in Tibetan as the *Lung chung* [Small Treatise]. Three copies of the *Lung chung* were excavated from Dunhuang: IOL Tib J 689, IOL Tib J 1774, and P. T. 121. See Meinert, “The Conjunction of Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Thought,” 284–293, for a transcription of the commentary found in P. T. 699, and van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen*, 174–191, for a partial translation of this same text.

common tradition underlying all four texts, or a pattern of strategic borrowing from Tibetan to Chinese. While such an identification is not necessary in order to render our Chinese text meaningful—after all, we find multiple copies of the text at Dunhuang in at least two distinct manuscript contexts, suggesting that the text had independent currency, at least for a brief period in the 970s or 980s—a comparison of our Chinese visualisation text with the extant Tibetan *sādhana* texts helps to clarify its contents and to situate it within the wider collection of tantric Buddhist works at the site. Let us now examine the text in more detail, drawing comparisons between our Chinese and Tibetan sources.

4.1. *Instructions for Seated Meditation*

The *Vajragarbha Visualisation* begins with a rather cryptic line that reads: “When [contemplating] the original patriarch, sit upright in the correct meditative position and face west.” While it is common to find instructions at the start of a meditation text, the reference to the ‘original patriarch’ (Chin. *chuzu* 初祖) here is unusual—and unclear. To whom, or to what, does this phrase refer? To try and answer this question, we must turn to the most immediate contexts of our text, its manuscript witnesses. The reader will recall that three of the four known copies of the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* appear at the end of a lengthy Dunhuang ritual compendium, the *Vajra Peak Scripture*. Part two of this compendium contains a lineage text that begins with Mahāvairocana Buddha and ends with a well-known list of thirty-three Indian and Chinese Chan patriarchs. The *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, together with a companion meditation text, is appended to this transmission account. Our text’s proximity to this hybrid lineage suggests at least three possible identifications for the phrase ‘original patriarch’. The first is Mahāvairocana Buddha himself, the source of the *Vajra Peak Scripture* and the head of its distinctive lineage. This identification would situate the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, like the *Vajra Peak Scripture* itself, within the body of arcane revelations traced back to Mahāvairocana, a figure conflated in the *Vajra Peak Scripture* with Rocana Buddha (盧舍那佛).

The second, perhaps more intuitive, reading is Bodhidharma, the prototypical Chan patriarch to whom the phrase ‘original patriarch’ is often applied. This reading is supported not only by the presence of



Bodhidharma in the *Vajra Peak* lineage—again, Bodhidharma is presented here as a direct spiritual descendent of Mahāvairocana—but also by the presence of Chan terminology in the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* itself.⁵³ Whether the author-compiler(s) of the *Vajra Peak Scripture* composed or altered the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* remains unclear, but its unique combination of elements (Chan and tantric) might well explain why it was included in a ritual compilation that promotes its own brand of esoteric teachings. A third possible reading, and one that takes into account the extended Vajragarbha sequence found in P. 3835v (9), places Vajragarbha in the role of original patriarch (guru?), or principal deity, to be invoked at the start of the visualisation.⁵⁴

⁵³ The identification of *chuzu* 初祖 as Bodhidharma is all the more compelling given the inclusion of a recension of the *Fu fazang [yinyuan] zhuan* 付法藏[因緣]傳 in part two of the *Vajra Peak Scripture*, a text in which Bodhidharma figures prominently. On Bodhidharma's role in that text, see Elizabeth Morrison, *The Power of Patriarchs: Qisong and Lineage in Chinese Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 51–87. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for making this connection and for pointing me to Morrison's study.

⁵⁴ There are at least three additional interpretations of the opening line of the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, the first being that the received Chinese text is simply corrupt and hence unintelligible. In fact, the opening line of the text requires a bit of creative reading to render it meaningful at all: I have inserted a verb (to contemplate) where none exists in the original. I am uncertain as to whether there is a direct Tibetan equivalent to the word 'original patriarch' found in our Chan text. That said, van Schaik and Dalton, "Where Chan and Tantra Meet," 69, point to a parallel passage in P. T. 699 that defines ignorance as "not seeing the face of the deity and the master" (Tib. *lha dang sloba dpon ni zhal ma mthong*; P. T. 699, f. 2R.2). They observe that the "reference to seeing the face of the deity carries a strong implication of the presence of Vajrayāna practice. This is no more than a hint by our author, but it sets the scene for the meditation instructions which follow." Might the cryptic opening line of our Vajragarbha text contain an echo of this 'hint' by the author of P. T. 699? This first line might also represent an interpolation from another work. For a discussion on the intertextuality of ritual manuscripts, see Carmen Meinert, "Gestückelte Schriften: Überlieferungsgeschichten der dem Meditationsmeister Wolun zugeschriebenen Dunhuang-Manuskripte," *Oriens Extremus* 47 (2008): 215–245. See also, Carmen Meinert, "Production of Tantric Buddhist Texts in the Tangut Empire (11th to 13th C.): Insights from Reading Karakhoto Manuscript ɸ 249 ɸ 327 金剛亥母修習儀 *Jingang haimu xiuxi yi* [The Ritual of the Yogic Practice of Vajravārāhī] in Comparison with Other Tantric Ritual Texts," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 44 (2021): 441–484.

4.2. Preliminary Visualisation to Purify the Body, Speech, and Mind of the Practitioner

Having settled into the correct meditative position, the practitioner is instructed to imagine three syllables at specific points on the body: *OM* (Chin. *an* 唵), visualised at the crown, emanates a golden light; *HŪM* (Chin. *hong* 吽), visualised at the heart, emanates a white light; and *ĀḤ* (Chin. *ya* 押), visualised at the tongue, emanates a red light. Table 2 presents this scheme in simpler form:

Syllable	Location	Colour
<i>OM</i> (Chin. <i>an</i> 唵)	Crown	Yellow
<i>ĀḤ</i> (Chin. <i>ya</i> 押)	Tongue	Red
<i>HŪM</i> (Chin. <i>hong</i> 吽)	Heart	White

Table 2. Correspondences established between seed syllables, bodily points, and colours in the Vajragarbha Visualisation.

This section determines the ritual readiness of the practitioner to undertake the practice that follows. Here, the activities of body, speech, and mind are purified through the projection and reabsorption of coloured light rays that radiate from seed syllables placed at the three sacral points of crown, tongue, and heart. The lights serve as beacons, as it were, that invite the blessings of the buddhas, which are then bestowed onto the body of the practitioner. This sequence can be read as an extension of the Mahāyāna three mysteries (Chin. *sanmi* 三密) theory: body, speech, and mind are purified through the manipulation of corresponding elements, in this case the three syllables, the three primary colours, and the three physical points. The syllables *OM ĀḤ HŪM*—in Chinese texts we find variation in the second syllable, which is rendered alternately, depending on the Buddhist text or rite, as *AM*, *ĀḤ*, or in the case of our Chinese text, *YA*⁵⁵—are used extensively across tantric Buddhist traditions. For

⁵⁵ The Middle Chinese pronunciation for the character *ya* (押) is ‘*aep*. See Paul Kroll, *A Student’s Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese, Revised Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 524. Hirakawa Akira, *Buddhist Chinese-Sanskrit Dictionary* (Tokyo: The Reiyukai, 1997), 541, no. 1358, connects the character *ya*’*aep* (押) to the Sanskrit root $\sqrt{pī}$. This character does not appear to be part of the standard *mantra* syllabary of East Asian Esoteric Buddhism.



