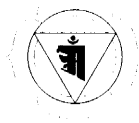


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A Definition of Mahāyoga

Sources from the Dunhuang manuscripts

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1. Introduction

The categories that we use to talk about groups of texts are always problematic. We tend to adopt a category from traditional sources, and make our own sense of it, using it for convenience because we need a way to refer to a group of thematically or historically associated texts. This is understandable and perhaps necessary as a working practice. But our use of these terms is called into question when such categories are themselves submitted to historical analysis. Sometimes such analysis reveals that the category came into being so late that its use is anachronistic, or that it has been used with such a variety of significations that our way of employing it is almost entirely arbitrary. Then it may seem as if we have no choice but to continue using the category in a way that is historically inaccurate or to abandon it entirely.

The category of *Mahāyoga* — “the great yoga” — has come to be problematic in just this way. *Mahāyoga* has not yet been treated to a full historical analysis as a doxographical category, yet it continues to appear in current scholarly discourse as if it were self-explanatory and unproblematic. *Mahāyoga* (Tib. *rnal ’byor chen po*) does have a particular meaning in the received Tibetan tradition, especially within the Nyingma school, where it signifies a group of eighteen tantras, a set of meditative and ritual practices, and a philosophical view associated with these.¹ Yet the interpretation of *Mahāyoga* has not been stable over the 1,200 years of the Tibetan tradition; nor is any uniformity in its use to be found in the Indic commentarial tradition.

Therefore I would argue that it is time that the category of *Mahāyoga* was treated to a thorough historical analysis, even though it is not my intention in this article to undertake such an awesome task in full. Here I will take just one phase in the development of *Mahāyoga* in the Indo-Tibetan tradition by looking at the meanings of *Mahāyoga* in the Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts, mostly dating from the tenth century AD. I hope to show that the category of *Mahāyoga* is defined coherently enough in these manuscripts to justify our continuing to use it in this context at least, without anachronism. At the same time, understanding the way in which the Dunhuang texts define *Mahāyoga* may augment our reading of the tantras and *sādhana*s themselves.

My main intention is to introduce a group of texts from the Dunhuang manuscripts that can be brought into relationship with each other using the definitions of *Mahāyoga* found within the manuscripts themselves. I will show connections between these sources and how they imply an attempt to form a coherent concept of *Mahāyoga*, without glossing over the differences between them. Thus my aim here is mainly synchronic. I hope at least to show the state of the developing Tibetan tradition of *Mahāyoga* exegesis, as it stood in the tenth century.

¹ A classic Tibetan presentation of *Mahāyoga* in English translation can be found in Dudjom 1991 (Volume I, Part 4).

2. The Sources

A Summary of the View of Mahāyoga According to Scripture

The *Summary* is the most important text for this study. It is substantially the longest and most detailed definition of Mahāyoga provided in any of the Dunhuang manuscripts. It is found in a single manuscript, IOL Tib J 436, which is poorly written and physically damaged, and the text is probably missing its opening lines.² The *Summary* treats Mahāyoga under four headings: (i) view, (ii) *samaya*, (iii) union and liberation, and (iv) meditation.³

Doxographical texts

Two further manuscripts (IOL Tib J 644 and Pelliot tibétain 656) offer definitions of Mahāyoga in the context of doxographical treatments of Buddhist scripture that are antecedents to the nine-vehicle system of the Nyingma. Here we find brief but well-developed treatments of not only Mahāyoga, but Anuyoga and Atiyoga as well. Notably, none of the manuscripts refer to these higher yogas as “vehicles” (*theg pa*) per se. In both manuscripts the treatments of Mahāyoga are interestingly in close concordance with the definitions offered in the *Summary*. In particular, Pelliot tibétain 656, entitled *The Seven Great Scriptural Systems* (*Spyi'i lung chen po bdun*) presents an almost identical definition of Mahāyoga view, practices and vows, and may be from the same authorial source.

The works of Gnyan dPal dbyangs

Of primary importance here is *The Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva* (*Rdo rje sems dpa'i zhus lan*), a treatise by Gnyan dPal dbyangs comprising a wide-ranging collection of fifty-one questions and answers on meditative and ritual practice, encompassing both philosophical and practical issues. These questions and answers are intended as a clarification of Mahāyoga. In contrast to the doxographical texts, Mahāyoga is here called “the supreme system,” and no higher class of tantra is mentioned.⁴

The Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva appears in three Dunhuang manuscripts (IOL Tib J 470, Pelliot tibétain 819 and 837) as well as the Tibetan canonical collections, and will shortly appear in translation and critical edition elsewhere, so is not included here.⁵

² Though the text is apparently incomplete, the word that begins the treatise as we have it, “... meditation” (*bsgom pa*) suggests that all we are missing is a list of the topics covered in the treatise, i.e. view, *samaya*, union, liberation and meditation.

³ The *Summary* is not the only text contained in the manuscript IOL Tib J 436, though it is the first text. It is followed by five others. The titles of the six texts in the manuscript are as follows.

- (i) *Ma ha yo ga'i lung du bsdu pa*
- (ii) *Man ngag be ru ka la bstod pa* (a stotra to Heruka)
- (iii) *Byang chub sems pa rdo rje la bstod pa* (a stotra to Vajrasattva)
- (iv) *Lha rnam la rdo rje gar gis mchod pa* (a treatise on the *vajra* dance performed as an offering)
- (v) *Dpal chen shri he ru ka la bstod pa* (another stotra to Heruka)
- (vi) *Dam tshig nyams la bskang ba'i 'thol bshags* (a confession prayer for infringements of the tantric *samaya*)

The nature of the texts, and the very rough and ready quality of the paper and handwriting comprising this manuscript suggest that it was the property of an individual who used it for teaching and ritual purposes. For a complete catalogue entry, see Dalton and van Schaik 2006. A translation and transcription of the *Summary* appears below in Section 5.

⁴ Note that Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and (implicitly) Atiyoga are also briefly discussed in Pelliot tibétain 841.

⁵ A full translation and critical edition of *The Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva* appears in Takahashi forthcoming.

Another treatise by Gnyan dPal dbyangs, the *Lamp for the Mind*, also treats Mahāyoga explicitly, and though it is preserved only in the Tibetan canon (and not in the Dunhuang manuscripts) I will refer to it here as well.

The works of Madhusādhu

Another important text, though less well-known than *The Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva*, is an unnamed commentary associated with a master known as Madhusādhu. This appears in a lengthy scroll (IOL Tib J 454), and in a condensed form in a shorter manuscript fragment, IOL Tib J 508. While only the latter presents itself as a Mahāyoga treatise, the strong thematic connections between these two texts justifies the inclusion of the longer manuscript in this group as well. I have presented a translation and edition of both texts elsewhere, and here I will draw on these texts where appropriate.⁶

The works of Padmasambhava

The only early text convincingly attributed to Padmasambhava is a commentary on the *Upāyapāśa* which survives in a Dunhuang manuscript copy (IOL Tib J 321) as well as in the Tibetan canon. The canonical version is unattributed but the Dunhuang manuscript contains a colophon which states that Padmasambhava was the author of the commentary. The term Mahāyoga occurs both in the main text and in the interlinear notes.⁷ The *Upāyapāśa* itself is known to the later Nyingma tradition as one of the eighteen Mahāyoga texts, and is also cited in the longer Madhusādhu treatise. In addition there is an important work on Mahāyoga that is attributed to Padmasambhava in the Tibetan canon, *The Garland of Views* (well-known through Samten Karmay's edition and translation). Though though this attribution is later and perhaps less certain, the text does contain much that is similar to the Dunhuang Mahāyoga texts, and even if not by Padmasambhava at least seems to belong to the early period.

The works of Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes

While they are not represented among the Dunhuang manuscripts, we should not neglect the two major works of Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes. His *Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation* and *Armour Against Darkness*, dating from the late ninth to early tenth centuries, are classic works of Tibet's 'dark age' and contain much that is thematically linked to the Dunhuang manuscripts. Both works offer definitions of Mahāyoga, which we must consider as vital context for the definitions in the Dunhuang manuscripts.⁸

⁶ Another important and lengthy tantric treatise is found in the manuscript Pelliot tibétain 337. Although the term Mahāyoga does appear once in the treatise (panel 3, l.17), the doxographical system here is that of exoteric (*nang*) and esoteric (*phyi*) yoga. The treatise quotes from the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga* and *Gubhasamāja* tantras, as well as the *Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha* tantra (panel 4, ll.4–5). The treatise does not share many of the features that characterize the explicitly Mahāyoga literature, and may represent a slightly earlier stage of tantric exegesis.

⁷ The main text in chapter 38 (IOL Tib J 321: 78r.5–6) states that to understand the meaning of *mahāmudrā*, one should start with the four activities, and goes on to say that this is taught in many Mahāyoga tantras (*ma ha yo ga 'i tan tra du ma las bshad do*). The interlinear note to 1v.3 mentions "the tantra [class] of Mahāyoga" (*ma ha yo ga 'i rgyud*). My thanks to Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell for their help with locating these passages.

⁸ Despite the existence of a critical edition of the Tibetan text and more than one translation in progress, no translation or edition of the *Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation* has yet been published. There are however two studies of the text's general framework: van Schaik and Dalton 2003 and Meinert 2003. Regarding the

Tantric notes

There are notes on tantric theory and practice scattered throughout the Dunhuang manuscripts. Two such collections of notes, brief treatises and practice texts are relevant to our investigation here. The first, which I will refer to as *Tantric Notes I*, is a large concertina now split into three parts. The first folios are Pelliot tibétain 36, followed by a substantial segment in IOL Tib J 419, followed by Pelliot tibétain 42 (when the manuscript is turned over to read the verso, this order is reversed, of course). All in all, the complete manuscript contains about twenty texts of various kinds.⁹ Among these texts is a series of questions and answers (IOL Tib J 419.6, Pelliot tibétain 42.I). These are similar in subject matter and tone to *The Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva*. There is also a long treatise dealing with various matters relating to tantric meditation practices (Pelliot tibétain 42.II–VI). There is a descriptive treatment of the rituals of union and liberation (Pelliot tibétain 42.VIII–IX and IOL Tib J 419.7), and a more detailed ritual manual for the liberation practice (IOL Tib J 419/12).

The second of these manuscripts, which I will refer to as *Tantric Notes II*, is a compact concertina, in a fluent but hastily written handwriting with several mistakes and corrections. Like the manuscript above, it is now split between the Stein and Pelliot collections, the beginning and end appearing in IOL Tib J 583 and the middle in Pelliot tibétain 288.¹⁰ The manuscript contains a series of *sādhana*s, prayers and notes. Among these is a treatise on “the six boiled-down essentials” (IOL Tib J 583/4), which are: (i) view, (ii) *samaya*, (iii) recitation practice, (iv) purification through burning, (v) aspirational prayer, (vi) *sādhana*.¹¹

Manuals for tantric practice

There are a great number of meditation and ritual manuals found in the Dunhuang collection, including *sādhana*s (*sgrub thabs*), *vidhi* (*cho ga*) and other descriptions of ritual techniques. I will draw on some examples of these in the Dunhuang manuscripts where they seem particularly apposite to the way Mahāyoga is being defined in the *Summary*.

Armour Against Darkness, Jacob Dalton's Ph.D. dissertation on the *Sutra Gathering All Intentions* (Dalton 2002, as yet unpublished) draws extensively on this work.

⁹ Macdonald and Imaeda (1978–9) divided one long text on aspects of tantric practice into five parts (their parts II to VI). Due to the widespread use of their division of the manuscript, I will use it (represented by Roman numerals) when discussing texts in Pelliot tibétain 42. When discussing text in IOL Tib J 419, I will use the divisions found in Dalton and van Schaik 2006.

¹⁰ The structure of this manuscript is as follows:

- (i) Fragmentary notes
- (ii) *Sādhana* for Avalokiteśvara
- (iii) Prayers to the five buddhas
- (iv) The six boiled-down essentials (*bskol mo rnam drug*)
- (v) Prayer to Vajrasattva
- (vi) Notes on the view of Mahāyoga
- (vii) Invitation prayer to the bodhisattvas of the *vajra*, *ratna* and *dharmā* families
- (viii) Invitation prayer to Vajrasattva
- (ix) Treatise given “by the yogin to his students”

As with IOL Tib J 436, the miscellaneous nature of this material, and the poor quality of the handwriting and spelling suggest that this was a personal collection of materials for teaching and ritual purposes. For a complete catalogue entry, see Dalton and van Schaik 2006.

¹¹ Due to a lacuna in the manuscript, (i) is incomplete while (ii), (iii) and (iv) are missing. Fortunately, another explanation of these “six boiled-down essentials” has survived in Pelliot tibétain 280/2, which is also fragmentary but contains full treatments of (ii), (iii) and (iv).

An exception among the *sādhana*s is the long ritual manual in Pelliot tibétain 245, which appears to follow the ritual sequence of the *Guhyagarbha*. It contains a ritual for the “Mahāyoga maṇḍala of the gathering” (*rnal ’byor chen po’i tshogs kyi dkyil ’khor*), and refers elsewhere to “the eternal Mahāyoga” (*rnal ’byor g.yung drung chen po*).

Tibetan Chan texts

It has been known for some time that several of the Tibetan Chan texts in the Dunhuang manuscript collections refer to the practices of Chan as “the great yoga” (*rnal ’byor chen po*), the same Tibetan term that translates the Sanskrit *mahāyoga*.¹² However, there is no indication in any of these manuscripts that “great yoga” refers to the tantric class of the same name. Thus it may be used simply to refer to an exceptional yoga.

Kenneth Eastman argued that “the great yoga” in Chan texts does indeed refer to the tantric class of Mahāyoga, but that it was used in these texts by “members of a Ch’an lineage who were attempting to disguise their teachings with the name of Mahāyoga.”¹³ This explanation seems unlikely, since there is no sign of any attempt to disguise the nature of these texts, which name many Chinese Chan masters, frequently use the Tibetan equivalent for the term “Chan” (*bsam gtan*) and which are even in places referred to as Chan texts (*bsam gtan gi yi ge*).¹⁴ In general, it seems that “the great yoga” appears in these texts merely as a synonym for Chan practice.

On the other hand, there is evidence of integration between Chan and Mahāyoga lineages, and even syncretism between Chan and Mahāyoga meditation practices at Dunhuang. A group of manuscripts written in the same hand suggest that the Chan techniques of examining the mind (*sems la lta*) were taught in the context of the “suchness concentration” in Mahāyoga *sādhana*s.¹⁵ In addition to this, one of our Mahāyoga manuscripts defines the view in the following striking way: “according to the scriptures of Chan, Sūtra and Mantra, the view is non-fixation (*dmyigs su myed pa*).”¹⁶

Thus the question of the significance of the term “great yoga” in the Tibetan Chan manuscripts remains open. In the notes toward a definition of Mahāyoga below I will return to certain parallels with Tibetan Chan; but as none of these texts contain any explicit references to tantric meditation practices, we do not need to consider them among our primary sources for a definition of Mahāyoga.

Dating

An important point here is the dating of the manuscripts that we are using as sources for the definition of Mahāyoga. It was once thought that the Tibetan manuscripts in the Dunhuang collections must date to the period of Tibetan occupation; that is, between the conquest of Dunhuang in 786 and the fall of Tibetan power there in 848. It is now recognized that many of the Tibetan manuscripts can be dated to later than this. Indeed

¹² For example, IOL Tib J 705, 709/9, 710/1; Pelliot tibétain 116, 818.

¹³ Eastman 1983: 58.

¹⁴ See for example 709/9, also discussed in the section on the *samaya* vows, below.

¹⁵ For a detailed examination of the manuscripts in question, see van Schaik and Dalton 2004. See also Meinert 2006 for a detailed analysis of one of these manuscripts, and an argument for links with Atiyoga rather than Mahāyoga.

¹⁶ IOL Tib J 508/4 r19.3–5: *lta ba ni bsam gtan dang / mdo sde dang sngags gyi gzhung zhes dmyigs su myed de*.

some of the Tibetan manuscripts were written only a few years before the closing of the cave at the beginning of the eleventh century.¹⁷

Many of the later manuscripts contain tantric material. Indeed, few if any manuscripts containing tantric texts have been dated to the earlier, imperial period. Some of the manuscripts that we will look at below have been firmly dated to the tenth century, and without contrary evidence, we may take it as a working hypothesis that all of these manuscripts postdate the Tibetan rule of Dunhuang, and indeed may well be as late as the end of the tenth century.

A separate issue, however, is the date of the textual content of the manuscripts. There is little to indicate that any major translation of Indian tantric sources occurred between the fall of the Tibetan empire in the mid-ninth century and the activity of the “new” translators from the late tenth century onward. The Dunhuang materials contain little or no sign of developments in the manipulation of internal energies (and the corresponding set of four empowerments) that characterize the Indic movements of the mid-ninth century onward, such as the eighteenth chapter of the *Guhyasamāja* and the works of the Ārya school. Thus the Tibetan tantric manuscripts from Dunhuang, while generally written in the tenth century, seem to represent lineages that came to Tibet between the mid-eighth and mid-ninth centuries. The primary reason for this is probably simply that after the fall of the Tibetan imperial dynasty there was not the necessary will or resources to carry out the project of sending Tibetan translators to India to find new lineages and translate new texts. It was just this combination of will and resources in the kings of Western Tibet and other local princes that restarted the Tibetan translation project in the late tenth century — too late to leave a trace in the Dunhuang manuscripts.¹⁸

As for the interest in Mahāyoga at Dunhuang itself, we can only speculate on who was practising Mahāyoga. However, there are some indications that that was a relatively wealthy audience for these texts. We have, for example, the beautifully produced manuscripts of the *Guhyasamāja* and the commentary on the *Upāyapāśa* attributed to Padmasambhava. There is also a ritual item featuring Vajrasattva as the chief of the five buddha families, expensively decorated with the rare pigments of lapis lazuli and vermilion¹⁹ (see Figure 1).

