
Tantra and the Tantric Traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism

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Summary

The term *tantra* and the tantric traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism have been subjected to a great deal of misunderstanding in both India and the West. There is a diverse range of attitudes toward the tantric traditions, ranging from their emic understandings as paths to liberation to the relatively widespread associations of the tantric traditions with sorcery and libertine sexuality. Likewise, tantric traditions are also extremely diverse, which has made it difficult to develop a definition broad enough to cover the various tantric traditions without being overly broad. There have also been many attempts to discern the origins of the tantric traditions. While there is very little evidence supporting the hypothesis that any of the tantric traditions existed before the 5th century CE, there have been attempts to trace back these traditions much earlier, to the time of the Buddha or the ancient Hindu sages, or even back to the Indus Valley civilization. In overviewing various attempts to date these traditions, it appears that the first tantric traditions to emerge in a distinct form almost certainly first emerged in a Hindu context around the mid-first millennium CE.

An overview of the history of tantric traditions, then, should begin with a survey the development of the Hindu tantric traditions, from the mid-first millennium CE up to the colonial period, when tantric traditions in South Asia generally entered a period of decline, followed by a renaissance in the 20th century. The historical appearance of Buddhist tantric traditions occurs a few centuries later, during the 7th century. Buddhist tantric traditions were strongly influenced at their inception by preexisting Śaiva Hindu traditions, but they also drew on a growing body of ritual and magical practices that had been developing for several centuries, since at least the 5th century CE, in Mahāyāna Buddhist circles. The spread of tantric traditions quickly followed their development in India. They were disseminated to Nepal; Central, East, and Southeast Asia; and also, much later, to the West. Tantric Hindu and Buddhist traditions were also a significant influence on a number of other religious traditions, including Jainism, Sikhism, the Bön tradition of Tibet, Daoism, and the Shintō tradition of Japan.

Keywords: tantra, Tantrism, Hinduism, Buddhism, South Asia, East Asia, Tibet

Subjects: Hinduism, Rituals, Practices, and Symbolism, Buddhism

“Tantrism” or the tantric traditions originated as a development within Hinduism during the first millennium CE. Over the course of this millennium Hinduism went through a remarkable series of transformations, transitioning from the ancient Vedic tradition into the classical traditions of Hinduism. This period saw the rise of both the tantric and the Bhakti devotional movements. While the latter drew from the tendency toward monotheism seen in late Vedic literature, Tantrism developed from Vedic ritual traditions as well as from the yogic and meditative traditions that developed both within ancient Hinduism as well as in rival Buddhist and Jain traditions. Hinduism as currently practiced is a product of the intermixture of tantric and devotional approaches to practice that developed during the first millennium CE.

The connection of contemporary Hindu practices, such as daily worship ceremonies (*pūjā*, *nityapūjā*) conducted by many Hindus in private shrines or public temples, to tantric traditions is not well understood by most Hindus or even by scholars, as the rich liturgical literature produced by Hindu traditions have, until relatively recently, been largely ignored.¹ While most Hindu traditions have received some influence from the tantric traditions, the focus here will be the Hindu traditions that clearly and unambiguously identify as tantric. But Tantrism, while originating in a Hindu context, is not limited to Hinduism. Early Hindu tantric traditions had a striking impact on South Asian Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions, leading to the development of distinctly Buddhist tantric traditions. They also had a less striking but still real impact on Jainism and several other religious traditions. Buddhist tantric traditions, which emerged during the 7th century CE, were rapidly transmitted to Southeast, East, and Central Asia, leading to the establishment of several distinct East Asian and Tibetan traditions. These, in turn, had an impact on the development of Daoism and Shintoism in East Asia as well as the Bön tradition in Tibet.

The tantric traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism have been simultaneously infamous as well as poorly understood. Due to the strong association of tantric traditions with magical practices, and of the so-called “left-handed” (*vāmācāra*) tantric traditions with sexuality and violent ritual practices, the tantric traditions have, over the past few centuries at least, been associated with black magic in India. Tantric traditions have had a tremendous impact on the practice of Hinduism that is now poorly appreciated by most Hindus; the term *tantra* is now best known in South Asia in the compound *tantramātra*, which is the equivalent in modern languages such as Hindi to “abracadabra” or “hocus-pocus” in English, terms that originated in Western magical practices that now designate “mumbo-jumbo, nonsense, gibberish”² and “magic, trickery, or sleight of hand,”³ respectively. The title *Tantra Mantra* was given to a recent Hindi horror film featuring black magic.⁴ The term *tantra* in modern Indian languages “is frequently used to conjure notions of effective black magic, illicit sexuality, and immoral behavior.”⁵ Western scholars of Indian culture and history often treated tantric traditions with disdain, using its alleged degeneracy as an excuse to ignore this important aspect of Asian religious history.⁶