example, in *Yoganiruttara-tantras* the three syllables *OM ĀH HŪM* are used to empower objects for worship, including images and *stūpas*; in the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, we see this same ritual logic applied to the body of the practitioner.⁵⁶

Comparable purification sequences are documented in Tibetan Buddhist *sādhana*s that circulated in tenth century Dunhuang. This includes the ritual works found on P. T. 626 and P. T. 634.⁵⁷ Like the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, these Tibetan ritual works insert a preliminary visualisation before the meditation on emptiness. Although there are slight differences between the Chinese and Tibetan renderings of this sequence—whereas the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* places the syllable *YA*, for *ĀH*, at the tongue, the Tibetan *sādhana*s place the syllable *AM*, for *ĀH*, at the mouth—there is overall correspondence.⁵⁸ And while it is possible to interpret these minor discrepancies as undermining a possible connection between our Chinese visualisation text and these Tibetan *sādhana*s, I offer an alternative interpretation: taken together, the differences between our Chinese and Tibetan texts reveal ‘local’ variations on ‘normative’ tantric themes that demonstrate the fluid nature of tantric Buddhist meditation systems in the tenth-century, and the flexible nature of Buddhist ritual genres more generally.

4.3. Entry into a Non-conceptual Meditation on Emptiness

With the preliminary purification complete, the practitioner is guided into a non-conceptual meditation on emptiness. This is a crucial step in the rite.

⁵⁶ See Yael Bentor, *Consecration of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

⁵⁷ According to van Schaik, “A Definition of Mahāyoga,” 59, fn. 62, a number of Tibetan Dunhuang *sādhana*s include an initial visualisation for purification comparable to the one found in our Chinese text. These include: P. T. 626, fol. 1a, P. T. 634, fol. 1R, IOL Tib J 331/1, and IOL Tib J 716, fol. R1–12.

⁵⁸ Several of the Mahāyoga *sādhana*s at Dunhuang place the syllable *AM/ĀH*, at the mouth of the practitioner. I thank Jacob Dalton for bringing this important detail to my attention. The placement of the *YA/ĀH* syllable at the tongue in our Chinese text, and the *AM/ĀH* syllable at the mouth in our Tibetan texts, can be contrasted with the arrangement of syllables found in standardised sequences like those found in the *Guhyasamājatantra*, where the corresponding syllable is placed at the throat. All three bodily locations—tongue, mouth, and throat—are associated with the element of speech.

It begins with the recollection of the light-gathering *mantra*, *Samharaṇā hūm*, which sets in motion the following sequence:

Next, visualise the three syllables hanging in empty space, with *ĀḤ* on top, *HŪM* in the middle, and *OM* below. So arranged, the two syllables, *OM* and *ĀḤ*, emit streams of light that enter the syllable *HŪM*; with this step complete, a single stream of light radiates from the syllable *HŪM*, dissolving the other two syllables. Then the syllable *HŪM* itself dissolves. Afterwards, enter the meditation of no-thought. Sit quietly for a long time. If you become drowsy, you should contemplate emptiness.

In this passage we see a purposeful play on emptiness, with the three visualised syllables suspended in space. In contrast to the previous section, the syllables in this section have reoriented, with *ĀḤ* above, *HŪM* in the middle, and *OM* below. So arranged, the three syllables dissolve, one by one, into emptiness. Next, the practitioner enters into the meditation of no-thought. The Chinese term used is *wunian* (無念), a term of significance in a number of early Chan works, and one that stands out here because we find it embedded within a tantric visualisation.⁵⁹

Turning to the Tibetan texts found in P. T. 626 and P. T. 634, not only do we find sequencing that parallels that of our Chinese text—a preliminary purification followed by the meditation on emptiness—but we also find the same pattern of incorporating Chan techniques and terminology at a specific point in the sequence, a point identified in the Tibetan commentaries as the thusness meditative absorption (Skt. *samādhi*, Tib. *de bzhin nyid kyi ting nge 'dzin*), the first of three meditative absorptions that structure Mahāyoga generation-stage practice.

⁵⁹ Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission*, discusses the uses of *wunian* in ‘sudden’ Chan teachings generally, and eighth-century Sichuan Chan traditions specifically. While the term *wunian* came into prominence in the writings of Shenhui (670–762, 神會) and in the *Liuzu tanjing* 六祖壇經 [Platform Scripture of the Sixth Patriarch] (T. 2007.48, T. 2008.48), its use predates the Southern School polemic. For example, the term appears in the *Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論 [Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith] (T. 1666.32, T. 1667.32) and the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* (see for example the *Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所說經 [Sūtra on the Teachings of Vimalakīrti] (T. 475.14), and the *Shuo wugoucheng jing* 說無垢稱經 [Sūtra on the Teachings of Vimalakīrti] (T. 476.14)). On the significance of *wunian* and related concepts in Tang Dynasty debates between so-called Northern Chan proponents and Śubhakarasiṃha (637–735, Chin. Shanwuwei 善無畏), see Sharf, “Buddhist Veda and the Rise of Chan,” 106–108.



Allow me to introduce the three meditative absorptions (Tib. *ting nge 'dzin rnam pa gsum*), a meditation scheme rarely, if ever, encountered in East Asian Esoteric Buddhist studies.⁶⁰ I begin with a definition of Mahāyoga (Tib. *rnal 'byor chen po*).⁶¹ The term Mahāyoga refers to a Tantric Buddhist practice tradition known primarily in the Nyingma school (Tib. *rnying ma pa*) of Tibet. Historically, the term was used to denote an early collection of eighteen Indian Tantric Buddhist scriptures, together with an ancillary body of texts and practices, as well as a distinct philosophical view.⁶² In terms of Tantric Buddhist periodisation, Mahāyoga is thought to be slightly younger than the related Yogatantra system. A number of Tibetan tantric works from Dunhuang have been classified as Mahāyoga works.⁶³

Mahāyoga visualisation practice is commonly divided into two stages: (1) the generation stage (Skt. *utpattikrama*; Tib. *bskyed rim*), in which one first meditates on emptiness, after which a *maṇḍala* visualisation is developed and blessings are received, and (2) the perfection stage (Skt. *utpannakrama*, Tib. *rdzogs rim*), in which “the visualization appears

⁶⁰ The Mahāyoga scheme of three meditative absorptions should be distinguished from the three-part meditative scheme that structures the first part of the Yogatantra STTS, although the two schemes are likely connected. In his discussion of the STTS, Kano, “Sarvathāgatattvasaṃgraha,” 375, describes these three meditative absorptions as three visualisations: (1) the preliminary visualisation (Skt. *ādiyoga* or meditative absorption of the first yoga), (2) the visualisation that generates the thirty-seven deities of the *maṇḍala* (Skt. *maṇḍalarājāgrī* or meditative absorption of the supreme king of the *maṇḍala*), and (3) the visualisation of the unity of practitioner and central deity (Skt. *karmarājāgrī* or meditative absorption of the supreme king of action). See also Rolf W. Giebel, *Two Esoteric Sutras*, 9–10. The source of the Yogatantra scheme of three meditative absorptions is unclear and may represent a later commentarial tradition. On this topic, see Steven Neal Weinberger, “The Significance of Yoga Tantra and the Compendium of Principles (Tattvasaṃgraha Tantra) within Tantric Buddhism in India and Tibet,” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2003), 63.