Furthermore, we have evidence that relatively highly placed Chinese officials from the regime that replaced the Tibetan occupation were deeply involved with Tibetan Mahāyoga. In one of the copies of *The Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva* (IOL Tib J 470) the name of the scribe is Phu shi meng hwe'i 'gyog. The first part of this clearly Chinese name is an official rank, *fu shi* 副使, the name for the third highest ranking official in a district called a *zhen* 鎮, comprising 50 households. This same scribe probably also wrote out the longer Madhusādhū treatise mentioned above.²⁰ This certainly suggests that the presence of Mahāyoga at Dunhuang was at least in part sustained by patronage from wealthy Chinese officials.

¹⁷ See Takeuchi forthcoming. Important tantric manuscripts dated to the late tenth century include Pelliot tibétain 44, Pelliot tibétain 849 and Or.8210/S.95.

¹⁸ One of the best discussions of this movement is in Davidson 2005, chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁹ This item is IOL Tib J 1364. Analysis of this item with Raman Spectroscopy has shown that it contains the precious pigments lapis lazuli and vermilion, rare among portable painting from Dunhuang. See Chudo 2005: 61. The author states that “the evidence of very precious lapis lazuli on the icon may serve to illustrate the iconographic importance of Vajrasattva in the 8–10th century with the spread of esoteric Buddhism in Dunhuang.” For my reasons for associating this image specifically with Mahāyoga, see Section 3(i) of this article.

²⁰ This rank, as it appears in another Tibetan Dunhuang document (Pelliot tibétain 1124), is discussed in Sakajiri 1995: 70. For further discussion of this scribe, see van Schaik forthcoming(a), where I argue that the same scribe is responsible for IOL Tib J 454.



Figure 1: Vajrasattva with Five-Buddha Crown. IOL Tib J 1364.

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3. The View

(i) THE SINGLE MODE (*tshul gcig*)

The *view* (*lta ba*) is a catch-all term for philosophical or doctrinal content.²¹ Among the Dunhuang texts we find two ways of defining the Mahāyoga view. The first is found in the *Summary* and the doxographical texts, and clearly works to set Mahāyoga apart from other tantric classes, especially the other ‘inner yogas’ of Anu and Ati. The second way of defining Mahāyoga is more inclusive, emphasizing a nonconceptual formulation of the view, the spontaneous presence of enlightenment, and the identity of the buddhas and one’s own mind. I will discuss these two kinds of definition separately and then look at their relationship to each other.

The *Summary* defines the view of Mahāyoga with the words “seeing the five families in a single mode” (*rigs lnga tshul gcig du lta*). This is repeated, more or less exactly, in the definitions of the view in the two doxographical texts. *The Seven Great Scriptural Systems* says:

In Mahāyoga secret mantra the view is that the five families are seen in a single mode. Moreover, the five great elements are the female deity, and the objects formed from them are the male deity. Because they abide pervasively in everything, everything is seen as *nirvāṇa* without self or other.²²

While in the other doxographical text, we have:

In the deity system of Mahāyoga the five families are seen in a single mode.²³

²¹ While *lta ba* is used in Tibetan translation for Skt. *darśana* or *dr̥ṣṭi*, in the Tibetan exegetical tradition it generally has the specific signification of the philosophical or gnoseological insight that characterizes a particular system of thought and practice. Thus in the Dunhuang doxographies and later Rnying ma exegesis there is a different ‘view’ associated with each of the Buddhist vehicles.

²² Pelliot tibétain 656 l.24: gsang sngags ma ha yo ga lta ba ni / rigs lnga tshul gcig du lta / de yang ’byung ba chen po lnga ni yum / de las gzug [25] su gyur pa ni yab / thams cad la khyab par gnas pas / bdag dang gzhan myed ngan las ’das pa lta ba’o /

²³ IOL Tib J 644 1v.5: ma ha yo ga’i lha rgyud ni / rigs lnga tshul gcig par lta /

This was clearly a popular formulation of the difference between Mahāyoga and other, earlier tantric systems.²⁴ So what might it mean? The “five families” are the five buddha families, a *maṇḍala* formulation that is implicit in the *Sarvatathāgatattvasamgraha* and appears in fully developed form in tantras such as the *Guhyasamāja* and *Guhyagarbha*. Indeed, in the opening passages of the early-period Tibetan translation of the *Guhyasamāja* all forms of buddhas and bodhisattvas are absorbed into the body of Mahāvairocana. Then at the beginning of the next section of the tantra we have the following statement:

Then the *tathāgata* Akṣobhya, the *tathāgata* Vairocana, the *tathāgata* Ratnaketu, the *tathāgata* Amitābha and the *tathāgata* Amoghavajra resided together in the heart of the *tathāgata* Bodhicittavajra.²⁵

The remainder of the first chapter consists of the transcendent buddha re-emerging as the five buddha-families and their consorts. Both of the passages quoted above can be found in the somewhat fragmentary first pages of the Dunhuang manuscript of the *Guhyasamāja*. This manuscript contains interlinear notation throughout; the note to the second of the two quotations reads: “then the buddhas of the five families resided in the body of Vajrasattva”.²⁶ This identification of the supreme buddha who embodies all five families as Vajrasattva is significant, for we see it again and again in the Dunhuang manuscripts, in an apparent smoothing-over of the different names for the transcendent deity found in the *Guhyasamāja* and elsewhere. For example, our manuscript of notes of Mahāyoga, IOL Tib J 583, also contains the following prayer to Vajrasattva:

The five families are a single mode, inseparable by nature,
But due to the need for training, the five families teach individually;
The omniscient Bodies are without limits;
To the inseparable wisdom Body I pay homage.

Although the aggregate of wisdom is like space,
Body, Speech and Mind are the great embodiment.
Please come from the place
Where all emanations originate, O Vajrasattva.²⁷

Here, by implication Vajrasattva is the embodiment of the five buddhas. *The Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva* seems to presuppose the eminence of this deity in its very title, and this is made explicit in the first two questions and answers in the text. The answer to the second question states:

²⁴ Note however that the “single mode” is not discussed by Gnubs Sangs rgyas ye shes in his treatment of Mahāyoga in the *Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation*. It is also absent from Gnyan dPal dbyang’s works on Mahāyoga. Possibly it derives from a distinct lineage of Mahāyoga exegesis.

²⁵ Tn.409: 55.6: / de nas de bzhin gshegs pa rdo rje mi bskyod pa dang / de bzhin gshegs [7] pa rin chen dpal dang / de bzhin gshegs pa tshe dpag tu med pa dang / de bzhin gshegs pa rdo rje gdon mi za bar grub pa dang / de bzhin gshegs pa rnam par snang mdzad rnam [56.1] de bzhin gshegs pa byang chub kyi sems rdo rje’i thugs la bzhugs so /

Most of this passage, with no significant variation, is found in IOL Tib J 481: 1v.5 and IOL Tib J 438: 1r.1

²⁶ IOL Tib J 481 1v.5 (*mchan ’grel*): de nas rigs lnga’i sangs rgyas rdo rje sems pa’i skur bzhugs so //

²⁷ IOL Tib J 583 v9.3: // rigs lnga tshul [4] gcig rang bzhin dbyer myed yang // [5] btul pa’i dbang gyis rigs lnga so sor [v10.1] bstan // thams cad mkhyen pa’i sku [2] ni mtha’ dag myed // dbyer myed ye shes [3] sku la phyag ’tshal lo // ye shes phung po mkha [4] ’dra yang sku sku gsung thugs ni bdag [5] nyId che // <spu> sprul pa kun gyis [v11.1] ’byung gnas nas rdo rje sem pa gshegs [2] su gsol //

He is identical to the matchless realization of nonproduction of all conquerors of the
 three times;
 He is the nature of them all, the mind of the ocean of sugātas.
 Because he is the genuine basis for all the marks
 Of Body, Speech and Mind, he is taught as the supreme one.²⁸

We also find ample evidence for the primary role of Vajrasattva in the Dunhuang *sādhana* material. Indeed, it is a striking fact that the majority of the *sādhana*s which might be categorized as Mahāyoga based on the criteria of the *Summary* (discussed in the next section) involve self-visualization as Vajrasattva.²⁹ In one of these *sādhana*s, Vajrasattva is visualised as appearing from a *vajra* in which the five spokes represent the buddhas of the five families, and he wears a crown with the buddhas of the five families.³⁰ Furthermore, in the *sādhana*s which focus on the practice of “union” (on which, see below), the male practitioner is visualized as Vajrasattva, often with the deities of the five families visualized internally at different points of his body. These are clear instances from the ritual texts of the meaning of the “single mode”. To give one final, visual, example, we also have a painting of Vajrasattva on a ritual item which I mentioned in the previous section (see Figure 1). On this item, Vajrasattva is clearly wearing the crown of the five buddha families, a visual implication of his role as the embodiment of all five families.³¹

The assignment of this role to Vajrasattva can be seen in the later Tibetan tradition as well, and not only within the Nyingma school. The Sakya patriarch Bsod nams rtshe mo (1142–1182) is credited with the statement that Vajrasattva should be considered the principal deity because of his ability to cause any of the buddha families to manifest.³² This is essentially the same point made in the *Summary*, though Vajrasattva is not mentioned explicitly there. In the later tradition, the role of Vajrasattva seems to have been somewhat weakened as the deity became primarily associated with the purification practice of the tantric preliminaries (*sngon 'gro*).³³

The five families that are contained within the “single mode” are of course the standard five buddhas and their consorts. In the *Summary* and other sources, the female deities are said to represent the “five great elements” (*'byung ba chen po*), while the male deities

²⁸ From the critical edition in Takahashi forthcoming: [Q2] / rdo rje sems dpa' ni dus gsum gyi de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi thugs rdo rje/ lags la/ sku gsung thugs kyi bdag po lags so zhes bya ba'i don ci lta bu lags// dus gsum rgyal bas skye med rtogs par mnyam / / kun gyi rang bzhin bde bshegs rgya mtsho'i thugs // sku gsung thugs kyi mtshan ma ci snyed pa'i// dngos gzhi nyid du gyur pas bdag por bshad/

²⁹ Such *sādhana*s include IOL Tib J 331/2, 464/1, 552, 553, 554, 716/1, 754/8; Pelliot tibétain 245.

³⁰ This is in IOL Tib J 552 4r.6–5r.4.

³¹ This item is IOL Tib J 1364.

³² For a discussion of Vajrasattva's role as principal deity, and this statement in particular, see Snellgrove 1987: 220–223.

³³ Note that the purification practice from the tantric preliminaries employs the imagery of the descent (*'babs*) of the flow of *bodhicitta*, and in some cases, for example the preliminaries of the *Klong chen snying thig* Vajrasattva is visualized in union with a consort, making explicit the connection with the practice of union (many translations are available; probably the most easily acquired is the commentary by Dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po: Patrul Rinpoche 1998). Note also the so-called “hundred syllable mantra” of Vajrasattva, which is always associated with the purification practice, appears on the verso of the final folio of the Great Perfection text IOL Tib J 647, with the instruction that it is to be recited before the precepts (*lung*) of the main text can be received (see van Schaik 2004b: 175–176). The hundred-syllable mantra also appears on the final folio of IOL Tib J 581, which may possibly be included among our Mahāyoga material, as it contains imagery from the *sādhana*s of union, especially in the final line: “[the goddesses] play by offering the secret nonduality” (3v.2: *gnyis myed gsang ba'i mchod pas rol*).

represent the forms made up from those elements. This statement is characteristic of the *Guhya garbha*.³⁴

Before we move on I would like to note, without drawing any conclusions, that the “single mode” (*tshul gcig*) is also a common term in Tibetan Chan literature. In the Tibetan Chan manuscripts (also from the Dunhuang collections), the “single mode” (*yi xing* 一行 in Chinese) signifies the method of simultaneous (*cig car*) realization through non-conceptualization (*mi rtogs*) or non-fixation (*mi dmigs*). The idea that there could be a single mode for realization was contentious within Chan, and was one of the distinguishing features of the split between the so-called northern and southern schools.³⁵ We see both positions represented in the Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts.³⁶

(ii) NON-FIXATION, SAMENESS AND THE BUDDHA AS ONE’S OWN MIND

The second common way of formulating the Mahāyoga view can be seen in the following quotation from *Tantric Notes II*:

The view of Mahāyoga: Phenomena are neither existents nor non-existents. Having renounced purity and impurity, “not renouncing” and “not obtaining” are one in space. Whoever understands the true state of Vajrasattva becomes him. Since one’s own mind is the path to liberation, nothing will come of seeking it anywhere else.³⁷

This passage (apart from the last sentence, which I will come back to shortly) is a version of the view strongly based in the *prajñāpāramitā* texts, though without recourse to the specific arguments of the Madhyamaka literature. Turning to a canonical source from the same period, we see a very similar definition of the view of Mahāyoga given by Gnyan dPal dbyangs in his *Lamp for the Mind*:

The meaning of the view of Mahāyoga is this:
If it is sought in existence that is a superimposition;
If it is sought in nonexistence that is a depreciation;
If it is sought in both existence and nonexistence,
It would become indeterminate.
Since it is not connected with any other [state]
It will never be found.
All debate regarding the extremes is thus
Free from these three and free from all biased extremes,
Which are the manifestations of one’s own deluded intellect.
Consequently, this is the ultimate view.³⁸

³⁴ See for example the description of the generation of the maṇḍala in chapter 6 of this tantra.

³⁵ See the discussion of *ting nge ’dzin tshul gcig* in van Schaik and Dalton 2004: 67. See also the translation of the *Text on the Single Mode of Non-fixation* (*Dmyigs su myed pa tshul gcig pa’i gzhung*) in Faber 1985. On the controversy related to this term in Chinese Chan see Faure 1997: 67–69.

³⁶ For example, IOL Tib J 710/1 contains a detailed critique of the idea that a single mode is suitable for all, and IOL Tib J 709/4 argues for a multiplicity of methods contained in the so-called single mode. Other treatises, especially those from named Chinese masters, often lean more toward the single mode approach; see for example the treatise of Gal na yas in IOL Tib J 709/8.

³⁷ IOL Tib J 508/8 v5.2–v6.1: / rnal ’byor chen po ’i lta ba la // dngos po dngos po myed pa’i chos // dag cing ma dag rnam spang nas ma spangs ma blangs dbyings su gcig // rdo rje sems dpa’i ngang nyid la gang shig shes pa der ’gro ’o // bdag sems thar pa’i lam las ni gzhan las btsal bar myi ’byung ’o /

³⁸ *Thugs kyi sgron ma*, 377r: rnal ’byor chen po lta ba’i don // yod las btsal na sgros btags te // med las btsal na skur btab ’gyur // yod med gnyis las btsal byas na // de ni lung du ma bstan ’gyur // de la gzhan yang ’brel med pas // nam yang rnyed par mi ’gyur te // mtha’ la rtsod kun de lta bas // gsum bral phyogs gcig mtha’ bral ba // rang blo ’khrul pa snang ba yin //

This kind of *prajñāpāramitā*-based discourse is seen in much of tantric literature. In many sources it is expressed as “non-fixation” (*myi dmyigs*), a term that occurs across the spectrum of sutra and tantra, and therefore attractive to exegetes seeking to associate the tantras with the philosophical position of the sutras.³⁹ A striking instance of this appears in one passage from the Mahāyoga Notes: “According to the scriptures of Chan, Sūtra and Mantra, the view is non-fixation.”⁴⁰ Is there any basis for this highly syncretic statement? The longer Madhusādhū treatise does offer a definition of non-fixation (*myi dmyigs*):

Non-fixation means that the dharmakāya, or the space of reality, pervades all phenomena, and in wherever is pervaded by that space is nondual with the wisdom of awareness. [Thus] not to fixate on substances and characteristics is to be pervaded by the dharmakāya.⁴¹

Indeed, along with its occurrence in the tantras and sūtras, *non-fixation* is also found throughout the Tibetan Chan texts. The statement that the view of non-fixation is found throughout “the scriptures of Chan, Sūtra and Mantra” may just reflect an awareness that this term was used in a variety of traditions, but we should also keep in mind the syncretic tendencies of Tibetan Chan.⁴²

Another important way of expressing the view of Mahāyoga in the Dunhuang manuscripts is in terms of “oneness” (*gcig tu*) or “sameness” (*mnyam nyid*). For an example let us look again at *Tantric Notes II*:

What does it mean to “cut through phenomena”? Whatever exists, it is all based on the five great [elements]. Even the great [elements] themselves do not exist. Thus, everything — proof and refutation, self and other, virtue and sin, purity and dirt and so on — is shown to be nothing whatsoever. Everything is non-dual. This is known as *sameness*.⁴³

The concept of sameness is described as one of the ways of formulating the Mahāyoga view by Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes in his *Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation*:

According to some spiritual guides (the masters Padmasambhava and Madhusādhū) the view of Mahāyoga is sameness. They (the arguments, scriptural sources and esoteric instructions on sameness) say that there is sameness in ultimate, in conventional, in the nonduality of the truths, that the five great elements are the same as the five *tathāgatas*, and that the eight consciousnesses are the same as the five wisdoms. I will

³⁹ It is particularly common in the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras. In the tantras, see for example *Guhyagarbha* chapter 5 (Tb.417:168.2): ‘jigs pas dmigs med shes par gyis/. While the *Mahāvīryūtpatti* (4461) gives the Sanskrit equivalents *anupalabdhi* and *anupalabdhibetuh*, in the current context the original Sanskrit term may be **nirālambana* or **anālambana*.