Defining Tantra/Tantric Traditions

Tantric traditions are manifold, spanning several religious traditions and cultural worlds. As a result they are also diverse, which makes it a significant challenge to come up with an adequate definition, one that is broad enough to be applicable to all of the tantric traditions, but not too broad, including traditions that would identify themselves as tantric, and thus probably should be excluded from this rubric.

The tantric traditions have been given several labels, but there is no single label that is accepted by all of these traditions. The adjective *tantric*, an English word derived from the Sanskrit term *tāntrika*, means simply that which relates to the *tantras*, the genre of scripture that serves as the canonical basis for the various tantric traditions. Tantras are works that primarily focus on ritual and meditative practices, so the term *tantric* also envelops the practices associated with these scriptures, which were traditionally disseminated by the *tāntrikas* (the Sanskrit term also designates tantric practitioners), along with the texts.⁷ So “tantric traditions” are the communities of practitioners who practice, preserve, and transmit through both time and space both the texts and the practices traditionally associated with them.

It is important to note the use of this term in a plural form. Tantric traditions are multiple and also originated as multiple, distinct traditions of both text and practice. One of the most important tropes in the history of the dissemination of tantric traditions is that of lineage, the transmission of teachings along an uninterrupted lineage, from master to disciple, the so-called *guruparamparā*. This focus on lineage is found throughout the tantric world; originating in India, this emphasis was transmitted to Tibet and East Asia and remains an important concern of contemporary tantric communities.

In the West the tantric traditions have often been labeled “Tantrism,” a neologism coined by Western scholars that does not reflect the self-understanding of any particular tantric tradition. As André Padoux noted,

The word “Tantrism” is assuredly a Western creation. India traditionally knows only texts called Tantras. These texts, moreover, fall far short of covering the entire Tantric literature; nor are only Tantric texts called Tantras. India also knows the word *tantrasāstra*, “the teaching of the Tantras,” as well as the adjective *tāntrika*, “Tantric,” which is opposed to *vaidika*, “Vedic,” thereby placing a new form of revelation and rites against Vedic tradition and rites.⁸

The concept is based upon the *tantras*, key scriptures in many tantric traditions, but as Padoux notes, not all tantric traditions use the term *tantra* for their scripture, and the term is also used for nontantric works. We might also add that tantric traditions also use other terms for their scriptures; Hindu tantric traditions also use the terms *āgama*, *jñāna*, *saṃhitā*, *siddhānta*, *vidyā*, and *upaniṣad* to designate scriptures,⁹ while Buddhist traditions also used the terms *sūtra* and *kalpa* for some of their scriptures. So the presence or absence of tantras cannot be taken as a defining characteristic of these traditions. Likewise, while the East Asian tantric Buddhist traditions preserve Chinese translations of many of the tantras, the term *tantra* itself is not well known by these traditions, nor do they identify themselves as “tantric.”¹⁰ But the very term *tantra* points to an important feature of even these traditions. The scriptures known as *tantras*, which were transmitted to East Asia, tend to be heavily focused on the description of ritual, meditative, and yogic practices. These traditions tend to be heavily practice-oriented, with the goals of this practice ranging from worldly success to ultimate liberation, however defined.

Obviously it would be ideal to define Tantra in terms of a single defining characteristic. Were there a single feature that all tantric traditions shared, this would naturally make it far easier to delineate exactly what the term designates. Such attempts include the Tibetan scholar

Tsongkhapa's (1357–1419 CE) argument that deity yoga, the visualization of oneself as a deity, is the defining characteristic of tantric practice, an argument that was problematized by his contemporary Ngorchen Kunga Sangpo (1389–1456 CE), who noted that not all esoteric works classified as tantras feature this practice.¹¹ While the visualization of oneself as a deity is an important aspect of many tantric traditions, it is not found in all. It is also a somewhat arbitrary definition, as there are also many other elements of tantric practice that are found in most, if not all, tantric traditions.