⁶¹ van Schaik, “Reconsidering Tibetan Chan,” 204, identifies two distinct uses of the term *mahāyoga*, a Chan usage that can be traced back to works like the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, and an exclusively tantric usage. He notes that confusion over the separate uses of the term has led to a mischaracterisation of certain Tibet Dunhuang texts. See for example Kenneth Eastman, “Mahāyoga Texts at Tun-Huang,” *Bukkyō bunkan kenkyūkiyō* 佛教文化研究所紀要 [Bulletin of the Research Institute of Buddhist Culture, Ryūkyō University] 22 (1983): 42–60.

⁶² See van Schaik, “A Definition of Mahāyoga,” 45.

⁶³ See Jacob Dalton and Sam van Schaik, *Tibetan Tantric Manuscripts from Dunhuang: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Stein Collection at the British Library* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

instantaneously and is typically used in a ritualized sexual practice”.⁶⁴ At Dunhuang, we find elements of perfection-stage rites in a scattering of Tibetan tantric manuscripts, including P. T. 626 and P. T. 634.⁶⁵

Mahāyoga generation-stage practice is further divided into three phases known, again, as the three *samādhis* or meditative absorptions. These three phases both structure the meditation practice and indicate the accomplishments generated in the course of the visualisation.⁶⁶ In the first meditative absorption, the practitioner meditates on thusness, establishing the emptiness of mind and all phenomena. In the second all-illuminating meditative absorption (Tib. *kun tu snang ba'i ting 'dzin*), the practitioner imagines a luminous opening in the sky that serves as a clearing for the manifestation to come (and marks the place in the texts where metaphors abound). In the third causal meditative absorption (Tib. *rgyu'i ting nge 'dzin*), a seed syllable appears, from which the rest of the visualisation unfolds.

The Mahāyoga scheme of three meditative absorptions is only one of the schemes used in yogic meditation systems. Again, we find an analogous scheme used to structure the practice texts based on the STTS.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ van Schaik and Dalton, “Where Chan and Tantra Meet,” 66. In fact, these stages are rarely explicitly identified in the Tibetan tantric texts at Dunhuang. This is likely because the Dunhuang texts represent an early phase of the tradition, when the meditative stages were still being worked out.

⁶⁵ On the sacramental forms of sexual yoga and the elements of perfection-stage practice documented at Dunhuang, see Dalton, *Conjuring the Buddha*. To the list of Dunhuang manuscripts that contain elements of perfection-stage practices, I would add the Vajragarbha practice texts found in the Chinese-language manuscripts P. 3835 and P. 2104 discussed above.

⁶⁶ See Cozort, *Highest Yoga Tantra*, 51.

⁶⁷ On the Yogatantra scheme of three meditative absorptions, see fn. 60 above. It begins with a ‘five-stage process of actualising awakening’ (Skt. *pañcākārābhisambodhikrama*, Chin. *wuxiang chengshen guan*, Jap. *gosō jōshin kan* 五相成身觀), whereby one realises the body of Mahāvairocana in the *vajradhātu* through a series of progressive visualisations. This five-part practice was schematised in China by Amoghavajra (or those in his immediate circle), and was later introduced to Japan by Kūkai (774–835, 空海), where it was used to create the *vajradhātu* practice (Jap. *kongōkai shidai* 金剛界次第) central to most Shingon rites. On this latter practice, see Robert H. Sharf, “Thinking through Shingon Ritual,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 26.1 (2003): 51–96. The five stages are typically identified as (1) entry into the mind of awakening (Chin. *tongda xin* 通達心); here the practitioner imagines their mind to be like a full moon; (2) cultivation of the mind of awakening (Chin. *xiu putixin* 修菩提心); (3) attainment of the adamantite or *vajra* mind (Chin. *cheng jingangxin* 成金剛心; this appears to be a reference to the tenth



In fact, there seems to be some ambiguity regarding the specific scheme represented in the Dunhuang *sādhana* texts. This may be because our Dunhuang sources reflect a period in the development of yogic practice in which Mahāyoga and Yogatantra had yet to be fully distinguished, making it difficult (and likely anachronistic) to draw definitive conclusions about the root system of any one text.⁶⁸

The Mahāyoga three meditative absorptions receive commentary in a number of Dunhuang manuscripts, including, again, P. T. 626 and P. T. 634.⁶⁹ As van Schaik and Dalton have noted, these texts incorporate Chan techniques in the first meditative absorption or opening sequence. Specifically, these commentaries associate the first meditative absorption with the practice of ‘gazing at mind’ (Tib. *sems la bltas*, Chin. *kanxin* 看心), a meditative technique popular in Tibetan and Chinese Chan Dunhuang texts, in which the mind is examined and found to be empty.⁷⁰ Both P. T. 626 and P. T. 634 describe the non-conceptual state that results from gazing at mind using three phrases: non-thought (Tib. *mi bsam*, Chin. *busi* 不思), non-conceptuality or non-discerning (Tib. *mi rtog pa*; Chin. *buguan* 不觀), and not engaging the mind or not having intentions (Tib. *yi la mi byed pa*, Chin. *bu zuoyi* 不作意).⁷¹ Here, we see a popular Chan meditative technique, together with a well-known Chan explanatory formula, incorporated into a Mahāyoga framework.

stage of the bodhisattva path, also known as the ‘adamantine absorption’; (4) realisation of the *vajra* body (Chin. *zheng jingangshen* 證金剛身); and (5) perfect attainment of buddhahood (Chin. *foshen yuanman* 佛身圓滿). Dale Todaro, “An Annotated Translation of the Pancābhisambodhi Practice of the Tattvasaṃgraha,” in *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), includes a translation of this five-part scheme. On these five stages, see also Sharf, “Buddhist Veda and the Rise of Chan,” 93–97; and Kano, “Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha,” 376–377.

⁶⁸ On this issue, see Dalton, “A Crisis of Doxography,” 126, fn. 32.

⁶⁹ According to van Schaik, “A Definition of Mahāyoga,” 58–63, the most extensive treatment of the three *samādhis* at Dunhuang is found in IOL Tib J 437/2. Additional manuscripts that discuss the three *samādhis* include: IOL Tib J 552, IOL Tib J 553, IOL Tib J 554, IOL Tib J 716, Or.8210/S.95/7, P. T. 42, P. T. 283, and P. T. 634.

⁷⁰ van Schaik, “A Definition of Mahāyoga,” 61, fn. 68, lists the relevant sections as P. T. 626, fol. 2V.6 and P. T. 634, fol. 1V.1. See also van Schaik, *Tibetan Chan*, 176. On the practice of ‘gazing at mind’ in the Dunhuang documents, see Meinert, “The Conjunction of Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Thought.”

⁷¹ van Schaik and Dalton, “Where Chan and Tantra Meet,” 66.