⁴⁰ IOL Tib J 508/4 r19.3–5: lta ba ni bsam gtan dang/ mdo sde dang sngags gyi gzhang zhes dmyigs su myed de.

⁴¹ IOL Tib J 454 l.195: myi dmyigs [196] zhes pa ni / chos kyi sku ste / chos kyi dbyings kyim chos can thams cad la khyab pa dang / dbyings kyis gar khyab par rig [197] pa’i ye shes kyis gnyis myed pa / dngos pa dang mtshan mar myi dmyigs pa chos kyi skus kyab khyab bo /

⁴² On syncretism at Dunhuang see van Schaik and Dalton 2004 and Meinert 2007.

⁴³ IOL Tib J 508/9 v12.3–5: / de la chos gyi la gcad pa gang zhes na / ci snyed du srid pa de dag thams shad / ched po lnga las brten zhang/ (Pelliot tibétain 288 v1.1–5) ched po nyid kyang myed te / de bzhin du thams shad / sun phyung dang / bdag dang gzhen zhes ’am / dge sdig dang / gtsang smyes zhes bya ba la bstogs ste / gang yang myed par mngon te /

[v2.1] thams shad gnyis su myed na / mnyam pa nyid [2] ces bya ’o /

not go into the arguments for these at length as it would only increase the number of words.⁴⁴

In fact, Gnubs chen does continue with a detailed account of each kind of sameness. Other accounts of the Mahāyoga view are offered by Gnubs chen, with the names of those who taught them given in the interlinear notes: the non-duality of buddhas and sentient beings, attributed to Dga' rab rdo rje; all phenomena as buddhahood in reflexive wisdom — *bodhicitta*, attributed to Padmakāra; the union of insight (*shes rab*) and means (*thabs*), attributed to Buddhaguhya; the great embodiment (*bdag nyid chen po*), attributed to Ska ba dpal ba rtsegs; nonduality, attributed to Gnyan dPal dbyangs; sameness, attributed to Padmasambhava and Madhusādhu; that all phenomena are the vase of *bodhicitta* filled with the *vajra* water, attributed to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's *Guhyasamāja* exegesis.⁴⁵

In any case, we can confirm that the view of sameness was associated with the otherwise mysterious master Madhusādhu. In the Dunhuang treatise associated with Madhusādhu, we find the following definition of *sameness*:

Sameness means not being distinct from the dharmakāya. The manifestation of the dharmakāya is the sambhogakāya, which does not move away from the dharmakāya without characteristics. Although the different kinds of characteristics of the sambhogakāya come forth and manifest, they are empty in their very manifestation. They [do not] move away from being without characteristics. This nonduality is called *sameness*.⁴⁶

The term *sameness* appears with particular frequency in the *Guhyagarbha*, a text which seems to have influenced the work of Madhusādhu, as I have shown elsewhere.⁴⁷

Now we can return to the last sentence in the quotation that began this section: "One's own mind is the path to liberation and there is no striving for anything else." This is very similar indeed to another passage from the Madhusādhu text:

Your own mind is primordial purity and buddhahood, and to comprehend that mind is primordial purity and buddhahood is to be accomplished as a buddha, to see the face of a buddha, and to hold a buddha in your hand. Therefore, it is sufficient to realise mind's reality. It is not necessary to seek buddhahood anywhere other than in the mind.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ STMG: 210.5–211.1: dge bshes (slob dpon padma dang ma du sa du'i bzhed) kha cig ni mahā yo ga'i lta ba ni mnyam pa nyid du bzhed de / de (mnyam pa'i gtan tshigs pa lung man ngag gsum) yang don dam par mnyam pa dang / kun rdzob du mnyam pa dang / bden pa gnyis su med par mnyam pa dang / chen po lnga de bzhin gshegs pa lngar mnyam pa dang rnam par shes pa brgyad ye shes lngar mnyam pa dang lngar gsungs na / de dag gi gtan tshigs rgyas par ni yi ge mangs te 'gro bas ma bgod do /

⁴⁵ STMG: 191–216. Note that the reference to the Ārya school of *Guhyasamāja* exegesis here is the only example that I have seen of an awareness of this tradition and its contents before the later diffusion of Tibetan Buddhism (*phyi dar*).

⁴⁶ IOL Tib J 454 l. 197: mnyam nyid zhes [198] pa ni / chos kyi sku las myi gzhan pa / chos kyi sku nyid snang ba'i long spyod rdzogs pa'i sku ste / chos kyi sku mtshan myed pa / [199] la ma g.yos bzhin / longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku mtshan ma'I rnam par yang 'byung zhing snang la / snang bzhin du stong ste / [200] mtshan myed pa las g.yos te / gnyis su myed pa ni mnyam pa nyid ces bya ste /

⁴⁷ See for example *Guhyagarbha* chapter 5 (Tb.417: 168.5): *mnyam par bzhag pas btul nas su* /.

⁴⁸ IOL Tib J 454 ll.88–92: yang na rang gyl sems ye nas rnam par dag cing sangs rgyas pa yin dang / sems ye nas rnam par dag cing sangs rgyas pa yin pa'i don rtogs pa ni sangs rgyas su grub pa 'am / sangs rgyas kyi zhal mthong ba 'am / sangs rgyas lag tu 'ongs zin pa yin pas / sems kyi chos nyid rtogs pa kho nas chog / sems la gzhan du sangs rgyas btsal myi dgos / sangs rgyas sems las btsal na /

The same emphasis on the practitioner's own mind is found in *The Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva*. The shorter Madhusādhū text (IOL Tib J 508) combines the statement that one's own mind is the buddha with the concept of sameness:

You won't find the Buddha-bhagavān in any of the ten directions or the three times. Look in your own mind and you will find him. If the nature of your own mind is realized without mistake, all inner and outer phenomena have the significance of the two aspects of sameness. This occurs through realizing the meaning of abiding in buddhahood.⁴⁹

Thus we have numerous sources among the Dunhuang manuscripts, explicitly identifying themselves in the category of Mahāyoga, which define the view according to the related ideas of sameness / nonduality and the presence of the buddha in the realization of one's own mind. These ways of expressing the view, found in the Dpal dbyangs and Madhusādhū works and in various of the Dunhuang manuscripts, is essentially identical to that found in the early Great Perfection texts.

I have argued elsewhere that the early function of the Great Perfection was primarily a mode (*tsbul*) of deity yoga practice, or an expression of a view to be held while undertaking these practices.⁵⁰ It fitted into the scheme of development (*bskyed*), perfection (*rdzogs*) and great perfection (*rdzogs chen*) found in Padmasambhava's *Garland of Views* and elsewhere. It is clear from Dpal dbyangs' *Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva* that all three were to be applied within the context of Mahāyoga. In this text, which is explicitly set out as an explication of Mahāyoga, we have much discussion of the practice of deity yoga in the context of freedom from effort. The different modes of engaging in deity-yoga are explained as follows:

When, as in the example of a king appointing a minister,
The accomplishments are granted from above, this is the exoteric mode.

When the kingdom is ruled having been offered by the people,
This is the mode of the unsurpassable, self-arisen great perfection.⁵¹

So the sense that the mode of effortlessness should be included within Atiyoga rather than Mahāyoga is not found in the *Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva*.⁵²

On the other hand, the doxographical texts, which do distinguish Mahāyoga from Anuyoga and Atiyoga, define the view of Mahāyoga primarily in terms of the "single mode" and not nonduality or sameness. It is possible that the doxographical texts belong to a later stratum; later, that is, than *The Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva* and the Madhusādhū works (in which there is no mention of classes of tantra higher than Mahāyoga), perhaps

⁴⁹ IOL Tib J 508: sangs rgyas bcom / ldan 'das phyogs bcu dus gsum gang nas kyang rnyed par myl 'gyur gi / rang gI sem / btsal dang rnyed par 'gyur te / sems kyi rang bzhin phyin 'chi ma log par rtogsna / phyI nang / gI chos thams cad kyi rang bzhIn yang mnyam ba nyid rnam gnyIs kyi don kyIs / : / sangs rgyas par gnas pa'I don rtogs pas 'gyur ro /

⁵⁰ See van Schaik 2004b.

⁵¹ From the edition in Takahashi forthcoming: [Q9] / rnal 'byor pas dngos grub thob pa'i khyad par ci ltar mchis / / dper na rgyal pos blon po bskos pa ltar / / grub pa gong nas byin pa phyi'i tsbul / / 'bangs kyis rgyal srid phul nas dbang sgyur ltar / / rang 'byung rdzogs chen bla na myed pa'i tsbul /

⁵² The term Atiyoga does appear in the interlinear notes to IOL Tib J 470, one of the versions of the *Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva*, but this copy, and its notes, are almost certainly much later than the text itself, possibly as late as the end of the tenth century.

as late as the second half of the tenth century. Clearly, due to its similarity to the doxographical texts, the *Summary* would also belong to the later stratum. It is in this putative later stratum the themes of nonduality, nonconceptualization and spontaneous presence become the province of Anuyoga and Atiyoga.⁵³ At the same time the “single mode” becomes the characteristic feature of the Mahāyoga view, filling the space left in Mahāyoga by the migration of the themes of nonduality and sameness to Anuyoga and Atiyoga.

More research on the period following these tenth century Dunhuang texts may reveal further connections with later exegetical styles among the Nyingmapas. Of particular relevance here are the two traditions of *Gubhyagarbha* exegesis known as the Zur tradition and the Rong-Klong tradition.⁵⁴ The Zur tradition of Mahāyoga, developed by Zur po che Śākya 'byung gnas and his lineage, considered the definition of distinct views for each of the vehicles of yoga to exclude the possibility of applying the approach of Atiyoga, or anything like that approach, to Mahāyoga. In effect, this meant that an unqualified account of the path as nondual, nonconceptual and spontaneously present was not appropriate to the exegesis of Mahāyoga. In this the Zur tradition seems to have followed the lead of Gnubs Sangs rgyas ye shes; their approach fits well with the later stratum of Mahāyoga exegesis in the Dunhuang manuscripts – represented by the *Summary* and the doxographical texts. On the other hand, the method of exegesis represented by Rong zom pa and Klong chen pa adopted of the distinction between the views of the yogic vehicles, but considered it appropriate to apply the view of Atiyoga to Mahāyoga exegesis. In this regard the Rong-Klong tradition is closer to the earlier stratum of Mahāyoga exegesis, as seen in the works of Gnyan dPal dbyangs and the Madhusādhu treatises.⁵⁵

The three concentrations

In a brief section on meditation, the *Summary* defines Mahāyoga meditation in the context of three concentrations (*ting nge 'dzin*, Skt. *samādhi*). The *Seven Great Scriptural Systems* also puts it succinctly:

Developing the three aspects in stages is meditation.⁵⁶

These three are well represented in the Dunhuang *sādhana* material, as well as in the later Nyingma tradition.⁵⁷ They are:

⁵³ Note that Anuyoga, as it is defined in the Dunhuang texts (IOL Tib J 656 and Pelliot tibétain 644), is similar to Atiyoga in having no meditative or ritual content. According to IOL Tib J 656 (l.30) the practice of Anuyoga is union and liberation (*sbyor sgröl*) but this is also said of Mahāyoga in the same text. Both of the emergent categories of Anuyoga and Atiyoga clearly show their basis as modes (*tsbul*) of the view in the practice of Mahāyoga, concordant with the modes of development, perfection and great perfection in *The Rosary of Views*.

⁵⁴ There have been no published studies on the Zur and Rong-Klong traditions of exegesis, but see Garson 2004.

⁵⁵ The Zur tradition of exegesis presents itself as preserving the Indic exegetical tradition of Vilāsavajra, Buddhaguhya and Vimalamitra. The Rong-Klong tradition, on the other hand, is linked to the *Gubhyagarbha* commentary of Sūryasimhaprabha. It is certainly true that the latter commentary uses the vocabulary later to be characterised as Atiyoga, and is similar in its approach to the Mahāyoga works of Gnyan dPal dbyangs and Madhusādhu. However, a deeper analysis of the historical development of the *Gubhyagarbha* exegetical tradition is required before such general observations can be warranted.

⁵⁶ Pelliot tibétain 656 l.26: rnam s gsum rims kyis bskyed de bsgom ba'o /

⁵⁷ For a translation and edition of a nineteenth-century treatise in which the three concentrations are discussed (by 'Jam mgon kong sprul blo 'gros mtha' yas), see Jamgön Kongtrül 2004.

- (i) the concentration on suchness (*de bzhin nyid*)
- (ii) the concentration on total illumination (*kun tu snang ba*)
- (iii) the concentration on the cause (*rgyu*)

These three concentrations are a schematic for the stages in meditation, based on earlier systems, especially the five enlightenments (*abhisambodhi*) of the *Tattvasamgraha*.⁵⁸ Discussions of the three concentrations feature in several manuscripts, with considerable consistency in the way they are described.⁵⁹ The most extensive treatment is probably that found in IOL Tib J 437/2, a short treatise devoted to the subject, from which the following summary of the three is primarily drawn.

(i) THE CONCENTRATION ON SUCHNESS

The author of IOL Tib J 437 states that conceptualization is the cause of *samsāra*, and therefore one needs to meditate nonconceptually as an antidote to conceptualization. He goes on to offer a syllable-by-syllable definition of the Tibetan term for “suchness” (*de bzhin nyid*). Note that this Tibetan etymology (which we also see in the longer Madhusādhū treatise) implies a well-developed Tibetan tradition of tantric exegesis at this time.

Regarding the definition of meditation: *De* means to remain in the state of the totally pure space of reality, unborn even from the very beginning and unceasing even at the end. *Bzhin* means clarity without center or periphery due to the wisdom of reflexive awareness within that unborn state. *Nyid* means realization.⁶⁰

The meditation on suchness is situated in the context of the space of reality (*chos kyi dbyings*, Skt. *dharmadhātu*) which is defined as “pure from the beginning” (*ye nas rnam par dag pa*). The true nature of phenomena is said to be natural authenticity (*rang bzhin kyi rnal ma*) and unborn *bodhicitta* (*skyes pa myed pa'i byang chub kyi sems*). The meditator is instructed not to think of anything at all (*ci la yang myi sems*), not to abide anywhere (*myi gnas*) or to be attached to anything (*myi chags*).⁶¹

In these meditation instructions on the suchness concentration we can see many aspects of the discourses on the view of Mahāyoga discussed in the previous section. The suchness concentration places this kind of discourse on nonduality and nonconceptualization at the beginning of any Mahāyoga meditation practice, so that the visualizations emerge from the state of nonconceptualization.

It should be added that a number of Dunhuang *sādhana*s insert a preliminary visualization before the concentration on suchness. This involves the visualization of syllables (usually three) at the main physical centres, which emit light and purify the meditator's conceptual mind.⁶² This is then followed by the non-conceptual meditation on suchness.

Three concentrations, though not the same as these, are discussed in the *Sarvatathāgatattattvasamgraha* (see Weinberger 2003: 64–65).

⁵⁸ See Garson 2004: 35–36, 51–55 and the first chapter of Weinberger 2003.

⁵⁹ See IOL Tib J 437, 552, 553, 554, 716; Or.8210/S.95/7; Pelliot tibétain 42 (26–29), 283, 634.

⁶⁰ IOL Tib J 437 2v/15r.3: sgom pa'i nges tshig ni / de zhes bya ba ni / gte thog ma nyid nas kyang ma skyes / mtha' mar yang ma [4] 'gegs // chos kyi dbyings rnam par dag pa'i ngang la gnas pa la bya // bzhin zhes bya ba ni / de ltar ma skyes pa'i ngang [5] las rang rig pa'i ye shes kyis mtha' dbus myed par gsal la bya / nyi ces bya ba ni / rtogs pa 'o //

⁶¹ IOL Tib J 437 2v/15r.3.7–9.

⁶² See IOL Tib J 716 R1.1–12; Pelliot tibétain 626 1a; Pelliot tibétain 634 1r. See also the *sādhana* IOL Tib J 331/1, which is devoted to this practice alone, and is attributed to Mañjuśrīmitra.

The author of IOL Tib J 437/2 includes two citations from tantras in his discussion of the suchness meditation. The first is rather long, but as it is one of the few citations from the *Guhyagarbha* in the Dunhuang manuscripts, it is worth quoting here in full:

Emā'o! This teaching, secret from the beginning,
Has been spoken by all the perfect buddhas.

All birth comes from the unborn,
Birth itself is unborn.

Emā! This amazing and marvellous teaching
Has been spoken by all the perfect buddhas.