We find a similar interpretive strategy at work in the commentary preserved in P. T. 699. Again, P. T. 699 has been identified as a Mahāyoga commentary on a short series of meditation instructions known in Tibetan as the *Small Treatise*.⁷² Where the ritual works on P. T. 626 and P. T. 634 employ the tripartite formula of ‘non-thought’, ‘non-conceptuality’, and ‘not engaging the mind’ to describe the non-conceptual state following the meditative absorption of thusness, the commentary in P. T. 699 introduces a parallel set of three quintessential instructions (Tib. *man ngag gsum*): no-thought (Tib. *mi sems*), no-recollection (Tib. *mi dran*), and illusoriness (Tib. *sgyu ma*).⁷³

In contrast to the three Tibetan texts found in P. T. 626, P. T. 634, and P. T. 699, the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* refers to the non-conceptual state resulting from the meditation on emptiness using a single Chan term: no-thought (Chin. *wunian*). This is one of the ‘quintessential instructions’ discussed above, and a key term in ‘sudden’ Chan Buddhist works; the fact that the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* employs the term no-thought might link it to the commentary in P. T. 699 specifically, where the corresponding Tibetan term *mi sems* is used. The fact that our Chinese text, like our three Tibetan texts, includes a Chan meditative technique in its opening sequence—and only in the opening sequence—is significant, suggesting that all four texts are drawing on a common tradition.

⁷² Meinert, “The Conjunction of Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Thought,” 240, describes the root text on which P. T. 699 is based as “an instruction on the nature of mind as it is transmitted in the Chan tradition.”

⁷³ These three instructions appear to be derivative of the three phrases (Chin. *sanju* 三句) traditionally attributed to Chan master Wuxiang (684–762, Kor. Musang 無相) in the *Lidai fabao ji* 歷代法寶記 [Record of the Dharma-Jewel Through the Generations], namely no-recollection (Chin. *wuyi* 無憶), no-thought (Chin. *wunian* 無念), and not forgetting (Chin. *mowang* 莫忘; alt. *mowang* 莫妄, not being deluded). On Wuxiang and his milieu, see Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission*, 206, 246, 338. The three phrases attributed to Wuxiang circulated in Tibetan Chan Dunhuang works, including in the Chan compendium P. T. 116, where they are associated directly with Wuxiang’s *dharma heir* Wuzhu (714–774, 無住), founder of the Baotang (保唐) school. See Kapstein, “*The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*,” 71–78; Meinert, “The Conjunction of Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Thought,” 268, fn. 112.



4.4. *Generation of a Half Moon, Followed by the A-syllable, Which Together Form a Sun-Moon Maṇḍala*

After resting in the non-conceptual state, the practitioner is again instructed to recall the light-projecting and light-contracting *mantras*. This is followed by one final sequence:

Having recalled both *mantras*, the three lights are transformed, creating a half moon. The syllable *A* also forms a half moon. Together they create a sun-moon *maṇḍala*.

Here, I suggest, we see the transition from one meditative stage to the next, a transition described in the parallel Tibetan *sādhana*s as the shift from the first meditative absorption to the second and third meditative absorptions. The transition is marked in the Chinese text by the appearance of a half moon (Chin. *banyue* 半月; quarter moon?). This is followed by the generation of the *A*-syllable, which also becomes a half moon. Together, the two half moons form a sun-moon *maṇḍala* (Chin. *yueri tan* 日月壇). In Mahāyoga *sādhana* practice, the *A*-syllable is sometimes used to mark the transition from one meditative absorption to the next, although there is some confusion over precisely which transition is signaled by the *A*-syllable in the Dunhuang sources.⁷⁴ That said, the three Tibetan texts found in P. T. 626, P. T. 634, and P. T. 699 all use visual metaphors to describe the transition from the first to the second and third meditative absorptions. For example, the commentary in P. T. 634 likens the second all-illuminating meditative absorption to an opening in the clouds, where the moon and stars are revealed. The text then describes how a white

⁷⁴ IOL Tib J 331/2 appears to state that the syllable *A* is generated in the transition between the first and second meditative absorption—and not in the transition from the second to the third meditative absorption as it appears in P. T. 626 and P. T. 634. I thank Jake Dalton for pointing out this possible discrepancy.

On the confusion in the commentarial tradition over the initial sequence of the Yogatantra scheme—namely whether a single lunar disk is generated in two separate steps, or whether two separate lunar disks are generated in a single step—see Weinberger, “The Significance of Yoga Tantra,” 58. This confusion is only exacerbated by the terseness of our Chinese text, which can be interpreted as saying either that a single sun-moon *maṇḍala* is generated, or that two separate *maṇḍalas* are generated (one represented by the sun, the other by the moon). It is possible that the separate phrases in our Chinese text represent a mixing of the metaphors captured in the Tibetan texts.

syllable A, “the syllable of oneself... arises brightly in the sky.”⁷⁵ Similarly, P. T. 699, after the contemplation on thusness, compares meditation to the reflections of the sun and the moon on the water’s surface. The text goes on to state that “any further changes are equal in the mere A.”⁷⁶

Despite the absence of clear labels to mark the transition from one phase to the next, we can discern a clear progression of meditative steps in the Chinese scenario. And while the Chinese passage lacks the vivid metaphors seen in the Tibetan works (we should bear in mind that the three Tibetan works are commentaries, whereas the Chinese text contains only meditation instructions), the image of the two half moons becoming a sun and moon *maṇḍala* (a full lunar disk?) is striking and seems to follow the scenarios outlined in the Tibetan sources.

With this, the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* abruptly ends. It does not go on to outline the tantric visualisation typically associated with the four phases of Mahāyoga perfection-stage rites that we see in P. T. 626 and P. T. 634—but neither does P. T. 699. Like all three Tibetan commentaries, the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* places an emphasis on the initial meditative absorption, transitions quickly to the second meditative absorption, and contains little to no discussion of the third meditative absorption. All four texts are structured similarly, contain several of the same idiosyncratic features, and, in the case of P. T. 699 at least, stop at the same point in the sequence as the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*. Add to this the fact that all four texts, one Chinese and three Tibetan, employ well-known Chan terms at precisely the same point in the meditative sequence and we seem to have the grounds for an identification, however loose.

5. Conclusions

What does such a comparison—a comparison between an unidentified Chinese contemplation text and three Tibetan Mahāyoga ritual commentaries—reveal? Again, the four texts share nearly identical

⁷⁵ See van Schaik and Dalton, “Where Chan and Tantra Meet,” 66, 70, fn. 12; P. T. 634, fol. 2R.3.

⁷⁶ See van Schaik and Dalton, “Where Chan and Tantra Meet,” 69, 71, fn. 48; P. T. 699, fol. 4V.1. See van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen*, 189, for another reading of this line.



compositional structures, including basic and sometimes highly specific elements that appear in the same rough order. Despite their differences, these similarities are enough to indicate that the texts emerged from a shared tradition. To summarise, the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* begins with instructions for seated meditation, followed by a preliminary purification. Next comes the meditation on emptiness, after which two half-moons are visualised; these half-moons join to become a sun and moon *maṇḍala*. A revised outline of our Chinese text, with reference to the Tibetan commentaries, reads as follows:

(1) Instructions for seated meditation

Although the order and type of meditative instructions found in P. T. 626, P. T. 634, and P. T. 699 differ from those found in the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*—the three Tibetan texts employ a system of five *mudrās* (Tib. *phyag rgya lnga*; alt. *bzhag pa'i thabs lnga* or ‘five methods for settling’)—all four works instruct the practitioner on the proper meditative posture.⁷⁷

(2) Preliminary visualisation to purify the body, speech, and mind of the practitioner

Like the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, the texts in P. T. 626 and P. T. 634 insert a preliminary visualisation before the initial contemplation or thusness meditative absorption. Despite minor discrepancies, all three texts present a short scenario in which three syllables are ‘imaginatively placed’ at the crown, tongue/mouth, and heart; lights emanate from each syllable to purify the universe, and then regather to purify the body of the practitioner.

(3) Entry into non-conceptual meditation on emptiness

In all four texts, the preliminary purification is followed by a contemplation on thusness, which is followed by a prolonged period of reflection on the emptiness of mind and all things.⁷⁸ This is the point in the

⁷⁷ See van Schaik and Dalton, “Where Chan and Tantra Meet,” 69. The system of five *mudrās* appears in a number of Dunhuang Mahāyoga works, including Or. 8210/S. 95, V.5, ll. 4–8; IOL Tib J 552, 1R.2–1V.1. van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen*, 185, includes a translation of the five *mudrā* segment found in P. T. 699, 2R.2–3.

⁷⁸ Like the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, the text in P. T. 699 instructs the meditator to remain in this state of concentration for a long period of time “while the meditative experience becomes increasingly subtle, peaceful, and clear” (van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen*, 178).

texts—and the only point in the texts—where we see Chan techniques and terminology introduced.

- (4) Generation of a half moon, followed by the A-syllable, which together form a sun-moon *maṇḍala*

This visualisation sequence marks the final phases of the Chinese visualisation. Like the three Tibetan texts, the Chinese text leads the practitioner through what appear to be at least two distinct transitions, according to which a progressive visualisation is generated. In contrast to the Tibetan Mahāyoga commentaries, the Chinese text employs fewer visual metaphors to describe the meditative state.

* * *

The discovery at Dunhuang of a Chinese Mahāyoga *sādhana* would be unusual, but not entirely unexpected. Since at least the 1970s scholars have been uncovering evidence of Chan and tantric practice lineages in the greater Dunhuang area based on Tibetan and, to a lesser extent, Chinese sources.⁷⁹ These sources testify to the dynamic networks of exchange between members of local Buddhist communities in the Tibetan-Chinese border regions during the ninth and tenth centuries.⁸⁰ The four texts surveyed above appear to have been produced in or around Dunhuang during this period; they clearly represent a fluid stage in the

⁷⁹ On these lineages in and around Dunhuang, see esp. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*; Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); and van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen*. See also Tanaka, *Tonkō zenshū bunken no kenkyū*; and Saitō Tomohiro 齋藤智寛, “Bonmōkyō to mikkyō – S2272V ‘Kongōkai shin’in gi’ no honkoku shōkai ni chinan de 『梵網經』と密教 – S2272V 「金剛界心印儀」の翻刻紹介にちなんで” [The *Fanwang jing* and Esoteric Buddhism—A Transcription and Introduction to the ‘Vajradhātu Mind-Seal Ceremony’ found in S.2272V],” in *Tonkō shahon kenkyū nenpō* 敦煌寫本研究年報 [Journal of Dunhuang Manuscript Studies] 2, ed. Takata Tokio, (Kyoto: Kyōto Daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 2008), 23–45.

⁸⁰ For a fascinating discussion on the connected communities and practices in the larger Dunhuang/Hexi/Blue Lake region, see Carmen Meinert, “People, Places, Texts, and Topics: Another Look at the Larger Context of the Spread of Chan Buddhism in Eastern Central Asia during the Tibetan Imperial and Post-Imperial Period (7th–10th C.),” in *Buddhism in Central Asia III—Doctrines, Exchanges with Non-Buddhist Traditions*, ed. Lewis Doney, Carmen Meinert, Yukiyo Kasai, and Henrik H. Sørensen (Leiden, Boston: Brill, forthcoming), ca. 40 ff.



development of tantric Buddhist ritual during which the Yoga and Mahāyoga *sādhana* schemes were still being worked out, and an ethos of practice in which competing meditation techniques were still welcome.⁸¹

We know that the so-called borderland regions between Tibet and China were marked by complex interactions between diverse populations of settled and itinerant peoples, combinations of Chinese- and Tibetan-speaking communities (among others) that continued to practice Buddhism in and around Dunhuang after the fall of the Tibetan Empire in the mid-ninth century. This appears to have included those we might identify as cultural intermediaries who were clearly reading and writing across imagined ethnic and linguistic lines. It remains unclear whether our Tibetan Mahāyoga commentaries represent an Indian or Tibetan tradition (or both); we know they include material derived from Chinese Chan sources. Either way, it is entirely possible that the same author-compiler of the Tibetan works found in P. T. 626, P. T. 634, and P. T. 699 was responsible for our Chinese visualisation text. This is a tantalising possibility: Tibetan Mahāyoga commentaries that incorporate Chan teachings derived from original Chinese compositions, some of which might have been retranslated back into Chinese through the medium of hybrid Tibetan tantric ritual works.⁸²

Viewed from this perspective, the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* looks less like a canonical outlier and more like a number of hybrid Buddhist ritual

⁸¹ van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen*, offers these insights and explores the larger context in which the Tibetan Chan and tantric Dunhuang works were produced; he pays special attention to the physical manuscripts on which these works were inscribed, an approach I have adopted in the present paper.

⁸² In a recent discussion of the ‘more interpretive uses’ to which Tibetan translations can be put, Jonathan Silk, “Chinese Sūtras in Tibetan Translation: A Preliminary Survey,” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2018*, 227–246, volume XXII (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, 2019), 227, notes that the “Indo-Tibetan axis is not, moreover, the only relevant or interesting one.” It never has been. Silk’s paper represents a much-needed shift in perspective on Buddhist sources, whereby the multiple directions of translation, and the overlapping types of exchange (textual, doctrinal, ritual), can properly be accounted for in the extant textual record, transmitted and non-transmitted. Silk’s paper pays special attention to the Dunhuang manuscripts. This is because the Dunhuang manuscripts bear direct witness to the types of crossings—border crossings, linguistic crossings, cultural crossings—that characterised premodern Buddhist history.

works that circulated in late tenth century Dunhuang, the very same date proposed for the group of five Tibetan manuscripts with which this study began, and confirmed by at least one of the three extant copies of our Chinese text. This late tenth-century date fits well with current assessments of the Dunhuang manuscript collection as a whole, a predominantly 9th and 10th century collection with significant numbers of ritual manuscripts in both Tibetan and Chinese dating to the late tenth century specifically. I situate the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* in this manuscript matrix because that is where we find it—a textual module that moved around Chinese-language miscellanies that, like a number of Tibetan manuscript miscellanies from Dunhuang, contain unique arrangements of ritual writing. These materials offer compelling evidence of the types of Buddhist practice, and the types of Buddhist books, that circulated in the Guiyijun period.

Important questions remain about the socio-historical background of our text, and the type and degree of exchange implied by all four sources. For example, we still know too little about the formal and informal environments in which Buddhist ritual compositions like ours were prepared, studied, and practiced, and even less about those who commissioned and copied such texts in this early period.⁸³ More research, too, is required to better understand the reception of Tantric Buddhism in Sinitic circles; this will require a more thorough examination of the connections between Chinese and Indo-Tibetan meditation methods, and the relationship between Mahāyāna and tantric Buddhist ritual systems. Here, the Dunhuang sources will be invaluable. Finally, it merits asking what it might mean that the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* circulated in autographed compilations alongside spell texts, meditation tables, and hand mnemonics that were inscribed on the back of a recycled report on a recent attack by upland nomads (P. 3835v7).⁸⁴ For now, these and other questions remain unanswered.