All cessation comes from the unceasing,
Cessation itself is unceasing.

Emā! This amazing and marvellous teaching,
Has been spoken by all the perfect buddhas.

All abides in the unabiding,
Abiding itself is unabiding.

Emā! This amazing and marvellous teaching,
Has been spoken by all the perfect buddhas.

All fixation comes from nonfixation,
Fixation itself is nonfixation.

Emā! This amazing and marvellous teaching,
Has been spoken by all the perfect buddhas.

All movement comes from the unmoving,
Movement itself is unmoving.⁶³

These verses are identical to those that appear at the end of chapter two of the *Guhyagarbha*, where they are spoken on the subject of generating oneself as the wisdom mind of primordial buddhahood.⁶⁴ However, the name of the tantra is not mentioned here. The author of IOL Tib J 437/2 also cites the following verse from the *Guhyasamāja*:

The lack of essence is the essence of meditation;
To practise meditation is not meditation.

If you meditate on essence and the lack of essence,
Meditation is without fixation.⁶⁵

⁶³ IOL Tib J 437 15v/3r.2: e ma 'o ye nas gsang ba'i chos / rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kun kyis gsungs // skye pa myed las thams [3] cad skyes / skyes pa nyid na skye pa myed // e ma ngo tshar rmad <rmad> kyi chos // rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kun kyis gsungs / [4] 'gags myed las thams cad 'gag // 'gag pa nyid na <thams cad> 'gag +pa myed+ / e ma ngo tshar rmad kyi chos // [5] rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kun kyis gsungs // gnas pa myed na thams cad gnas / gnas pa nyid la gnas pa myed / [6] e ma ngo tshar rmad kyi chos // rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kun kyis gsangs // dmyigs pa myed las thams cad [7] dmyigs // dmyigs pa nyid na dmyigs pa myed / e ma ngo tshar rmad kyi chos // rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kun kyis [8] gsangs // 'gro la myed las thams cad 'gro / 'gro 'ong nyid na 'gro 'ong myed / ces brjod nas /

⁶⁴ See Tb.417: 158. The only consistent deviation from the canonical version is the repeated phrase *rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kun kyis gsungs*, as the last syllable is *gsang* in the canonical versions. Thus "This amazing and marvellous teaching / Is the secret of all the perfect buddhas."

⁶⁵ IOL Tib J 437 3v.2: rgyud nyid las dam pa'i don du bsgom pa ni // [3] dngos po myed par bsgom pa'i dngos // bsgom par bya ba bsgom ma yin // dngos dang dngos myed bsgom pas na / bsgom pa [4] dmyigs su myed pa 'o // zhes 'byung ste /

These lines also appear in a similar context in Pelliot tibétain 42 v2.2–3. The version of these verses found in these two manuscripts is similar, though not identical, to the Dunhuang manuscript version (IOL Tib J 438 8v.4) and the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* version (Tb.409: 767.1–2).

This verse, which appears in several other manuscripts as well, seems to have been popular in tantric exegesis at Dunhuang.⁶⁶ These two citations give us a clear view of the tantric sources used for the explication of the first of the three concentrations. Most explanations of the three concentrations seem to be wholly based on such tantric sources. However certain Dunhuang texts seem to draw on Chan terminology in their descriptions of the suchness concentration.⁶⁷ Two commentaries, Pelliot tibétain 626 and 634 (both on the same root text and written in the same hand) associate the suchness concentration with the Chan practice of “viewing the mind” (*sems la lta*).⁶⁸ In this practice the mind is examined for features like shapes and colours, and consequently found to exist nowhere.

Techniques of introspective analysis are not unique to Chan Buddhism, but it is striking that they are found in the writings of the Northern Chan schools in conjunction with the phrase “viewing the mind” (Ch. *kan xin* 看心) and also in the Dunhuang Chan manuscripts, including the fragments attributed to the Chan master Heshang Moheyan.⁶⁹ Furthermore, in IOL Tib J 626 and 634 the mental state resulting from the suchness concentration is described as non-thought (*mi bsam*), non-conceptualization (*mi rtog*), and not engaging the mind (*yid la mi byed pa*), three important terms in Tibetan Chan, including the texts attributed to Moheyan.⁷⁰ Yet despite the striking concordances found in these two manuscripts, and the more general shared meditation practice of not thinking (*mi sems / bsam*) no such obvious syncretism is found in other treatments of the suchness concentration.

(ii) THE CONCENTRATION ON TOTAL ILLUMINATION

According to IOL Tib J 437/2, the purpose of this concentration is to purify concepts, to be comfortable in the arising of the illusory manifestations, and to be able to visualize the *maṇḍala* and the palace with ease. The actual meditation instructions are given in series of poetic similes:

Like the emptiness of the sky, appearance shines forth as appearance, and emptiness shines forth as emptiness. It is wisdom like a moon-disc [reflected] in water, and it pervades deep space without center or limits. Thus it is known as *concentration on total illumination*. It is also called *concentration on emptiness, the clear bliss of method, the opening for forms, or the seed of the arising forms*. Meditate without wavering from the state of the great compassion, like the surface of an empty sky, or the reflected forms of the sun, moon, planets, and stars vividly appearing on a clear lake, or a mirror without nature or characteristics, or a lake at dawn.⁷¹

⁶⁶ The verse appears in descriptions of the concentration on suchness in IOL Tib J 552 (1v) and 553 (1v), and in a longer citation from the tantra in Pelliot tibétain 42 (38).

⁶⁷ I have previously discussed this material in an article co-authored with Jacob Dalton. See van Schaik and Dalton 2004.

⁶⁸ PT626 f. 2v.6, PT634 f. 1v.1 (*mchan 'grel*).

⁶⁹ See IOL Tib J 468 2r.4–5; STMG 146.6–147.2; PT823, recto f. 1.4 (translated in Gomez, 1983: 109, 119, 126). On *kan xin* see Meinert 2006: 251–262.

⁷⁰ See 1983: 152 n. 43.

⁷¹ IOL Tib J 437 4v/5r.1: kun snang gyi ting nge 'dzin sgom ba'i thabs ni//nam ka 'i stong bzhin du snang snang bzhin du [2] stong la stong bzhin du gsal//ye shes chu zla'i dkyil 'khor dang 'dra bar//mkha' gting dbus mtha' [3] myed par khyab pas // kun tu snang ba'i ting nge 'dzin zhes bya / thabs gyi [4] bde sel zhes kyang bya//gzugs gi go byed zhes kyang bya / gzugs 'byung ba'i drgyu zhes kyang bya ste/ nam ga bstod pa'i ngos blta [5] bu 'am/ mtsho dangs pi nang na nyi zla gza skar gi gzugs gnyan gsal par snang yang/ rang bzhin dang mtshon ma myed [6] pa rgya long kha bsdu 'dra bu 'am/ nam nangs pi mtsho 'dra bur bsnyin rje chen po'i ngang las ma g.yos par bsgom mo /

The main themes that emerge here are openness and light. As the various names for this stage of meditation suggest, this is a preparation for the appearance of the forms of the deities. Another important aspect of the concentration on suchness, appearing here and in most other treatments, is the generation of compassion. In some *sādhana*s, specific contemplation of the suffering of sentient beings is recommended.⁷² This emphasis on compassion as an integral part of meditation places the practice in the general context of sūtric Mahāyāna. The same can be said for the first concentration, which in its emphasis on the lack of birth and cessation draws heavily on the discussion of emptiness in *prajñāpāramitā* literature. Thus it is clearly a function of the first two concentrations to locate the *sādhana* in the context of Mahāyāna sūtric discourse, emphasising a continuity between the latter and tantric meditation techniques.

Additionally, the combination of compassion with the idea of total pervasion prefigures the definitions of the “basis” (*gzhi*) in later great perfection (*rdzogs chen*) literature. One Dunhuang *sādhana* explains in more detail how compassion pervades all sentient beings because it arises from the wisdom body (*jñānasattva*); intriguingly, this *sādhana* is said to be based on “the tantras of secret mantra and the sūtras of the great perfection.”⁷³

Finally, in discussing the concentration on total illumination, the author of IOL Tib J 437/2 adds another tantra citation:

Everything has the characteristic of the sky,
Yet the sky has no characteristics.

Through the sky-like yoga,
All objects are clarified as equal.⁷⁴

Once again the tantra is not identified, but we do find the same quote elsewhere in the Dunhuang Mahāyoga manuscripts, in IOL Tib J 454 and 508, where it is attributed to the *Śrīparamādyā*, a tantra which is often included in list of the Eighteen Mahāyoga tantras. The lines do indeed appear in the *Śrīparamādyā*, where they are attributed to “the *prajñāpāramitā*.”⁷⁵

(iii) THE CONCENTRATION ON THE CAUSE

The last of the three concentrations represents the inception of formalized visualization practice. The relationship between this concentration and the last is eloquently explained by the author of IOL Tib J 437:

From the empty sky, as described above, come phenomena which are in essence without birth or cessation. The sky, too, can become anything — clouds, wind, thunder and lightning, and so on. Due to the cause of rain falling on the ground, everything — like plants and forests — is made to spread and ripen. Similarly, from the state of

⁷² For example, IOL Tib J 716 R1.12–24.

⁷³ Pelliot tibétain 353 1r: *gsang ba sngags tan tra rdzogs chen pa chen po'i mdo*.

⁷⁴ IOL Tib J 437 4v/5r.8: *de yang ci mngon zhes na / drgyud nyid las thams chad nam ka 'i mtshan nyid bste / [9] nam ka la yang mtshan nyid myed / nam ka 'dra bu rnal bsbyor pas // / don kun mnyam pa nyid du gsal /*

⁷⁵ *Śrīparamādyā* (Tib. *Dpal mchog dang po*) Tb.477.7–478.1. Here “the *Prajñāpāramitā*” may be a reference to the *Prajñāpāramitā-nayasatapañcāsatikā*, an early tantra (or perhaps a “proto-tantra”) which does not contain these lines in its canonical version, but does have them in the Dunhuang version (see IOL Tib J 97 53v–54r). For further discussion see the relevant entries in Dalton and van Schaik 2006.

unborn and unceasing phenomena, the emanated unceasing phenomena take on any aspect and emanate.⁷⁶

The general meaning of “cause” is made quite clear here. More specifically, the cause is embodied in the visualization of a seed syllable (*sa bon gi yi ge*), the basis for the visualization of the deity.⁷⁷ In IOL Tib J 437, the white syllable *a* is visualized. In certain *sādbanas*, the syllable *om* is used instead. In some *sādbanas* the syllable rests on a moon disc; in the lengthy *sādhana* in IOL Tib J 716, even the visualization of the moon disc is a gradual process, in which the moon begins as the new moon on the first day of the lunar month, and gradually passes through the days of the month to become full.⁷⁸

Generally the whole visualization begins from this seed syllable. As it says in IOL Tib J 437:

The inconceivable three-pointed *a* emanates as all of the thousand worlds,
and everything becomes like the sky.⁷⁹

This use of the letter *a* to symbolize the primordial sky-like state from which all pure appearances come into being became a standard feature of great perfection texts. In brief, there is a degree of consistency within the Dunhuang manuscripts regarding the treatment of the three concentrations, and there is also a consistency with the later Nyingma tradition.⁸⁰

In the *Summary*, where the three concentrations are referred to simply as “the three aspects of Mahāyoga”, they are the last topic to be discussed, after the section on union and liberation. This is slightly anachronistic, in that the *sādhana* manuscripts show us that the three concentrations are often practised immediately before the sexual practices that are indicated by the term “union.” The categorization of such visualization practices as the “development stage” (*bskyed rim*) seems to be implicitly present here, in that the three concentrations are explicitly said to be “developed” (*bskyed*) and often the phrase “in stages” (*rim gyis*) is also used.

5. Union and liberation

Union (*shyor ba*) and liberation (*sgrol ba / bsgral ba*) are usually found together, and often discussed as a pair, in tantric literature. Together, they are also the subject of five of the *samaya* vows (see below). Union and liberation embody the most transgressive of tantric practices — the ritualized practice of sexual intercourse and of violence. These were, of

⁷⁶ IOL Tib J 437 6v/7r.1: drgyu bsgom pa ni / gong ma lta bu nam ka stong ba las [2] chos skye 'gag myed pa'i ngo bor yin ste / nam ka la yang bsprin dang / khu rlabs dang / 'brug dang glog las [3] bstsoqs bste / cir yang 'gyur pas / sa gzhi yang char pi drgyu phab pas / rtsi shing dang / nag gtsal la [4] bstsoqs pa tams cad / rgyas shing bsmyin par byed pa dang 'dra bar // chos bskye 'gag myed pi ngang las / [5] 'gag pa myed pi chos 'phrul rnam pa cing yang 'gyur zhing / ! / bspros bste /

⁷⁷ For an instance of the specific term “seed syllable” in the context of the three samādhis, see Pelliot tibétain 42 (28.4).

⁷⁸ IOL Tib J 716 R1.12–24.

⁷⁹ IOL Tib J 437 7v/8r.5: a gru gsum bsam gyis myi khyab [6] par stong gi 'jigs rten thams cad du spros / thams cad nam ki rang bzhin 'gyur nas /

⁸⁰ By contrast, Gnubs chen's treatment of Mahāyoga barely touches on the three concentrations, perhaps because he considered them outside of the purview of his discussion of the view of Mahāyoga.

course, the aspects of tantric ritual practice in the early period of transmission that so troubled the kings of Western Tibet in the late tenth and eleventh centuries.⁸¹ Others have already discussed the presence of rituals for union and liberation in the Dunhuang manuscripts as evidence for their practice during this period.⁸²

In the *Summary*, union and liberation are explicitly identified as Mahāyoga practices; however some sources on Mahāyoga do not seem to engage with the practices of union and liberation at all.⁸³ These include *The Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva* and the two Madhusādhu treatises. Kammie Takahashi has suggested, that this may be because *The Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva* is earlier than the Dunhuang *sādhana*s; however, she concludes that it probably represents an alternative exegetical tradition contemporary with the *sādhana*s. I would agree that we seem to be dealing with alternative styles of exegesis, and note in addition that we might see these two exegetical tendencies a precursor to the Nyingma distinction between the “path of means” (*thabs lam*) and the “path of liberation” (*grol lam*). These are presented as two ways of approaching the perfection stage in Mahāyoga. The first relies on psycho-physical practices, while the second on presentations of the view.⁸⁴

(i) UNION

As mentioned above, in many of the Dunhuang *sādhana*s meditation practice involving sexual intercourse follows the gradual development of the visualization. Such practices were categorized as the “perfection stage” (*rdzogs rim*), following on from the “development stage” (*bskyed rim*).⁸⁵ The section on union is the most detailed part of the *Summary*, which is interesting considering that the later Nyingma tradition tended to categorise Mahāyoga as the vehicle of the development stage, with Anuyoga being the vehicle of the perfection stage.

The *Summary* defines Mahāyoga union as “the union of the *vajra* and the lotus.” This is of course a symbolic reference to the male and female sexual organs.⁸⁶ The *Summary* goes on to list three kinds of union: (i) the union in the single ornament, (ii) the union of the

⁸¹ On these events see Wangchuk 2002, and the earlier studies cited therein.

⁸² See Dalton 2004, Meinert 2006, and Dalton forthcoming. Note that union and liberation are not discussed in the *Lamp for the Eyes of Concentration*, which may be simply due to Gnubs chen’s treatment of Mahāyoga according to its view alone.

⁸³ It should be noted here that IOL Tib J 644 defines union and liberation in the context of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga; however, in the latter two contexts union and liberation are given a metaphorical reading. See also IOL Tib J 647 (3v.5–4r.2), which gives an Atiyoga reading to union and liberation, and Pelliot tibétain 841 (1r.1–2) which mentions union and liberation in the context of Anuyoga (though the main treatment of the topic is in the context of Mahāyoga).

⁸⁴ See for example Klong chen pa’s presentation of these two in his *Dispelling Darkness in the Ten Directions*, pp.113–127. The path of liberation (*grol lam*) here should not be confused with the violent rituals of liberation (*sgrol ba*).

⁸⁵ There is no explicit discussion of these two key terms in the Dunhuang manuscripts, though in the *Summary* and elsewhere Mahāyoga meditation is characterized in terms of the gradual ‘development’ of the visualized deity, and IOL Tib J 656 characterizes Anuyoga as meditating on development via the mode of perfection. (l.29–30: *bskyed de rdzogs pa’i tshul du bsgom ba’o*). Note also that the stages of development and perfection, along with a “great perfection” stage, are listed in the *Garland of Views* of Padmasambhava. See Karmay 1988: 155, 164. Similarly, the *Sutra Gathering All Intentions* (probably dating to the latter half of the ninth century) characterizes these three modes as development, perfection and total perfection (yongs su rdzogs pa). See *Armour of Darkness* vol.1, 509–511.

⁸⁶ This may also be an implicit reference to the fourfold classification of union found in IOL Tib J 754(b)/3. Here union is divided into (i) the union of the senses with their objects, (ii) the union of knowledge with means, (iii) the union of wisdom with space, and (iv) the union of the vajra with the lotus.

five families in a single mode, (iii) indiscriminate union. There is no further elaboration on these in the *Summary*, but fortunately they are defined in the *Seven Great Scriptural Systems*, as follows:

The single ornament is the vow to [remain as] a pair. *The five families in a single mode* is the accomplishment of one principal deity, four principal female deities and a single location. *Indiscriminate* is the greatest path of the three realms. In this case, if one is engaging in union with all women in accordance with the ritual manuals, one should avoid criticism by using *vajra* speech.⁸⁷

Here the distinction seems to be between different contexts for the practice of union, either (i) in a monogamous pair, (ii) with one male and four female practitioners or (iii) as a wandering male engaging in union with all kinds of women. Interestingly the text here is aware of the social transgression entailed by the third style of union, and recommends a kind of indirect language to avoid censure.⁸⁸ The *Summary* goes on to define union according to several further sets of categories. These initially seem rather bewildering, but on closer inspection, all of them can be mapped onto the structure of the Mahāyoga *sādhanas* found in the Dunhuang manuscripts.⁸⁹ In these *sādhanas*, the structure of the practice has these general stages, subsequent to the three concentrations:

1. Visualization of male and female practitioners as deities (usually as Vajrasattva and Samantabhadri). This is often referred to in the *sādhanas* as the *mahāmudrā* (the other three *mudrās* are not usually invoked). The non-differentiation of practitioner and deity is one feature that distinguishes Mahāyoga from the lower tantric methods, according to the doxographical text IOL Tib J 644. Here, the relationship between deity and practitioner is said to be that between a buddha and a sentient being in the ordinary Mahāyāna, that between a slave and a master in the Kriyā, that between a lord and a servant in Upāya, that between a brother and sister in Yoga, and without distinction in Mahāyoga. This lack of distinction is also said to characterize Anuyoga and Atiyoga.⁹⁰

IOL Tib J 754(b)/3, 1.45: sbyor ba rnam pa bzhi la// dbang po yul la sbyor ba dang/ shes rab thabs la sbyor ba dang// ye shes [46] dbyIngs la sbyor ba dang// rdo rje pad mo la sbyor ba'o//

It is evident from the discussion that follows this classification that only the last of these four refers to the performance of the practice of sexual union itself.

⁸⁷ Pelliot tibétain 656 1.45: gsang sngags ma ha yo ga'i sbyor ba ni / rdo rje dang pad mo sbyor ba ste de yang gsum mo / rgyan gcig par sbyor ba dang [46] rigs lnga tshul gcig par sgyor ba dang / phyal bar sbyor ba'o / de la rgyan gcig pa ni gnyis su dam bcas pa'o / [47] rigs lnga tshul gcig pa ni / gtso bo gcig dang / gtso mo bzhi dang / yul gcig sgrub pa'o / phyal ba ni khams [48] gsum dag kyi lam mchog / na / bud myed ci snyed yod pa rnam / thams cad cho ga bzhi sbyor na / rdo rje gsung kyis [49] myi smad do zhes 'byung ba'o /

⁸⁸ For a discussion of coded language in the tantras, see Davidson 2002: 257–269. A promiscuous lifestyle played a part in the legends of some of Tibet's "crazy yogins" (smyon pa), such as 'Brug pa kun legs, whose exploits have been translated in Stein 1972 and Dowman 1980.

⁸⁹ It is much more common to divide these practices according to the four limbs of *sādhana*: propitiation (*bsnyen pa*), approaching propitiation (*nye bar bsnyen pa*), accomplishment (*bsgrub pa*) and great accomplishment (*bsgrub pa chen po*). These four also appear in the Dunhuang manuscripts, including IOL Tib J 332/1 (translation in Dalton 2004: 11). They are also found in many canonical sources, including the *Guhyasamāja* (Tb.409: 187.4–5). There also seems to be a certain amount of correspondence here with explanations of the stages of empowerment (*abbiseka*) as described in some Indic treatises; see for example the translation of Su-jayaśrīgupta's *Abhiṣekanirukti* in Onians 2001: 342–347.

⁹⁰ IOL Tib J 644 1r–1v.

2. Visualization of one or more deities and/or syllables inside the male's and female's own bodies. Sometimes these are the standard five deities of the *maṇḍala*, but other variants often occur.⁹¹ Sometimes an external *maṇḍala* is visualized as well.⁹²
3. Visualization of the internal flow or “descent” (*'babs*) of *bodhicitta*. In some *sādhana*s the reference to the act of intercourse is more or less explicit, in others, the process seems to be described through visualization alone.⁹³
4. Visualization of the emanation of light from the *bodhicitta*, as an offering to the buddhas and as an empowerment for the benefit of all sentient beings.
5. Consuming the *samaya* substances. The *Summary* glosses this as “experiencing the savour of *bodhicitta*” or “receiving and eating”. This may be a reference to two alternative practices: on the one hand, the physical experience of the profound sensations of the descent of the *bodhicitta* energy, and on the other hand, the ingestion of the five nectars, including the sexual fluids.⁹⁴ This would account for a number of *sādhana*s in which there is no mention of ingesting anything.⁹⁵ Where there is explicit reference to consuming the *samaya* substance, it is usually first offered to the buddhas.⁹⁶
6. Contemplating the ultimate meaning of the *bodhicitta* or *samaya*. In some *sādhana*s there is a dissolution back into the nonconceptual state, and the language used here echoes the descriptions of the concentration on suchness.⁹⁷ At this point there is often also a reference to the *samaya* vows. Rather than spelling out the vows, most *sādhana*s just mention that the practitioners are bound by them, and the consequences of transgressing them. We will look at the definition of the Mahāyoga *samaya* vows in the next section.

Thus the various categories in the *Summary* map onto these *sādhana* stages as follows:

⁹¹ The standard five deities are seen in Pelliot tibétain 42 (28); an example of a different system is seen in IOL Tib J 716 (ll.46–70).

⁹² The external maṇḍala appears in the *sādhana*s in IOL Tib J 331/2 and 554, for instance.

⁹³ The deliberately allusive language of these *sādhana*s make such judgements necessarily tentative. Those *sādhana*s with apparent reference to intercourse include IOL Tib J 331/2, 464; Pelliot tibétain 42 and 841 (on these see Dalton 2004). *Sādhana*s which describe the movement of *bodhicitta* through visualization alone include IOL Tib J 716. Other *sādhana*s, IOL Tib J 552, 553 and 554, refer to the “play” (*rol*) of the father and mother, but otherwise give instructions purely in terms of visualization.

⁹⁴ On the five nectars, see Wedemeyer 2007: 401–403.

⁹⁵ These include IOL Tib J 552, 553, 554 and 716.

⁹⁶ For example, Pelliot tibétain 841 (2v.2–4), 332/e (1v.1–4) and 36 (v1.4–v2.1). These references from Dalton 2004: 16 n.40.

⁹⁷ For example, IOL Tib J 552 has “the supreme *samaya* is the sublime expanse itself” (6v.2: dam tsiḡ mchog rab dbyings dam pa nyid to /). IOL Tib J 437 has “the great perfection, the great embodiment, the essential nectar, this sublime, supreme medicine beyond birth and death.” (13v/14r.1: rdzogs chen bdag nyid chen po thugs kyi bcud // skye shi myed pa'i sman mchog [2] dam pa 'di /). Note here the reference to the “great perfection” (*rdzogs chen*) which is also found in the *Gubiyagarbha* in the same context. Here “great perfection” seems to indicate the culmination of the phase of perfection, while prefiguring some of the themes of later Great Perfection texts. I have discussed these *Gubiyagarbha* passages and their continuity with later Great Perfection texts in van Schaik 2004a: 167–169.

	4 types of union	Conquering the 4 Māras	5 space mistresses	4 secret consorts
1	Union	Conquering Māra the aggregates	The vajra and lotus space mistresses	The Lady of Mudrā
2	Subsequent union			
3	Total union	Conquering Māra the afflictions	The jewel space mistress	The Lady of Intoxication
4	Universal union	Conquering Māra the god	The karma space mistress	
5		Conquering Māra the lord of death		The Lady of Eating
6			The airborne space mistress	The Lady who Prolongs Life

The fact that none of these four lists covers the whole content of the *sādhana*s suggests that the author of the *Summary* did not have a single system available in the contemporary exegetical tradition.⁹⁸

(ii) LIBERATION

The *Summary* gives a very brief treatment of liberation, dividing it into liberation of the self and liberation of others. As with the section on union, we find an almost identical treatment in the *Seven Great Scriptural Systems*, which is as follows:

Liberation comprises (i) liberation of oneself and (ii) the liberation of others. Of these, there are two measures of the liberation of oneself: (i) approaching the deity and (ii) the tantric guru. *Approaching the deity* is when the practitioner levitates up to four finger-widths. *The tantric guru* is one who is learned. Having gathered numerous sages who are learned in this way, [one who is endowed with] the ten fields is brought and their conceptual stream is liberated. This is liberation of others.⁹⁹

In this twofold system, the “liberation of oneself” is devoid of the violent connotations of “liberation”, and refers only to tantric deity practice on the one hand, and tantric learning on the other.¹⁰⁰ However, these qualities seem to be introduced here mainly as a requirement for the “liberation of others”, that is, the violent ritual practice of symbolic or genuine

⁹⁸ Note that in IOL Tib J 331/1, a *sādhana* attributed to Mañjuśrimitra, we have a tenfold division of a perfection stage practice, as follows:

(i) the way of entering the *sādhana*, (ii) the place, (iii) developing the deities, (iv) the blessings, (v) empowerment by the *jñānasattva*, (vi) offering, (vii) the ritual of propitiation, (viii) dissolution of the *maṇḍala*, (ix) protecting the body and (x) the continuous *samādhi*.

IOL Tib J 331/1 2v.1: //bsgrub pa la 'jug pa'I tshul dang/ gnas dang/ lhar bskyed pa dang/ byIn kyIs brlab pa dang/ ye shes sems dpas dbang bskur ba dang/ mchod pa dang/ bsnyen pa'I co ga dang/ dkyil 'khor bsdu ba dang/ lus srung ba dang/ rgyun kyI tIng nge 'dzIn bstan pa'o//

My schematic six-part distinction roughly corresponds to parts iii to viii of this scheme. Parts i and ii are the preliminary steps of finding a master, receiving empowerment and finding a suitable site to practice (on which see section 9 below). Parts ix and x are post-meditation practices which aim to maintain the meditative realization through recitation of mantras and the correct state of mind.

⁹⁹ Pelliot tibétain 656 l.49: sgröl ba ni bdag bsgrol ba dang gzhan bsgrol ba'o / de la bdag bsgrol ba tshad rnam pa nyis [50] te / lha nye ba dang rgyud bla ma'o / de la lha nye ba ni bsgrub pa po de sor bzhi yan cad 'phags pa'o / rgyud bla ma ni mkha [51] pa'o / de lta bu skyes bu mkhas pa mang zhig 'dus nas / zhing bcu la bstags te bdag du / rtog pa'i rgyud [52] sbyor ba ni gzhan bsgrol ba'o /

¹⁰⁰ Note that the discussion of liberation in IOL Tib J 754 (b), which imposes a classification of four types of liberation, does not mention the liberation of others at all (ll.56ff).

sacrifice. Both the *Summary* and the *Seven Great Scriptural Systems*, though dealing with this ritual in the briefest of terms, suggest that it is only to be carried out by a group of well-qualified tantric practitioners. This is also emphasised in Pelliot tibétain 42, which states that liberation is not to be performed by ordinary people (*phal ba*).¹⁰¹

Regarding the subject who is to be liberated, the *Summary* states that the victim must possess the so-called “ten fields”. These are the “ten fields for liberation” (*bsgral ba'i zhing bcu*), a list of ten sins which make a being suitable for liberation (that is, for killing). Such lists are fairly common in later *sgrol ba* and *phur ba* literature, as well in as some Indic tantras and treatises, though the contents and arrangement of the list differ quite widely.¹⁰² I have not seen a definition of the ten fields in the Dunhuang manuscripts, though the liberation rite discussed immediately below does contain five suitable objects for liberation.¹⁰³

Compared to the practices which fall under the heading of “union” discussed above, there are very few explicit ritual manuals for liberation. One manuscript which does discuss the liberation ritual in detail is *Tantric Notes I*. The liberation ritual is described in brief and extensive versions. The brief version (Pelliot tibétain 42.IX) has been discussed by Carmen Meinert, while the more extensive version (IOL Tib J 419/12) will be the subject of a detailed study by Jacob Dalton, so I will only summarize it here.¹⁰⁴

The ritual of liberation begins with a preliminary list of five reasons for performing the ritual: the subject of liberation must have (i) denigrated the Mahāyāna, (ii) offended a Noble One, (iii) come to a *maṇḍala* without the *samaya*, (iv) hold a false view or (v) have caused a cessation in the Mahāyāna *dharma*. It is made clear that liberation must be practised on the basis of great compassion. The extensive version of the ritual then goes into some detail on the preparation of the ritual space. There follows a description of the visualization, a *maṇḍala* of deities and various seed syllables. The act of liberation is carried out with a weapon and the recitation of a mantra. The victim's liberated consciousness becomes an offering to the assembled deities of the *maṇḍala*, and the visualization is dissolved. In the extensive version there is a discussion of the signs that indicate the outcome of the ritual.¹⁰⁵ In both versions of this ritual it is suggested that the practice of union is to follow.

The Vajrakīlaya (*phur ba*) material is also relevant in this context. These rituals are contextualized in much the same way as the liberation ritual in *Tantric Notes I*, that is, in the context of compassion.¹⁰⁶ However, it should be noted that the practices explicitly pre-

¹⁰¹ Pelliot tibétain 42.I: 24.4–25.3. Translation in Meinert 2006: 117.

¹⁰² A detailed discussion of seven fields for liberation appears in Chapter 12 of the *Phur ba bcu gnyis* tantra (Tb.414: 907.6–913.7). Thanks to Robert Mayer for this information. An early version of the ten fields is found in the following list in Vilāsavajra's *Exposition of the Samaya* (576a.1–2):

dkon mchog slob dpon sku dgra gnyis // dam nyams log dang 'khus pa dang // 'du bar 'ongs dang yongs la gnod // dam dgra ngan pa'i ngang tshul can // ngang song gsum dang bcu po ni // rnal 'byor kun gyis dang du blang /

On the ten fields in the later Tibetan tradition see Cantwell 1997: 108–109. For one version of the ten categories in the later Tibetan *phur ba* tradition see Boord 2002: 224.

¹⁰³ See Meinert 2006: 199–120.

¹⁰⁴ See Dalton forthcoming, which will include a translation and transcription of this ritual, as well as the other Dunhuang manuscript source for a liberation ritual, Pelliot tibétain 840/1.

¹⁰⁵ The ritual begins on Pelliot tibétain 42, 68.4–72.4, and concludes on IOL Tib J 419 3r.1–4. In his forthcoming book, Jacob Dalton argues that this ritual manual implies the presence of a real human victim, and not a symbolic object, as is specified in the later tradition.

¹⁰⁶ The most important Vajrakīlaya *sādhana*s are IOL Tib J 754(b)/2, discussed in Mayer 1994, Pelliot tibétain 349, discussed in Mayer 2004, and IOL Tib J 331/3, discussed in Mayer and Cantwell 2008. Furthermore, an exhaustive review of the Dunhuang Vajrakīlaya material is the subject of a forthcoming book by Cantwell and Mayer.

sented as liberation in the Dunhuang manuscripts, discussed above, are not Vajrakīlaya rituals. Equally, in the Dunhuang Vajrakīlaya rituals the term ‘liberation’ does not play a central role. This is in contrast to the later Tibetan tradition, in which liberation rituals came to be synonymous with the figure Vajrakīlaya, and Vajrakīlaya came to represent the personification of the liberation act. Thus it appears that the Dunhuang manuscripts represent a stage at which these were two separate ritual lineages with similar content, which merged in the subsequent Tibetan tradition.

Finally, there are many related *sādhana*s and ritual manuals concerning wrathful deities to be found in the manuscripts that are not specifically concerned with liberation. One genre describes *maṇḍala*s with the deity Heruka at the centre surrounded by arrays of wrathful female deities. These deities include the well-known sequence of Gaurī, Caurī, Pramohā and so on, and animal-headed goddesses such as Kaṅkamukhā, Kākamukhā and Hulukumhā. In one manuscript (IOL Tib J 716), this wrathful *maṇḍala* immediately follows the *sādhana* of union, suggesting the union/liberation pair. In another version (IOL Tib J 332) the *maṇḍala* is clearly derived from chapter 17 of the *Guhyagarbha*. Behind these *maṇḍala*s there is the myth of the liberation of the demon Rudra by Heruka, which is recounted in one of the texts in *Tantric Notes I* (IOL Tib J 419.5). This story, which appears in chapter 15 of the *Guhyagarbha*, is the mythical prototype of the act of ritual liberation.¹⁰⁷

6. Samaya Vows

The *Summary* defines the *samaya* vows of Mahāyoga as a group of twenty-eight comprising three root vows and twenty-five branch vows. These will be known to anyone familiar with the later Nyingma tradition, where this arrangement of the vows has remained the same to the present day within the vehicle of Mahāyoga. I have discussed these vows, and other related vow systems found in Dunhuang, in a recent article where I traced the development of this system of *samaya* vows from the *Guhyagarbha*’s chapter 19, through Vilāsavajra’s *Exposition of the Samaya*, and finally to the system of the Dunhuang manuscripts, which has remained unchanged to the present day.¹⁰⁸

The *Summary* characterizes the *samaya* vows as “transmitted precepts” (*lung*). While the meaning of *lung* is not made clear in the *Summary*, we find the following passage in Pelliot tibétain 337, after a discussion of the *samaya* vows: “The *samaya* are the transmitted precepts of the *vajra* master, passed down from one person to another.”¹⁰⁹ The sense of *lung* here seems to be an oral explanatory tradition which accompanies the teaching of scriptural sources.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ See again Cantwell 1997, Meinert 2006 and Jacob Dalton forthcoming.