⁸³ For a recent discussion on the textual networks linking Dunhuang and the region east of the Blue Lake in the 9th century, see Gertraud Taenzer, “*Śatasahasrikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtras* Discovered at Dunhuang: The Scriptorium at Thang kar and Related Aspects. A Preliminary Investigation,” *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 60 (2021): 239–281.

⁸⁴ For a discussion and translation of this report, which chronicles a nomadic raid on the town of Ziting 紫亭 near Dunhuang, see Sakajiri Akihiro 坂尻彰宏, “An Order of the Governor-General of *Guiyijun* about an Attack of Upland Nomads: P. 3835v7,” in



Rather than assert a direct relationship between the *Vajragarbha Visualisation* and a specific Tibetan-language *sādhana* or commentary, I offer instead a close reading of an anonymous Chinese Buddhist ritual text and its manuscript witnesses. The provenance of the text's title remains unclear, as does the significance of its principal deity, Vajragarbha. That said, its contents are clarified when compared to parallel Tibetan sources recovered from the same manuscript cache. We have clear evidence of the Tibetan reception of Chan, and the combination of Chan and Mahāyoga elements in the Tibetan tantric manuscripts from Dunhuang; there is increasingly clear evidence of the local Chinese reception of tantric teachings at the site in the form of ritual works, like the *Vajragarbha Visualisation*, that circulated outside of, or alongside, the canon in the Buddhist borderlands.⁸⁵ At the very least, our Chinese text offers us a valuable look at the ritual ecology and codicological terrain of tenth century Dunhuang, and adds another compelling, if short, chapter in the long history of exchange between Tibetan and Sinitic Buddhist cultures.

Dunhuang Studies: Prospects and Problems for the Coming Second Century of Research, ed. Irina Popova and Liu Yi (Slavia Publishers: St. Petersburg, 2012), 217–221. On the town of Zitong, see Gertraud Taenzer, *The Dunhuang Region during Tibetan Rule (787–848): A Study of the Secular Manuscripts Discovered in the Mogao Caves* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 90–91. See also note 105 below.

⁸⁵ This constellation of Chinese and multilingual works includes, among other works, the *Vajra Peak Scripture* discussed above, and the Chinese tantric *samaya* text studied in Sørensen, “Tibetan Tantra and Chinese Esoteric Buddhism,” and (Allan) Ding Yi 丁一, “Divine Transactions: The Transformation of Buddhist Communal Liturgies at Dunhuang (8th–10th Centuries)” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2020), 341–348.

BuddhistRoad Paper 2.5. Goodman, “The Vajragarbha Bodhisattva Three-Syllable Visualisation”

Appendix I: Outline of the Vajra Peak Scripture⁸⁶

Part One (Fascicles 1–3)

Fascicle I (Sections 1–14)

- (1) *Wufo bapusa guanding tanfa* 五佛八菩薩灌頂壇法 [Five-buddha, Eight-bodhisattva Maṇḍala Initiation Ceremony]
- (2) *Miji jingang zhi tanfa* 密跡金剛之壇法 [Altar Method for Vajra Secret Traces]
- (3) *Tianwang huguo tanfa* 天王護國壇法 [Heavenly Kings State Protection Altar Method]
- (4) *Huguo shuilu dengtan zhi fa* 護國水陸燈壇之法 [Lamp-altar Method for Safeguarding the State and Liberating Creatures of Land and Water]
- (5) *Bajixiang shiliuzun bagongyang guanding zhi tanfa* 八吉祥十六尊八供養灌頂之壇法 [Initiation Ceremony that Uses the Maṇḍala of the Eight Auspicious Ones, the Sixteen Worthies, and the Eight Offering Goddesses]
- (6) *Sanzhongyue dasheng guanding shoufa zhi tan* 三重月大乘灌頂授法之壇 [Mahāyāna Consecration and Dharma Conferral Ceremony, to be Held during the Three Solemn Months]
- (7) *Wufo guanding chanhui zhi tanfa* 五佛灌頂懺悔之壇法 [Five-buddha Consecration and Repentance Rite]
- (8) *Foshuo pubian guangming yanfa wugou qingjing zongchi siwei ruyibao yinxin wunengsheng damingwang jide dazizai zongchi dajiaowang jingangjie tuoluoni qiqing zhenyan yue budiba* 佛說普遍光明焰髮無垢清淨總持思惟如意寶印心無能勝大明王即得大自在總持大教王金剛界陀羅尼啓請真言曰部第八 [Section 8, The Vajradhātu Dhāraṇī Invocation Mantra, the Universally Radiant, Incandescent, Stainless, Pure Dhāraṇī Visualisation, a Wish-fulfilling Jewel and the Sealed Essence of

⁸⁶ Recension A of the *Jingangjun jing* 金剛峻經 [Vajra Peak Scripture], which is outlined here, is extant in three copies: (1) a complete copy found on *pothi* booklet P. 3913; (2) a partial copy now divided between two scroll fragments, BD 15147 and GB 015; and (3) a partial copy preserved on the verso of five recycled scrolls: BD 02301 + S. 2316v + BD 02431 + BD 06329 + S. 2144v.



the Invincible Great King of the Vidyarājas who Grant Freedom,
the Great King of Teachings spoken by the Buddha]⁸⁷

- (9) *Wufo bapusa tiandengtan zhi shuilu dengtan* 五佛八菩薩天燈壇
之水陸燈壇 [Five-buddha, Eight-bodhisattva Heavenly Lamp
Altar for Liberating Creatures of Land and Water]
- (10) *Dilun dengtan* 地輪燈壇 [Earth-wheel Lamp Altar]⁸⁸
- (11) *Shuilu zhi tan* 水陸之壇 [Altar for Liberating Creatures of Land
and Water]⁸⁹
- (12) *Shijixiang zongchiwang tan* 十吉祥總持王壇 [Altar of the Ten
Auspicious Dhāraṇī Kings]
- (13) *Baizi mingwang tanfa* 百字明王壇法 [Hundred-syllable Wisdom
King Altar Method]
- (14) *Shifo zhi benshen laichu* 十佛之本身來處 [Source of the
Original Bodies of the Ten Buddhas]⁹⁰

Fascicle 2 (Sections 15–27)

- (15) *Jingangjie guanfo sanmei tan* 金剛界觀佛三昧壇 [Vajradhātu
Maṇḍala to be Used for the Practice of Buddha-Visualisation]
- (16) *Wufo zhi tan* 五佛之壇 [Five-buddha Altar]⁹¹
- (17) *Wufo zhi tan* 五佛之壇 [Five-buddha Altar]⁹²
- (18) *Guanfo sanmei hushen zhi fa* 觀佛三昧護身之法 [Buddha-
visualisation Method for Bodily Protection]
- (19) *Guanxing sanmei tanfa* 觀行三昧壇法 [Altar Method for
Undertaking Visualisation Practice]
- (20) *Mimi shenmiaofa sanmei tanfa* 秘蜜深妙法三昧壇法 [The
Secret and Profound Meditative Absorption Altar Method]
- (21) *Zuochan zongchi tanfa* 座禪惣持壇法 [Altar Method for Seated
Meditation and Dhāraṇī Recitation Practice]

⁸⁷ Two additional copies of the text found in section eight have been identified at Dunhuang: P. 2197 (10) and P. 2105 (II.1).

⁸⁸ This section appears to be corrupt.

⁸⁹ This section appears to be corrupt.

⁹⁰ This section includes a scriptural citation comparable to the text found in fascicle two of the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 [Brahmā's Net Scripture], T. 1484.24, 1003b10–23.