¹⁰⁸ See van Schaik forthcoming(b).

¹⁰⁹ Pelliot tibétain 337: panel 4, l.22: *slobs dpon gyI lung gcIg du brgyud cIng bshad pa yIn*

¹¹⁰ Note that early great perfection texts were often characterised as *lung* (see van Schaik 2004b). The esoteric instructions (*man ngag*) seem to differ only marginally in signification from the transmitted precepts. They may perhaps indicate a more personal, oral instruction. The *Lta ba’i yang dag pa’i sgron me* (ll.9–16) of Gnyan dPal dbyangs mentions both, without however helping us to distinguish them:

If you focus the mind on the great way of awareness,
That is, non-conceptualization, the nature of ultimate truth,
Using awareness you will confirm the transmitted precepts and esoteric instructions.
This is known as confidence in the correct nature of phenomena.

rnam pa mi rtog don dam rang bzhin gyi /

In addition to the *Summary* itself, we find other references to the twenty-eight *samaya* vows in the Dunhuang manuscripts. They are mentioned, though not listed, in the *Seven Great Scriptural Systems*:

There are twenty-eight *samaya*, grouped into three: the *samaya* of view, the *samaya* of practice, and the *samaya* of accomplishment.¹¹¹

The same twenty-eight vows are clearly intended in the following lines on *samaya* from “the six boiled-down essentials” in *Tantric Notes II*:

What are the *samaya*? They have the nature of moral discipline and vows. They are the root *samaya* of body, speech and mind, and the *samaya* to be practiced, and so on. Having received these as transmitted precepts, they must be protected and practised.¹¹²

The three root vows are discussed in some detail in three different manuscripts, suggesting that these three vows were sometimes transmitted independently of the twenty-five branch vows.¹¹³ The three root vows are:

- (i) The vow of the body: to venerate the guru.
- (ii) The vow of speech: to continually practice the mantras and mudrās of the deity.
- (iii) The vow of mind: to keep the restricted teachings of the tantras secret.

The twenty-five branch vows are arranged in five groups of five:

- (i) The five to be accepted, which are the five nectars: faeces, urine, semen, blood and human flesh
- (ii) The five not to be rejected, which are the five defilements of desire, hatred, ignorance, pride and jealousy
- (iii) The five to be practised, which are the five rituals of liberation and union
- (iv) The five to be known, which are the pure natures of the components, elements, sense objects, sacraments and propensities
- (v) The five to be accomplished, which are the buddha’s body, speech, mind, qualities and activities

The *Summary* and the *Seven Great Scriptural Systems* complicates things further by placing these vows into another threefold classification:

- (i) the *samaya* of the view, comprising root vow iii and branch vow iv.
- (ii) the *samaya* of practice, comprising root vow i and branch vows ii and iii.
- (iii) the *samaya* of accomplishment, comprising root vow ii and branch vow v.¹¹⁴

rig pa'i tshul chen sems kyis dmigs ba na /
lung dang man ngag rig pas thag gcod te /
chos kyi rang bzhin yang dag yid ches bya /

¹¹¹ Pelliot tibétain 656 l.26: dam tshigs ni nyi shu rtsa brygad do / [27] de yang lta ba'i dam tshig dang / spyod pa'i dam tshig dang / bsgrubs pa'i dam tshig gsum du 'dus so /

¹¹² Pelliot tibétain 280 13r.2: dam tshIlg gang [3] zhe na // tshul khrIms dang sdom ba'I rang bzhIn // sku gsung thugs kyI [4] dam tsIlg gI rtsa ba gsum dang // spyod pa'I dam tshIlg la stsogs ste // [5] lung bnos nas // bsrung dang / spyod pa 'o /

¹¹³ The manuscripts are IOL Tib J 718, Or.8210/S.9223 and Pelliot tibétain 269. The latter pair are two versions of the same text.

¹¹⁴ Note that the first set of branch vows has been omitted in *Summary*, which I take to be a scribal error, given the references to twenty-eight vows here and elsewhere.

As mentioned earlier, the *samaya* vows are frequently invoked in the Dunhuang *sādhana*s at the conclusion of the practice of union, in which the consumption of the *samaya* substances entails commitment to the *samaya* vows.¹¹⁵ The result of not maintaining the *samaya* vows is described in several places in graphic terms. The following description is typical:

If the *samaya* deteriorate, then while you live your complexion will deteriorate, your mind will become unclear, you will be subject to many illnesses and your wishes will go unfulfilled. Innumerable spirits and demons will wound you like an animal. When you die, your senses will become clouded, your tongue will stick [to your palate], you will smell unpleasant, and you will die vomiting blood. You will be escorted [from this life] by innumerable malicious demons.¹¹⁶

Perhaps surprisingly, a discussion of the *samaya* is also found in a Tibetan Chan text from Dunhuang, IOL Tib J 709/9. This text is interesting in several regards. It is titled “Chan document” and begins with the statement “the neck seal of the emperor Khri srong lde btsan appears below.”¹¹⁷ Though no such seal appears, it seems that the previous presence of such a seal associated with this text is intended here, suggesting that it was authorized by the emperor.¹¹⁸ In addition, this is one of the Tibetan Chan texts that refers to its teachings as “the great yoga”, that is, Mahāyoga.

In the middle of this text we find the question, “how does one receive the *samaya*?”¹¹⁹ In the answer, we may detect a similarity to the first root vow of the Mahāyoga *samaya*, which enjoins the veneration of the guru:

Those who have first made offerings to many buddhas and purified their minds should rely on the master-buddha, and not rely on any other.¹²⁰

The following sentence enjoins the trainee to avoid any conventional practices based on intellectual analysis, which may be loosely linked to the theme of practice in the second of the Mahāyoga root *samaya*. The remainder of the text is just a further elaboration of this point, so there is no correspondance to the third Mahāyoga root *samaya* of secrecy. Clearly more research into this text and the whole genre of Tibetan Chan is required before we can state anything with certainty about these terminological resemblences with the tantric Mahāyoga texts.

¹¹⁵ This is stated quite explicitly in IOL Tib J 552 (6v) and 554 (3v).

¹¹⁶ IOL Tib J 718 v4.1: / dam tshIg [2] 'dI gsum ma nyams na ni lus ngag yid gsum / [3] rdo rje rang bzhIn du gyur te // tshē 'di la yang / bsam [4] ba 'grub pa dang/ 'chI ba'i dus byung na yang / sems [v5.1] gsal ba dang / nyon mongs pa pa'i nad kyI pa myI brlungs [2] pa drI ma zhIm ba dang / man ngag myI brjed cing // sun mar yang lha [3] rnams pa byon no // dam tshIg nyams pa na / [4] tshē 'di la yang mdog nyams pa dang / sems myi [v6.1] gsal ba dang // nad mang ba dang / bsam pa [2] myI 'grub pa dang / rI dags sman ma dang 'dra ste // [3] 'dre srI na yang bsam gyIs myi khyab pas [v7.1] glags gcod do // 'chI ba'I dus su yang / [2] dbang po myi gsal ba dang // lce stibs pa dang // [3] drI ma myI zhibs pa dang / khrag skyug nas snying [4] gas te 'chI 'o // sun mar yang 'dre gnon [v8.1] bsam gyIs myI khyab par 'ong // 'dI [2] gsum nyams na dmyal ba chen por 'gyur ro //

¹¹⁷ IOL Tib J 709/10, 36r.1: // bsam gtan gI yI ge // lha btsan po khri srong lde brtsan gI mgur gI phyag rgya 'og nas 'byung ba/

¹¹⁸ On the “neck seal” (*mgur gi phyag rgya*) see Stein 1983, which contains a discussion of IOL Tib J 506, wherein the “neck seal” is mentioned.

¹¹⁹ IOL Tib J 709/10, 38r.2: dam tshIg jI ltar blang zhe na /

It is possible that this question marks the beginning of a new text.

¹²⁰ IOL Tib J 709/10, 38r.2: sngon sangs rgyas mang po la / mchod bkur ba dang // bsam pa yongs [3] su dag pa'I rnams kyis // slobd dpon sangs rgyas la rten gyI // gzhan la myI brten par bya'o //

7. Results

The result of Mahāyoga practice is not a subject we find treated in much detail among the Dunhuang manuscripts. The long Madhusādhū treatise discusses the result of practice mainly in terms of the three buddha bodies (*kāya*). The treatise stresses the oneness of the realized yogin and the buddhas.¹²¹ Perhaps more interesting is the discussion of *vidyādhara* levels in one of the doxographical texts (IOL Tib J 644). This text identifies four kinds of *vidyādhara* in the context of Mahāyoga, a distinction that has continued in the Tibetan Nyingma tradition through to the present day.

The four *vidyādhara* in the Dunhuang text are (i) the deity *vidyādhara* (*lha'i rigs 'dzin*), (ii) the medicine *vidyādhara* (*smān kyi rigs 'dzin*), (iii) the fully-ripened *vidyādhara* (*rnam par smyin pa'i rigs 'dzin*) and (iv) the *mahāmudrā vidyādhara* (*phyag rgya chen po'i rigs 'dzin*). These four are not identical to those of the later tradition, but there is a clear continuity. In the later tradition the four are usually (i) the fully ripened *vidyādhara* (*rnam par smim pa'i rigs 'dzin*), (ii) the life-enhancing *vidyādhara* (*tshe dbang gi rigs 'dzin*), (iii) the *mahāmudrā vidyādhara* (*phyag rgya chen po'i rigs 'dzin*) and (iv) the spontaneously accomplished *vidyādhara* (*lhun gyi grub pa'i rigs 'dzin*).¹²² There is probably a connection between the medicine *vidyādhara* and the lifespan-enhancing *vidyādhara*. The spontaneously accomplished *vidyādhara* does appear in IOL Tib J 644, but in the context of Kriyā, not Mahāyoga.¹²³

8. Scriptures

The *Summary* does not discuss the source texts for Mahāyoga, but it does mention “the eighteen tantras.” We do have a few other references to a group of Mahāyoga tantras in the Dunhuang manuscripts, and there is an interesting difference here, in that some of our sources use the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit word *tantra* (*rgyud*) while others transliterate it (*tan tra*). It is likely that the transliterated form was later abandoned in favour of the translated form, but this distinction is not entirely useful for dating, since the transliterated form was still in unofficial use at the end of the tenth century, as demonstrated by the list of tantras in Pelliot tibétain 849.¹²⁴ In some sources it seems that *rgyud* was used to refer to the general category of tantra, while *tan tra* was used for specific titles. The shorter Madhusādhū treatise refers to “the tantras (*tan tra*) of Mahāyoga, the esoteric tantra class (*rgyud*) of method.”¹²⁵ Similarly, Padmasambhava’s commentary on the *Upāyapāsa* mentions “many tantras (*tan tra*) of Mahāyoga,” while the interlinear notes mention the

¹²¹ This discussion comprises the last third of the manuscript, from l.132 to the end. See van Schaik forthcoming for a complete translation and transcription.

¹²² See for example Dudjom 1991: II.132.

¹²³ For a full translation of this manuscript see Dalton 2005.

¹²⁴ The transliterated form does not appear in the *Mahāvīryūtpatti*. On the list of tantras in Pelliot tibétain 849 see Hackin 1924 and Kapstein 2006. Note that all of the sources in the long Madhusādhū treatise are *tan tra* rather than *rgyud*.

¹²⁵ IOL Tib J 508 r32: /rnal 'byor chen po nang pa thabs kyi rgyud kyi tan tra las kun kyi nang nas bsdu pa'i lus tshad/ dpal rdo rje sems 'pa la phyag 'tshal lo/

In Padmasambhava’s *Garland of Views*, “the esoteric yoga tantras of method” (*rnal 'byor nang pa thabs kyi rgyud*) signifies the esoteric aspect of the Yogatantra category, which includes the subcategories of (i) development, (ii) perfection and (iii) great perfection (see Karmay 1988: 155, 165). In the later Tibetan tradition a similar phrase, “the vehicle of the esoteric tantras of method” (*nang pa thabs kyi rgyud kyi theg pa*), was used by some exegetes with reference to all three of the higher yoga classes (Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga) and

tantra class (*rgyud*) of Mahāyoga as a gloss on the phrase “scriptures of definitive meaning.” An early source mentioning a group of eighteen scriptures is a text by Jñānamitra which is mentioned in the *Ldan dkar ma*. As Dan Martin has pointed out, only two tantras are mentioned there by name: the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga* and the *Guhyasamāja*.¹²⁶ For more names, we can turn to two Dunhuang treatises for help: the long Madhusādhu treatise and Padmasambhava’s commentary on the *Upāyapāśa*.¹²⁷ Both treatises quote from numerous tantras, and there is a close match between these titles and the list of eighteen Mahāyoga tantras enumerated by Longchenpa (1308–1364) in his *Thunderous Melody of Brahmā*, one of the earliest such lists.

Interestingly, there is relatively little overlap with the list of tantras in the famous scroll Pelliot tibétain 849, which dates to the very end of the tenth or beginning of the eleventh century. It seems plausible that the list in Pelliot tibétain 849 reflects later developments in India which were not fully assimilated in Tibet until the later diffusion (*phyi dar*) of tantric Buddhism.¹²⁸ An interesting link between this scroll and the later diffusion which has not previously been noticed is the presence in the Pelliot tibétain 849 list of an *O li pad ti tantra*. This title is strikingly similar to the *Olapati*, one of the Sakya school’s nine cycles of the path (*lam skor*) attributed to the mahāsiddha Caryāvajra or Kāṇha, and is said to be based on the *Cakrasamvaratantra*.¹²⁹

Returning now to Longchenpa’s list, we find that more than half of his eighteen texts appear to some extent in the Dunhuang manuscripts. The following table shows which of these tantras are present, cited, or at least mentioned in the Dunhuang manuscripts:

1	<i>Glang chen rab ’bog</i>	Cited (IOL Tib J 321).
2	<i>Glang po chur ’jug</i>	Cited (IOL Tib J 321).
3	<i>Sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor</i>	Cited (IOL Tib J 454, Pelliot tibétain 337, 849)
4	<i>Ri bo brtsegs pa</i>	Cited (IOL Tib J 321, 454)
5	<i>Padma dbang chen</i>	Not found, but IOL Tib J 454 cites a <i>Dbang chen bsdus pa’i tantra</i> .
6	<i>Zla gsang thig le</i>	Partially present (Pelliot tibétain 281) and mentioned (Pelliot tibétain 849). ¹³⁰
7	<i>rTse mo ’dus pa</i>	Possibly to be identified with the <i>Rtse gcig bsdus pa</i> cited in IOL Tib J 321.
8	<i>gCig las ’phros pa</i>	Cited (IOL Tib J 454)
9	<i>gSang ba ’dus pa</i>	Present (IOL Tib J 438) and extensively cited (IOL Tib J 437, 454, 508, Pelliot tibétain 337). ¹³¹
10	<i>sGron me ’bar ba</i>	Not found.
11	<i>bDud rtsi samaya ’bum sde</i>	Not found. ¹³²

by others with exclusive reference to the Mahāyoga tantras, more in concordance with the earlier tradition represented here. See Dudjom 1991: I.357 and Garson 2004: 98, 141–142.

¹²⁶ Martin 1987: 179.

¹²⁷ On the citations from the longer Madhusādhu treatise (IOL Tib J 454), see van Schaik forthcoming(a). Thanks to Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell for sharing their list of the citations from IOL Tib J 321, which are to be discussed in their forthcoming monograph on this manuscript.

¹²⁸ On Pelliot tibétain 849 and the full list of tantras therein, see Hackin 1924 and Kapstein 2006.

¹²⁹ The *Olapati* has been identified by Davidson with the canonical text *The Four Stages (Rim pa bzhi pa)* T.1451 (Davidson 2005: 200–201).

¹³⁰ This tantra is also cited in *The Lamp of the Eyes of Contemplation* (26.6ff and 206.2ff). I am currently preparing a critical edition of Pelliot tibétain 281.

¹³¹ This tantra is also cited in *The Lamp of the Eyes of Contemplation* (194.6ff).

¹³² There is a reference to a *bDud rtsi rgyud* in *The Lamp of the Eyes of Contemplation* (52.1ff and 209.1ff) and quoted in IOL Tib J 437 (14v.6–1r.6) Note also the reference to a *Bdud rtsi mchog gi lung* at the beginning of in IOL Tib J 552.