⁹¹ This section appears to be corrupt.

⁹² This section appears to be corrupt.

- (22) *Kaichan xiuxing zhi tanfa* 開禪修行之壇法 [Altar Method for Undertaking Meditation Practice]
- (23) *Wufo jiachishen chengfo shishen zhi tanfa* 五佛加持身成佛十身之壇法 [Five-buddha Empowerment Rite for Attaining the Ten Bodies of the Buddha]
- (24) *Bapusa bagongyang bing sishe qiqing zhi tanfa* 八菩薩八供養并四攝啟請之壇法 [Altar Method Used to Invoke the Eight Bodhisattvas, Eight Offering Goddesses, and the Four Gatekeepers]
- (25) *Xumilu zhi tanfa* 須彌盧之壇法 [Sumeru Altar Method]
- (26) *Qiqing xiuxing tanfa* 啟請修行壇法 [Invocation Altar Method]
- (27) *Shiliu dashi shidi manzu zhi tanfa* 十六大士十地滿足之壇法 [Altar Method of the Sixteen Great Ones Used to Accomplish the Ten Bodhisattva Stages]

Fascicle 3 (Sections 28–35)

- (28) *Chengfo manzu zhi tanfa* 成佛滿足之壇法 [Altar Method for Attaining Complete Buddhahood]
- (29) *Zongchi dajiaowang chengfo tan* 總持大教王成佛壇 [Altar for Attaining Buddhahood as Taught in the Dhāraṇī Great King of Teachings]
- (30) *Guojienei zuofu zhi huotan* 國界內作福之火壇 [Fire Altar for Generating Merit on Behalf of the State]
- (31) *Shoujie jiemo zhengfa zhi tan* 授戒羯磨正法之壇 [Platform Ceremony for Conferring the Precepts of the True Dharma]
- (32) *Gongyang shifang shiliu dashi zuofu zhi tanfa* 供養十方十六大士作福之壇法 [Altar Method for Generating Merit by Making Offerings to the Sixteen Great Ones of the Ten Directions]
- (33) *Gongyang shifangfo shiye zuo fu zhi tan* 供養十方佛事業作福之壇 [Altar Method that Generates Merit by Making Offerings to the Activities of the Buddhas of the Ten Directions]
- (34) *Shenshen liupoluomi shidi manzu shi tanfa* 甚深六波羅蜜十地滿足之壇法 [Altar Method for Perfecting the Six Profound Pāramitās and the Ten Complete Bodhisattva Stages]
- (35) *Zongchi baizi mingwang xiuxing shidi manzu zheng wu zhang'ai zhi zongchi tanfa* 惣持百字明王修行十地滿足正無障礙之惣持



壇法 [Hundred-syllable Dhāraṇī Altar Method of the Wisdom Kings Used to Cultivate the Ten Complete Stages that Lead to Unobstructed Liberation]

Part Two (Fascicle 4)

Fascicle 4 (Sections 36–39)

- (36) *Fu fazang pin* 付法藏品 [Chapter on Entrusting the Dharma Repository]
- a. *Chapter on Entrusting the Dharma Repository*
 - b. *Shengzhou ji* 聖胄集 [Record of the Sagely Descendants]
 - c. *Fo chuxing shi shi ji* 佛初興世時記 [When the Buddha First Rose to Prominence in the World]
 - d. *Fuzhu fazang zhuan lüechao* 付囑法藏傳略抄 [Brief Notes on the Chronicle of the Transmission of the Dharma Repository]
 - e. *Fazhuji lüechao* 法住記略抄 [Brief Notes on the Record of the Dharma's Persistence]
 - f. *Fendeng zhi lu jing, cong shang xitian [nian]bazu shouji* 分燈之陸經從上西天[廿]八祖受記 [Scripture on the Division of the Lamp throughout the Land, the Prediction of the Twenty-[Eight] Indian Patriarchs]
 - g. *Tanglai liudai zushi michuan xinyin* 唐來六代祖師密傳心印 [Secret Mind-Seal of the Six Generations of Chinese Patriarchs]
- (37) Untitled contemplation text that ends with the line ‘Imagine: My body is that of all the buddhas; [the bodies of] all the buddhas are my own. Outside of this there is nothing’ (Chin. *xiang*: *Wo shen jishi zhufu, zhufu jishi woshen, yu wai geng wu bie wu* 想: 我身即是諸佛, 諸佛即是我身. 餘外更無別物)
- (38) *Jingangzang pusa sanzhi guanxiang* 金剛藏菩薩三字觀想 [Vajragarbha Bodhisattva Three-Syllable Visualisation]
- (39) *Jietan sanshi huixiang fa yuanwen* 結壇散食迴向發願文 [Liturgical Text for Establishing the Altar, Dispersing Food, Transferring Merit, and Making Vows]

Appendix II: Outline of the Manuscript Miscellany P. 3835

Recto

- (1) [Illustrated *mudrā* manual related to the cult of] Eleven-Faced Avalokiteśvara (Chin. *Shiyimian Guanshiyin* 十一面觀世音) (r.1–5)⁹³
- (2) Sanskrit practice syllables transcribed in Tibetan (Siddham?) script (r. 5)⁹⁴
- (3) *Guanshiyin pusa mizang wu zhangai ruyi xinlun tuoluoni jing* 觀世音菩薩密藏無障礙如意心輪陀羅尼經 [Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva’s Secret Collection [of Spells Leading to] Freedom from Obscurations, a Wish-fulfilling Jewel and the Sealed Essence Dhāraṇī Sūtra] (r.6–44)⁹⁵
- (4) Twelve lines that begin with a spell for banishing dogs (Chin. *jingou zhou* 禁狗咒); this item appears to be related to item 8 on the verso (r.45–46)
- (5) Colophon dated to the fifth day of the eighth month of the *wuyin* (戊寅) era (978) composed by a ‘disciple of pure faith, Yang Yuanshou’ (Chin. Qingxin dizi Yang Yuanshou 清信弟子楊願受) (r.46)⁹⁶

⁹³ Sørensen, “The Meeting and Conflation of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism,” compares the *mudrā* manual found in P. 3835 to those found in P. 3905 and Stein painting 83* (OA 1919,0101,0.83*).

⁹⁴ Several of the syllables are inverted. Sørensen, “The Meeting and Conflation of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism,” 10, following Sobisch, identifies the different syllables as *OM, A; Namō ratna tra* [...]. Sørensen concludes that the inclusion of Tibetan characters found inscribed on this manuscript suggest that it circulated among the Tibetan-language speaking Buddhist community at Dunhuang.

⁹⁵ This text, including its title, is comparable to the text found in Śikṣānanda’s *Guanshiyin pusa mimizang ruyilun tuoluoni shenzhou jing* 觀世音菩薩秘密藏如意輪陀羅尼神呪經 [Dhāraṇīsūtra of the Wish-Fulfilling Wheel, Esoteric Repository of the Bodhisattva who Contemplates the World’s Sounds] (T.1082.20, 197b–200a12). Pelliot catalogs note that two columns of missing text have been added to the bottom of the manuscript on a strip of paper attached with glue (fol. 19, ll. 103–104).

⁹⁶ The colophon appears on fols. 46, cols. 301–302; a second reference to the year 978 appears in item 7 on the verso of this same manuscript. Pelliot catalogs treat items 1–5 on the recto as a single item.