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|---|
| 12 | <i>dPal mchog dang po</i> | Cited (IOL Tib J 321, 454). |
| 13 | <i>dPal phreng dkar po</i> | Cited (IOL Tib J 321). |
| 14 | <i>Ma mo rgyud lung</i> | Not found. ¹³³ |
| 15 | <i>Bidyotamala 'bum sde</i> | Mentioned (Pelliot tibétain 44). |
| 16 | <i>Thabs zhags</i> | Present (IOL Tib J 321) and cited (IOL Tib J 454, 508). |
| 17 | <i>Dam tshig bkod pa</i> | Not found, but note that a Rdo rje bkod pa is cited in IOL Tib J 321. |
| 18 | <i>gSang ba sgyu 'phrul</i> | Passages cited without attribution, mentioned in Pelliot tibétain 332B, 849. ¹³⁴ |

As this list shows, some of these tantras are actually present in the Dunhuang manuscript collection. The *Gubhyasamāja* (*Gsang ba 'dus pa*), *Upāyapāśa* (*Thabs kyi zhags pa*) and **Candra-gubhyatilaka* (*Zla gsang thig le*) are all present (though the latter only partially). We should also mention here the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, which is present in the Dunhuang manuscripts, and has sometimes been considered a Mahāyoga tantra.¹³⁵ Investigations into these manuscript versions have shown that they are generally closer to the versions in the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* than the versions in the *Bka' 'gyur*.¹³⁶

In any case, there have always been a number of traditions in the enumeration of the eighteen tantras. In Tibet an alternative list of eighteen tantras was transmitted in the Zur tradition, though it is only known from an eighteenth-century source. Since this list is notable for its close correspondence to the Mahāyoga section of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, and includes of a group of five tantras with 'play' (*rol pa*) in the titles which are not attested in the Dunhuang manuscripts, it appears to be later than Klong chen pa's list.¹³⁷ Even if identifying the exact content of the "eighteen tantras" mentioned in the *Summary* is impossible, we can at least see a significant continuity between the tantras that were being cited and made the subject of exegesis in the context of Mahāyoga in the tenth century, and the later Nyingma lists of eighteen Mahāyoga tantras.

9. Contexts

We have now explored quite thoroughly the various elements of tantric practice which are classified as Mahāyoga in the *Summary* and other sources. In pointing out, as I have done here, that which is considered specific to Mahāyoga, I do not want to suggest any that Mahāyoga practices existed in some kind of conceptual isolation. They were closely linked on the one hand to earlier manifestations of tantric practice, and on the other hand to the emerging developments found under the headings of Anuyoga and Atiyoga.

(i) THE RITUAL CONTEXT OF MAHĀYOGA

The Mahāyoga practices we have been looking at here are clearly situated in the same framework as earlier forms of tantric ritual. For example, the necessity for tantric empowerment and the importance of the master-disciple relationship is indicated in some *sādhana*s which spell out the necessary stages prior to the actual practice of *sādhana*. In IOL Tib J 565/1 for instance, the following sequence is set out:

¹³³ But see the *sādhana* of *Ma mo chen mo* at IOL Tib J 716/3.

¹³⁴ There are also numerous citations of the *Gubhyagarbha* and various *Māyājāla* tantras in the *Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation*.

¹³⁵ See Davidson 1981.

¹³⁶ Davidson 1981 and Martin 1987.

¹³⁷ On the Zur tradition's list of eighteen tantras, see Garson 2004: 257–264.

- (i) Receive the empowerment (*dbang*) from a master (*slobs dpon*) who has the empowerment of the *Guhyasamāja*.
- (ii) Carry out the activities pleasing to the guru.
- (iii) Generate great compassion for all sentient beings.
- (iv) Find a quiet place to practice.

We find similar sequences elsewhere, such as in IOL Tib J 331/1 and Or.8210/S.95/7. These two manuscripts do not mention any specific empowerment; in the first the practitioner is instructed to request the empowerment “by the drop” and this is glossed in the interlinear notes as “the trio of outer, inner and secret.”¹³⁸ The second refers to the stages (*rim pa*) of empowerment. Another, more complex, discussion of the stages of empowerment appears in Pelliot tibétain 42.VI, and this is preceded by a brief discussion of the requisites of a genuine tantric master (*rdo rje'i slobs dpon*).¹³⁹ We may infer that the necessity for the guru and the empowerment is assumed in those *sādhana*s which do not specifically mention it.

Mahāyoga *sādhana* practice at Dunhuang is often further contextualized by the more general ritual activities of aspirational prayer, offering and confession. Some *sādhana* collections containing Mahāyoga elements (according to the criteria of the *Summary*) begin with aspirational prayers and / or *gtor ma* offerings.¹⁴⁰ Equally, many *sādhana*s conclude with the activities of offering and confession, either as part of the ritual of union or liberation, or in a separate text written after the *sādhana*.¹⁴¹ These contextualizing prayers and practices bind the Mahāyoga *sādhana*s to the aspirations of Mahāyāna Buddhism. At the same time, they bind the practitioners of the *sādhana*s into Buddhist communities (whether lay or monastic) through the communal activities of prayer recitation, confession and offering.

(ii) MAHĀYOGA, ANUYOGA AND ATIYOGA

In the later Tibetan tradition, Mahāyoga is considered a ‘vehicle’ (*theg pa*) in a system of nine vehicles. It is surpassed in this system by Anuyoga, the penultimate vehicle, and Atiyoga, the ultimate. In establishing the meanings of Mahāyoga from the Dunhuang manuscripts, we should be careful not to read this later system back onto them. As we saw earlier, some of the Mahāyoga texts from Dunhuang treat Mahāyoga as they highest form of yoga, the “supreme system” in the words of *The Questions and Answers of Vajrasattva*. As I mentioned earlier this may represent an earlier stratum in the manuscripts, based on developments in the late eighth and ninth centuries.

In other texts, we see a development in which Mahāyoga is understood in the context of the doxographical category of three inner yogas, of which it is the lowest. This probably represents a later stratum, dating to the tenth century. Yet even these Dunhuang doxographical texts, which seem to be standardizing the distinctions between the inner tantric frameworks of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga, do not designate these three ‘vehicles’ per se. Rather they continue to present Anuyoga and Atiyoga in terms of modes (*tshul*) of Mahāyoga practice, without any meditative content of their own. Thus in IOL Tib J 656

¹³⁸ IOL Tib J 331/1, 1a.2: thigs pas dbang bskur gsol btab nas/ (interlinear note: phyI dang nang dang gsang gsum gyIs/)

¹³⁹ Pelliot tibétain 42.V is folio 51.1–4, which VI is folios 51.5–61.4.

¹⁴⁰ For example, IOL Tib J 419, Or.8210/S.95.

¹⁴¹ For an example of the latter, see IOL Tib J 332.

Anuyoga is characterized as a meditation on the development of the visualization via the *mode of perfection*.¹⁴²

Thus Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga seem to have developed in parallel, if not in total identification with the three modes of esoteric yoga set out in Padmasambhava's *Garland of Views* and elsewhere: development (*bskyed*), perfection (*rdzogs*) and great perfection (*rdzogs chen*). It is evident in *Garland of Views* that these modes apply to the same basic practices.¹⁴³ Similarly, in *Armour Against Darkness*, Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes' commentary on the *Sutra Gathering all Intentions*, the author treats the yogas of Mahā, Anu and Ati as 'systems' (*lugs*) representing 'modes' of practice, and not as 'vehicles'. Rather they are specifically characterized as the lower, middle and higher divisions of a single vehicle.¹⁴⁴ While Gnubs chen does write of a vehicle of Atiyoga in his *Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation*, his use of the term 'vehicle' is rather haphazard in this text, and it is clear that Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga are fully conceptualized as three distinct vehicles here either.¹⁴⁵ In fact, as far as I am aware there is no reliable source before the eleventh century for the classic presentation of the nine vehicles as vehicles. Though such a source may yet come to light, we can at least say that Anuyoga and Atiyoga were not widely considered to be independent vehicles before the eleventh century.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² IOL Tib J 656: 29-30: bskyed de rdzogs pa'i tshul du bsgom ba'o.

It is interesting to note that Anuyoga seems to have developed independence even later than Atiyoga. It is absent from Vilāsavajra's commentary on the *Guhyaḡarbhā's* chapter thirteen, on the stages of tantric practice (Q.4718: 186b), and it is similarly absent from the treatment of the levels of empowerment in Sūryasiṃhaprabhā's *Guhyaḡarbhā* commentary (Q.4719: 224a-224b). In Pelliot tibétain 644 it is the same as Atiyoga in having no specific meditative or ritual content, while according to IOL Tib J 656 the practice of Anuyoga is the same as Mahāyoga: union and liberation (*shyor sgröl*). Moreover it seems that Anuyoga was not given any specific scriptural content until much later than was the case with Atiyoga. While Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes seems to have been instrumental in defining a group of texts as Atiyoga scripture in his *Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation*, no specifically Anuyoga texts are mentioned there. The *Sutra Gathering all Intentions*, which was to become one of the central Anuyoga scriptures was well known to Gnubs chen, who wrote an extensive commentary on the text, but in the *Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation*, he uses it solely as a source for his Atiyoga chapter, suggesting that it, like the other sources in that chapter, should be considered an Atiyoga text.

¹⁴³ For the relevant section of the *Garland of Views*, see Karmay 1988: 155, 164.

¹⁴⁴ See *Armour of Darkness*: I.509: mi mthun par 'dul ba'i theg pa la'ang gdul bya rab kyi rab 'bring tha ma gsum gyis lha rim par bsgom pa la rtsal chen rdzogs pa dang/ skad cig mas (*rdzogs dang*) bsgom pa bdal ba chos nyid kyi sa pa dang/ bskyed rdzogs dang bral (*yongs su*) rdzogs pa spyi chibs kyi sa pa'o/

The root text *Sutra Gathering all Intentions* characterizes the three modes not as Mahā-, Anu- and Atiyoga but as development (*bskyed pa*), perfection (*rdzogs pa*) and total perfection (*yongs su rdzogs pa*). In this it is similar to the *Garland of Views*. See *Armour of Darkness*: I.509-511.

¹⁴⁵ *Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation* 291.4: shin tu rnal 'byor gyi theg pa

In his summary of the differences between Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga (pp.490-491), Gnubs chen does not specifically apply the term 'vehicle' to these three yogas. However, he does not characterize them as 'modes' either. In general the *Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation* seems to stand midway between the understanding of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga as modes of esoteric yoga, and the understanding of them as independent vehicles.

¹⁴⁶ There is one ostensibly early source that does define Mahā-, Anu- and Atiyoga as vehicles per se in the manner of the later Nyingma tradition. This is the *Esoteric Instructions on the Stages of the View*, attributed to the eighth-century translator Ska ba Dpal brtsegs. However, there are many reasons for doubting the authorial attribution and early date of this text. Karmay has discussed Bu ston's questioning of the authorship (Karmay 1988: 149), and elsewhere I have noted the text's absence from Gnubs chen's *Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation*, despite the inclusion of other works by Dpal brtsegs (van Schaik 2004b: 188). Furthermore, Matthew Kapstein has noted that this text contains developments in doctrinal matters that bear comparison with works produced in the early second millennium Bka' ma lineages, notably the *Definition of the Vehicles* of Kaḡ thog dam pa bde gshegs (personal communication).

As I argued at the beginning of this paper, we must be careful to avoid reading the doxographies of a later period onto the earlier appearances of these terms. I have already suggested that Mahāyoga, as it appears in the ninth and tenth century texts we have been examining here, cannot be considered in isolation from the discourses of Atiyoga, or the Great Perfection. The earliest strata of Atiyoga, or Great Perfection, literature is characterized by a reformulation of Mahāyoga meditative practice in terms of nonconceptuality, nonduality and the spontaneous presence of the enlightened state. Before the eleventh century Atiyoga is not generally associated with a separate vehicle; rather it is characterized as a ‘mode’ (*tsbul*). Treatises like *The Questions and Answers on Vajrasattva* show exactly how the view embodied in the Great Perfection was to be applied to the practices of Mahāyoga.¹⁴⁷

10. Conclusions

As we have seen, the Dunhuang manuscripts represent an intense period of development in Indic tantra and its absorption into Tibet in the ninth and tenth centuries. The sources I have drawn upon here represent a time when Mahāyoga was considered the pinnacle of tantric ritual practice, while it was simultaneously in the process of being displaced from that position by the developing rubrics of Anuyoga and Atiyoga. At this point the latter (Anuyoga and Atiyoga) seem to have been primarily view or theory-based approaches, with little or no ritual presence in the manuscripts. Toward the end of this period we see a movement towards the stratification of the tantric categories of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga. That trend is best represented in doxographical texts and — for Mahāyoga — the central text of this survey, *The Summary of the View of Mahāyoga According to Scripture*.

What then is the ‘definition’ of Mahāyoga offered by the Dunhuang manuscripts we have been looking at here? Based on the *Summary* we may offer the following brief definition of Mahāyoga in tenth-century Tibet:

- The theoretical content or view is defined as the ‘single mode’ (*tsbul gcig*) in which the buddhas of the five families are embodied in a single deity, usually Vajrasattva.
- Meditation is defined by the gradual visualization practice of the three concentrations (*ting nge ’dzin*). These are the concentrations on (i) suchness, (ii) total illumination, and (iii) the cause.
- Ritual practice is subsumed by the two categories of union and liberation (*sbyor sgröl*), that is, sexual practice with a consort and ritual murder. The *Summary* leaves some room for interpreting these practices metaphorically.
- The *samaya* vows (*dam tshig*) that bind a practitioner who has received a Mahāyoga empowerment comprise three root and twenty-five branch vows.
- The result of Mahāyoga practice is defined in a succession of four levels of accomplishment known as the four kinds of *vidyādhara* (*rigs ’dzin*).
- The scriptural group associated with Mahāyoga is the ‘eighteen tantras’, although the content of this group is uncertain.

¹⁴⁷ For the full argument, see van Schaik 2004b.

As I mentioned at the outset, this has primarily been a synchronic study of the way Mahāyoga was understood at a particular time in the development of tantric theory and practice. The Dunhuang manuscripts capture the period just before the renaissance in tantric translation at the end of the tenth century. As new tantric lineages flooded into Tibet, those who remained loyal to the older lineages came to be known as Nyingma, “the ancient ones.” Under threat from the new lineages, the adherents of the Nyingma were involved, throughout their history, in defending the genuine antiquity and Indic origin of their own tantric lineages.¹⁴⁸

These Dunhuang manuscripts make it clear that the development of the ritual and theoretical content of Mahāyoga that characterises the later Nyingma tradition was already well underway by the tenth century. The links between the Indic sources and Tibet’s early tantric traditions — and the way that the Tibetans adapted and reshaped those sources — have become a little more clear now that we have a sense of the definition of Mahāyoga in Tibet during the tenth century. I hope that we can now, at least in this context, use the term Mahāyoga in an informed way and without too great a danger of anachronism.

Appendix: Translation and edition of IOL Tib J 436

A Summary of the View of Mahāyoga According to Scripture

[1r] Now, the view of Mahāyoga. What is the view of the five families as a single mode? When the great elements are subsumed into one, they exist in utter perfection. This is the female deity. The forms that come into being from them are the male deity: he who is called Totally Illuminating (Vairocana). As he cannot be carried off by external forces, he is known as The Immoveable (Akṣobhya). As he fulfills all wishes, he is known as The Jewel-Born (Ratnasambhava). As he goes to the realms of light he is known as Limitless Light (Amitābha). [1v] As . . . he is known as Meaningful Accomplishment (Amoghasiddhi).¹⁴⁹ The five families are, in this way, a single mode.

What are the relevant *samaya*? One should gather the *samaya* in order to embrace that which is concordant, in order to restrain that which is discordant, and in order to obtain and accomplish. The 28 *samaya* are the transmitted precepts. According to the esoteric instructions these are grouped into three. This one should know. What are they? They are:

- (i) the *samaya* of view,
- (ii) the *samaya* of practice,
- (iii) the *samaya* of accomplishment.

Now to distinguish these. The *samaya* of mind (not disseminating the secret instruction to others) and the five aspects to be known are *the samaya of the view*. The *samaya* of the body (not developing ill-will or scorn towards the *vajra* master and brothers and sisters) and the five *samaya* to be practised, and the five *samaya* not to be renounced, are *the samaya of practice*. The *samaya* of speech (not ceasing in the mantras and mudrās) and the five

¹⁴⁸ On this process, see Davidson 2004: 151–154. This polemical process continued through to the 20th century, when Nyingma exegetes were still on the defensive; see Dudjom 1991: 888–940.

¹⁴⁹ One edge of the manuscript has been severely damaged here, but most of the text can be reconstructed.

samaya to be accomplished are *the samaya of accomplishment*. [2r] The unsurpassable fruit of these three is the nature of accomplishment.

The union of Mahāyoga is called “the union of the *vajra* and the lotus.” It is also three-fold:

- (i) The union in the single ornament,
- (ii) The union of the five families in a single mode,
- (iii) Indiscriminate union.

One should know that each of these has four parts:

- (i) Union,
- (ii) Subsequent union,
- (iii) Total union,
- (iv) Universal union.¹⁵⁰

Of these, meditating on oneself as the deity is *union*. *Subsequent union* is developing the wisdom being at one’s heart. *Total union* is the unshakeable great bliss of the descent of the *bodhicitta* of the union of *vajra* and lotus. *Universal union* is projection and absorption, conferring empowerment upon limitless sentient beings, each in their particular deity family. [2v]

When [practising] union in Mahāyoga, the qualities of greatness are said to be:

- (i) Subduing the four Māras,
- (ii) Playing with the five space mistresses,¹⁵¹
- (iii) Possessing the four secret consorts.