- (6) A copy of the *Bukong juansuo shenzhou xin jing* 不空罽索[罽索]神咒心經 [Infallible Lasso Heart-Spell Sūtra] (r.47–84)⁹⁷
- (7) Twenty-one columns of a glossary (r.84–87)⁹⁸
- (8) A copy of the *Foshuo guan jing* 佛說觀經 [Contemplation Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha] (r.88–91)⁹⁹

Verso

- (1) Two mantras, the *Miao seshen rulai zhenyan* 妙色身如來真言 [Mantra of the Wondrous Rūpakāya of the Buddha] and *Ganluwang rulai zhenyan* 甘露王如來真言 [Mantra of the Tathāgata King of Sweet Dew] (v.1)¹⁰⁰
- (2) *Shui sanshi yiben* 水散食一本 [A Book of Food and Water Offerings] (v.2); this item might be connected to the previous item;
- (3) A series of *mantras* that begins with the *Ding xinzhou* 頂心咒 [Buddha-Crown Heart Spell] and ends with the *Jinlun fodong xinzhou* 金輪佛頂心咒 [Golden Wheel Buddha-Crown Heart Spell] (v.4–8)¹⁰¹
- (4) Fifteen columns of a (Daoist-inspired?) text that begin with the four-character phrase ‘enchantment methods of the [deities of the] fire department’ (Chin. *huobu jinfang* 火部禁方), followed by the *Longshu pusa jiutian xuannü zhou* 龍樹菩薩九天玄女咒 [Spell of the Mysterious Lady of the Nine Heavens by (?) Longshu [Nāgārjuna] Bodhisattva]; this is followed by

⁹⁷ This appears to be a copy of the text found in Xuanzang’s (600/602–664, 玄奘) *Bukong juansuo zhouxin jing* 不空罽索呪心經 [Heart Spell of Infallible Lasso] (T.1094.20, 402b–405c).

⁹⁸ Pelliot catalogers include this item with the previous item.

⁹⁹ An indigenous Chinese composition comprised of 49 columns of text; end missing. Reproduced in T. 2914.85, 1459c–1460a15.1.

¹⁰⁰ The appellation ‘Ganlu wang’ refers to the ‘King of Immortality,’ that is, Amitābha Buddha. Pelliot catalogers have identified comparable *dhāraṇīs* in Amoghavajra’s *Shi zhu egui yinshi ji shui fa* 施諸餓鬼飲食及水法 [Rite for Distributing Food and Water to Hungry Ghosts] (T.1315.21, 467c4–6, 14–16) and *Foshuo jiuba yan kou egui tuoluoni jing* 佛說救拔焰口餓鬼陀羅尼經 [Dhāraṇīsūtra for Saving the Flaming-Mouth Hungry Ghosts] (T.1313.21, 465a16–17).

¹⁰¹ This list of *mantras* is roughly comparable to that found in Atikūta’s *Tuoluoni ji jing* (T.901.18, 786b10–792b15).

- instructions on the ‘method of receiving pneuma’ (Chin. *shouqi fa* 受氣法) (v.10–11)
- (5) 138 cols. of a liturgical text that contains petitions and spells (Chin. *fuzhou zhenyan* 符咒真言) to several Buddhist and Daoist protector deities, followed by recipes or methods against various illnesses; Pelliot catalogers identify the scribal hand of this item with the hand of the previous item (v.12–31)¹⁰²
 - (6) Three talismans; includes instructions on the calligraphic style to be used by the copyist (v.32–36)¹⁰³
 - (7) Recycled insert inscribed on the front and back:
 - a. Fragment of an official report on a recent attack by upland nomads near Dunhuang issued by the governor general of Guiyijun, Cao Yanlu (r. 976–1002, 曹延祿), dated to the tenth day of the fifth month of the *wuyin* (戊寅) era (978)¹⁰⁴;
 - b. Fragments of a ritual miscellany inscribed on attached sheets that form movable flaps, constructed from the previous item 7a; the insert contains an elaborate hand mnemonic used in protection and healing (exorcistic?) rites (see item 4 on the recto and fig. 5 below) (v.37–40)¹⁰⁵
 - (8) Unidentified set of three *mantras*, the *Rudu zhenyan* 入觸真言 [Mantra for Entering the Skull], the *Rujing zhen[yan]* 入淨真[言] [Mantra for Entering Purity], and the *Changhuanxi zhenyan*

¹⁰² The petitions end with an injunctive formula to ward off malevolent spirits that reads, “Promptly, in accordance with the statutes and ordinations!” (Chin. *jiji rulie ling chishe* 急急如律令勅攝). Appended to the text we find the heading ‘method for binding the realm’ (Chin. *jiyin fa* 結印法), followed by the names of three *mudrās*. In the same hand, we find two notations: the ‘four directional *vajras*’ (Chin. *sifang jingang* 四方金剛) and the ‘masters of the five directions’ (*wu fangshi* 五方師). This item may be related to the previous item.

¹⁰³ See S. 2615v for another copy of these talismans, apparently written in the same hand. Copp, “Manuscript Culture as Ritual Culture,” includes a study of the seals preserved in this manuscript.

¹⁰⁴ The report is imprinted with official seals in red that read “The seal of the Governor of the Guiyin Garrison, Commissioner of Inspection, is affixed” (Chin. *Guiyijun jiedu guan cha liuhou yin* 歸義軍節度觀察留後印). This item appears on the verso of fols. 55–52 of P. 3835. On this report, see again Sakajiri, “An Order of the Governor-General of *Guiyijun* about an Attack of Upland Nomads: P. 3835v7.”

¹⁰⁵ Pelliot catalogers divide this item into three separate items and link the hand to the next item, item 8 on the *verso*, as well as to item 4 on the *recto*.



- 常歡喜真言 [Mantra of Eternal Happiness]; this item may be related to the next item (v.41)
- (9) A series of four short contemplation texts:
- Vajragarbha Bodhisattva Three-Syllable Visualisation* (v.42–44)
 - Untitled self-empowerment sequence (v.45–46)
 - Table A1, untitled five-syllable contemplation (v. 47–48)
 - Table A2, untitled five-syllable contemplation (v.49–50)
- (10) *Wenshu pusa guanxiang* 文殊菩薩觀想 [Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva Visualisation] (v.51–57)
- (11) *Foshuo dalun jingang wuchi tuoluoni fa* 佛說大輪金剛物 [惣=總] 持陀羅尼法 [Great Wheel Vajra Dhāraṇī Method Spoken by the Buddha], a text that contains talismanic seals; this is followed by sixteen blank pages (v.58–73).

Abbreviations

BD	Collection of Dunhuang manuscripts preserved in the National Library of China, Beijing.
GB	Collection of Dunhuang manuscripts held in Gansu Provincial Museum.
IOL Tib J	Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the British Library in London (formerly in the India Office Library (IOL)).
P.	Pelliot Collection of Chinese Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.
P. T.	Pelliot Collection of Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.
S.	Stein Collection of Chinese Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the British Library in London.
T.	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新脩大藏經 [Taishō Tripiṭaka], ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, et al. 85 vols. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1935.
Tōh.	<i>Chibetto Daizōkyō sōmoku-roku</i> 西藏大藏經總目錄 A Complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons (<i>Bkaḥ-ḥgyur and Bstan-ḥgyur</i>), ed. Ui Hakuju 宇井伯壽 et al. Sendai: Tōhoku Teikoku Daigaku Hōbun Gakubu, 1934.

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