The four Māras are:

- (i) Māra the aggregates,
- (ii) Māra the afflictions,
- (iii) Māra the god,
- (iv) Māra the lord of death.¹⁵²

Of these, the phase of meditation on the *mahāmudrā* of the deity’s body is called *conquering Māra the aggregates*. The phase of the unshakeable great bliss of *bodhicitta* is called *conquering Māra the afflictions* because the mind of the three times does not arise. The phase of acting for the benefit of sentient beings is called *conquering Māra the god*. The phase of

¹⁵⁰ The Tibetan terms are (i) *sbyor ba*, (ii) *rjes su sbyor ba*, (iii) *rab tu sbyor ba*, and (iv) *kun tu sbyor ba*. Possible Sanskrit equivalents are: (i) *yoganam*, (ii) *anuyoganam*, (iii) *prayoganam*, (iv) *samyoganam*. The last of these is attested in *Mahāvīyūtpatti* 2134. I have not found this particular fourfold classification in other Dunhuang sources or in later Nyingma presentations of Mahāyoga. Note however that another Dunhuang manuscript contains a different enumeration of four *sbyor ba*: (i) *dbang po yul la sbyor ba*, (ii) *shes rab thabs la sbyor ba*, (iii) *ye shes dbyings la sbyor ba*, (iv) *rdo rje pad mo la sbyor ba* (IOL Tib J 754/9.45–55). This enumeration occurs in the context of a discussion of a sexual ritual practice of union (*sbyor ba*).

¹⁵¹ Tib. *dbyings kyi dbang phyug ma*, Skt. *dhātviśvari*. These female deities appear as consorts in many tantras. Note that IOL Tib J 419/14 contains a list of eight *rnal ’byor gyi dbang phyug chen po* and in IOL Tib J 716/2, the consort of Heruka is named *Kbro mo dbang phyug ma*.

¹⁵² This standard set of four Māras derives from early Buddhist sources. The Sanskrit terms are (i) *skandha-māra*, (ii) *kleśa-māra*, (iii) *mṛtyu-māra*, (iv) *devaputra-māra*. The conquest of the four Māras became a central metaphor in the Tibetan “cutting” (*gcod*) tradition.

experiencing the savour of *bodhicitta*, which transcends birth and death, is called *conquering Māra the lord of death*.¹⁵³ [3r]

The five space mistresses are:

- (i) The *vajra* space mistress,
- (ii) The lotus space mistress,
- (iii) The jewel space mistress,
- (iv) The karma space mistress,
- (v) The airborne space mistress.¹⁵⁴

Of these, the male is called *the vajra space mistress* and the female is called *the lotus space mistress*. The phase of unshakeable great bliss which is the descent of *bodhicitta* endowed with the *vajra* and the lotus is called *the jewel space mistress*. The phase of activity for the benefit of sentient beings [by] projecting and absorbing the *bodhicitta* is called *the karma space mistress*. And thus making all *bodhicitta* of one taste without it bursting out is called *the airborne space mistress*.¹⁵⁵

The four secret consorts are:

- (i) The Lady of Mudrā,
- (ii) The Lady of Intoxication,
- (iii) The Lady of Eating,
- (iv) The Lady who Prolongs Life.¹⁵⁶

Of these, the body of the consort is known as *the Lady of Mudrā*. The unshakeable great bliss of *bodhicitta* is known as *the Lady of Intoxication*. [3v] Experiencing the savour as *bodhicitta*, or alternatively accepting and eating, is known as *the Lady of Eating*.¹⁵⁷ The phase of obtaining the praiseworthy qualities of *bodhicitta* is known as *the Lady who Prolongs Life* because it transcends birth and death.

The liberation of Mahāyoga is said to comprise:

- (i) Liberation of oneself,
- (ii) Liberation of others.

Of these, liberation of oneself comprises:

- (i) Approaching the deity,

¹⁵³ The conquest of the four Māras is mentioned in the prayer in Pelliot tibétain 16: 30r.4.

¹⁵⁴ These five categories obviously correspond to the five buddha families, with the exception of the fifth, which is *mkha' la* rather than *tathāgata*. See however the *Gubhyagarbha* (chapter 2, Tb.417: 157.1), where the five female buddhas are collectively called “space mistresses of the sky” (*nam mkha'i dbyings kyi dbang phyug ma*).

¹⁵⁵ I have not seen the specific names here in later sources, nor in other Dunhuang manuscripts. We do find groups of female deities (usually in groups of eight) surrounding a *heruka* figure in a *maṇḍala* in some Dunhuang ritual texts (as discussed above). The names in these manuscripts partially overlap with the eighteen *dbang phyug ma* which are found in later Nyingma Mahāyoga commentaries and *sādhana*s (see for example Klong chen pa's *Phyogs bcu mun sel*). On the 18 *dbang phyug ma* see Blezer 2000.

¹⁵⁶ The Tibetan names are: (i) Phyang rgya ma, (ii) Rmongs byed mo, (iii) Zab mo, (iv) Tshe 'phel mo. For the last name the text has *rmongs byed tshe 'phel mo*, but this is probably a scribal error, as the name when repeated later is just *tshe 'phel mo*. The Sanskrit equivalents here may be: (i) Mudrī, (ii) Mohaṇī, (iii) Gambhīra, (iv) Āyurnardhana.

¹⁵⁷ On “experiencing the taste of *bodhicitta*” see also *Tattvaratnāvaloka*, 240a.3: *byang chub sems/ ro myang dbang bzhir 'chad pa* (from Dalton 2004: 26). Note that in the *Summary* the context suggests that “experiencing the taste of *bodhicitta*” is distinct from “accepting and eating”. The latter could well be a reference to consuming all the five nectars (see esp. Wedemeyer 2007: 401–403).

(ii) Clarifying the tantras.

Of these, in *approaching the deity* the measure of accomplishment is the ability to levitate up to four finger-widths. And *clarifying the tantras* means becoming learned in the eighteen tantras, or alternatively it indicates the sages who possess the transmitted precepts and esoteric instructions. The liberation of others means that having assembled many such great lords, those in the category of the ten fields are placed into the *maṇḍala* of the heroes. Within the circle they are liberated to bring them into accord with others.

Meditation, via the gradual development of the three aspects of Mahāyoga, is as follows: [4r]

- (i) First, one begins with meditation on the *dharmatā*;
- (ii) Second, one then meditates on the unassailable total illumination;
- (iii) Third, one then meditates on the causal concentration.

Here ends *A Summary of the View of Mahāyoga According to Scripture*

TRANSCRIPTION OF IOL Tib J 436:

In the following transcription, I have attempted to provide a clear reading of the manuscript without over-correcting the archaic orthography. The reverse *gi gu* is indicated with a capital I. The *anusvāra* (which is merely used for scribal convenience) is indicated by a dot under the m. In most cases the divergences from classical orthography (eg. *rin cen*, *dam tsig*) are self-explanatory. I have made a very few insertions (marked by square brackets) where these seemed necessary to make the reading more clear.

CONVENTIONS:

- < > deleted in original manuscript
- + + inserted in original manuscript
- ... lost due to manuscript damage
- { } unclear reading
- [] inserted in the present edition

[1r.1] bsgom pa / 'di // de la ma ha yo ga'i lta / rlg<s> lnga tshul gcIg tu lta gang zhe na // 'byung [2] ba ched po la gcig gi nang na // kun rdzogs par yod pa nI // yum yin la / de las gzugs [3] su red pa nI / yab ste rnam par snang mdzad // ces bya // de nyid gzhan gyis myi 'phrogs pa nI [4] myI bskyod pa zhes bya // de thams cad re ba yid bzhin du skong ba ni // rin <ce> cen 'byung ldan zhes [b]ya [5] {snang zhing song bas ni snang} [ba mtha' yas] zhes bya // ... thams cad ... nI {gyis} // ...

[1v.1] ... nI // {don yod grub pa zhes} bya // rig[s] lnga de ltar tshul gcig go // de la {rtse}'i phyo[gs] [2] dam tsig ce na // 'dra bar dkra' ba'i phyI r dang / myi 'dra bar sdom ba'i phyI r dang // thob <par> cing [3] grub pa'I phyir dam tsig tseg bya/o // de la dam tsig nyi shu rtsa brgyad nI // lung yin la man ngag gIs ni gsu du 'dus pa [4] shes gpar bya ste // dpe yang gang zhe na // lta ba'i dam tsig dang / spyod pa'i dam tshig dang // bsgrub pa'i dam tsig go // de la dbyen [5] thugs kyi dam tsig gsang ba'i man ngag // gzhan la myi spel

ba dang // shes par bya ba'I dam tsig la ni / lta ba'i dam tsig go [6] sku'i dam tsig <ni>
 rdo rje slob dpon dang / mched lcam dral la ngan sems dang spyad sems myi bskyed pa
 dang // spyad par bya {du} [7] dang / myi spang ba lnga ste / spyad pa'i dam tsig go //
 gsung gi dam tsig sngags phyag rgya rgyun myi gcad pa dang / grub par bya ba

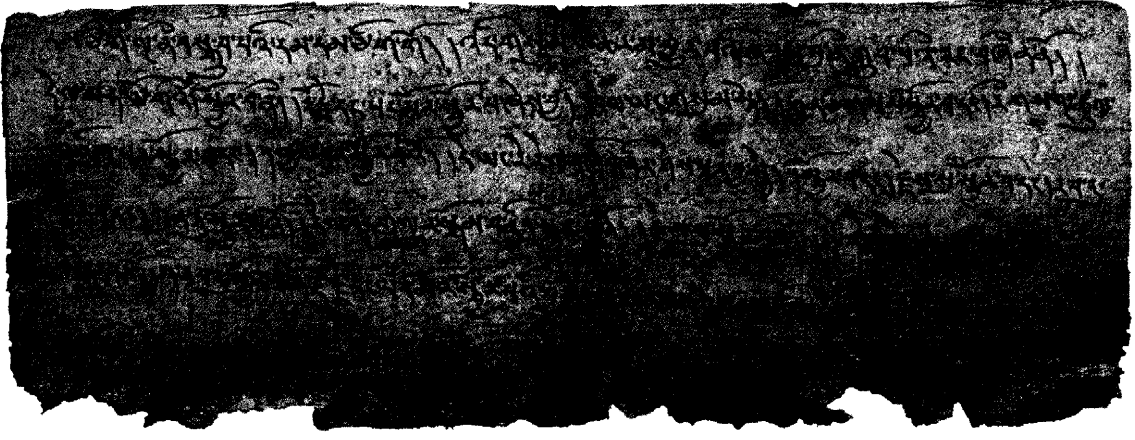
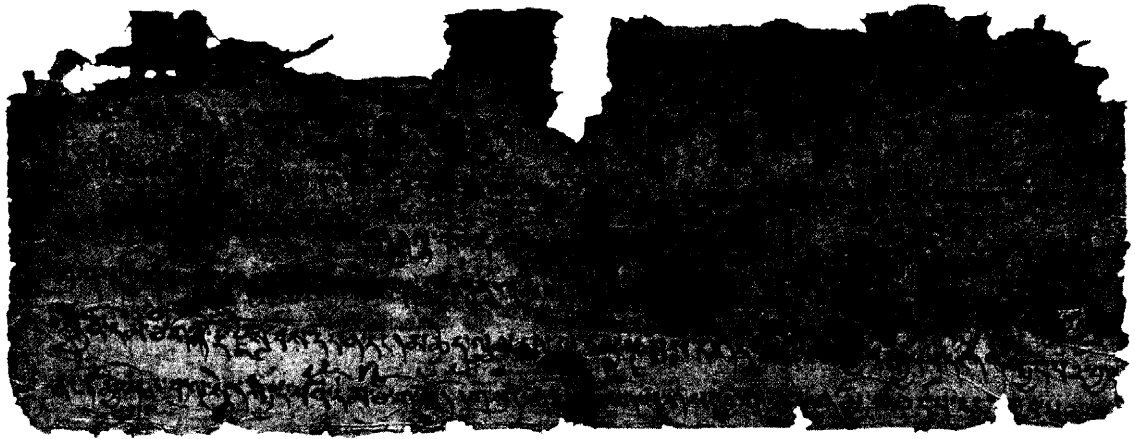
[2r.1] dam tsig lnga nI bsgrub pa'i dam tsig go // 'di gsum ya char ma gyur pa'i 'bras
 bu nI grub pa'I rang bzhi no // [2] de la maha yo ga'i / sbyor ba nI // rdo rje dang pad
 mor sbyor ba zhes bya // de la yang gsum ste // rgyan cig par sbyor ba dang / rIgs lnga
 tshul [3] gcig par sbyor ba dang // phyal bar sbyor ba'o // de yang re re la bzhi bzhi shes
 par ba ste // sbyor ba dang / rjes su sbyor ba dang/rab tu [4] sbyor ba dang / kun tu sbyor
 ba'o // de la bdag lhar sgom pa ni / sbyor ba'o // rjes su sbyor ba nI // ye shes sems pa
 thugs kar [5] bskyed pa'o // rab tu sbyor ba ni rdo rje dang pad mor sbyor ba'i byang chub
 sems / babs pa'i bde ba chen po myi g.yo ba'o // kun tu [6] sbyor ba nI 'phro 'dus / sems
 can <gi don> rgya mtsho rigs su [r]jes par dbang bskur ba'o // [de] la maha yo ga'i sbyor
 ba'i

[2v.1] [d]u[s] // ch[e] ba'i yon tan n[i] bdud bzhi bcom ba dang // dbyings phyug ma
 lnga la rol pa dang / gsang ba'i yum bzhi dang ldan no [2] zhes byung ste // de la bdud
 bzhi ni / pung po'i bdud dang / nyon mongs pa'i bdud dang / shi bdag gi bdugd dang /
 [3] lha'I bdud do // de la lha'I +sku+ phyag rgya chen por sgom pa'I dus na // pung po'i
 bdud bcom zhes bya // byang chub kyi sems [4] bde ba ched po myi g.yo ba'i dus na //
 dus sum gi sems myi 'byng bas // nyon mongs pa'i bdud bcom zhes bya // byang [5] chub
 kyi sems kyi 'phro 'dus / sems can gi don byas pa'i dus na // lha'i bdud bcom zhes bya //
 byang chub kyi [6] sems kyi ro tsor pa'i dus na // skye shi las 'das pa'i shI bdag gi bdud
 bcom zhes bya // de la dbyings phyug

[3r.1] ma lnga la // rdo rje dang pad mo'i dbyIngs phyug ma dang // rin chen dbyIngs
 phyug ma dang / las kyi dbyIngs phyug ma dang / [2] mkha' dbyings phyug ma zhes bya'o
 // de la yab ni rdo rje dbyings phyug ma zhes bya // yum ni pad mo dbyings phyug ma
 zhes bya / [3] rdo rje dang pad mor ldan pa'i byang chub kyi sems babs pa'i bde ba ched po
 myi g.yo ba'i dus na // rin cen dbyings phyug ma [4] zhes bya'o // byang chub kyi sems
 kyi 'phro 'dus sems can gyi don byas pa'i dus na // las kyi dbyings phyug ma zhes bya //
 de lta [5] bas na // byang chub kyi sems kun ro gcig par byas pa ni / ma brdos pa yin bas
 mkha' la dbyings phyug ma zhe bya / [6] de la gsang ba'i yum bzhi ni / phyag rgya mo dag
 rmongs byed mo dang / za ba mo dang / rmongs byed tshe 'phel mo zhes bya // de la yum
 [7] kyi {sku} nI phyag rgya ma zhes bya // byang chub kyi sems bde ba ched po myi g.yo
 ba nI [rm]o[ng]s [byed mo // byang] chub kyi se[ms]

[3v.1] su ro tshor ba 'am / yang na blangs te za ba ni / za ba mo zhes bya ba / byang
 chub kyi sems ky[i] y[o]n tan bsngags po thob pa'i [2] dus na // skye shi las 'das pas tshe
 'phel ma zhes bya // de la maha yo ga'i sgom pa ni // bdag bsgral ba dang / [3] gzhan
 bsgral ba <o> // zhes bya'o // de la bdag bsgral ba ni / lha nye ba dang / rgyud gsal ba
 'o / de la lha nye ba ni grub [4] pa'i tshad de // sor bzhi yan cad nam ka la 'pag nus pa
 dang // rgyud gsal pa ni rgyud bco brgyad la mkhas par [5] gyur pa 'am // yang na lung
 dang man ngag dang ldan pa'i skyes bu rnams la bya // gzhan pa sgral ba ni // de lta bu'i
 [6] dbang phyug ched po du <me>zhi'g 'tshogs nas // zhing bcu rim pa dang ldan pa'i
 rnams dpa' bo'i dkyil 'khor du [7] sbyar ba'o // bskor na mthun 'jug 'tsha<l>m pa'i sgral
 ba'o // mā ha yo ga'i rnam sum rims kyis [4r.1] bskyed nas / bsgoms / pa ni // dang po
 chos nyid sgom pa ste gcig // de nas kun tu snang ba'i myI brdos par bsgom [2] ba dang
 gnyis / de nas rgyu'i ti nge 'dzin sgom pa dang gsum mo // maha yo ga'i lta ba lung du
 bsdus pa rdzogs so //

(end)



MS IOL Tib J 436, ff. 1r, 1v, 2r

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