One solution to this problem is to delineate a range of features that tend to characterize tantric traditions. This was done by Teun Goudriaan, who first attempted to define "Tantrism" in terms of union with divinity, much like Tsongkhapa. He defined it as "the systematic quest for salvation or for spiritual excellence by realizing and fostering the bipolar, bisexual divinity within one's own body."¹² He then went on to list a number of "tantric elements" that characterize this path to practice, including distinct paths of practice (*sādhana*), the use of mantras and mandalas, visualization and worship of the deities, distinct initiation ceremonies, and yogic practices involving the subtle body.

This definition is quite useful as it indicates the range of ritual and contemplative techniques employed by tantric practitioners in order to achieve magical powers (*siddhi*) as well as liberation. Liberation in the Hindu theistic traditions is generally defined as the attainment of union with or proximity to the supreme deity, while it is defined as the achievement of the awakening of a buddha by Buddhists. For both traditions liberation is characterized by both knowledge and freedom.

While we might debate which elements of tantric practice might be included in a definition or taxonomy of Tantrism, it should be noted that tantric traditions of all sectarian affiliations, be they Buddhist or Hindu, are characterized by a strong focus on ritual and meditative practice. From a certain perspective, Tantrism is, as Jean Filliozat stated, "merely the ritual and technical aspect of Hinduism."¹³ This makes sense when one considers that tantric ritual largely supplanted the older Vedic ritual system in Hinduism. Likewise, in Buddhism, Tantrism originated simply as the ritual facet of Mahāyāna Buddhism as it came to be practiced in India around the mid-first millennium CE, and it emerged as an independent tradition only when its practitioners developed a self-conscious sense of distinction vis-à-vis mainstream "exoteric" Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions. Hence, as André Padoux argued, "Tantrism" per se is simply an academic category, abstracted from

the various forms taken over the course of time by large sections of Hinduism and Buddhism. Depending upon the background, the origins, and the local influences, the evolution was more or less marked by a rejection of orthodox Vedic rules and notions; it included more or less local autochthonous cults and beliefs, local religious behaviors, and magical and/or other practices.¹⁴

As there was, however, considerable borrowing among these traditions, there are commonalities that can be found among these traditions, although they are diverse enough to resist reduction to a single defining quality shared by all of them.

The Origins of Tantric Traditions

The origins of the tantric traditions is an enigma, largely due to the paucity of historical evidence in India from the period when it seems that they first emerged, during the Gupta dynasty (320–550 CE). This paucity of evidence has led to a great deal of unbridled speculation regarding the origin of these traditions. There is no hard evidence for the existence of tantric traditions prior to the mid-first millennium CE. While it is clear that some aspects of the tantric traditions, such as characteristic practices or iconography, considerably predate the historical formation of these traditions, the various attempts to date Tantrism prior to the first millennium CE are based on very flimsy evidence.¹⁵

The tantras themselves, as well as associated scriptures (*āgama*, *saṃhitā*, etc.), are understood by their respective traditions to be revealed works, initially taught by deities. In the Śaiva tradition, scriptures are believed to have originated in teachings given by Śiva to his wife, Devī; these teachings were then later conveyed to human sages such as Matsendranāth.¹⁶ The Śākta and Vaiṣṇava tantric traditions, on the other hand, hold the Goddess and Viṣṇu, respectively, to be the original divine teacher. Some Buddhist tantric traditions claim that their scriptures were taught by timeless cosmic buddhas and then revealed to adepts.¹⁷ These myths, while claiming that scriptures originate in a timeless divine expression, nonetheless point to their revelation as being meditated by great realized adepts (*mahāsiddhas*) who lived during the early medieval period, around the 7th through 13th centuries, more or less when most tantric scriptures actually came to light.

To the extent that tantric scriptures discuss their origins, these disclosures tend to be mythical rather than historical. Treating these myths as history is naturally methodologically unsound. For example, a number of Buddhist tantras, following the textual model of the Buddhist *sūtra* genre, begin with an opening passage (*nidāna*) that indicates the circumstances in which the scripture was taught. A number of tantras claim that they were, like the *sūtras*, initially taught by Śākyamuni Buddha. Despite these origin claims, however, there is absolutely no evidence that any of the Buddhist tantras originated when the Buddha lived, around the 5th century BCE.¹⁸ These passages represent attempts to legitimate these works as awakened speech (*buddhavacana*) and cannot be taken as historical evidence.

While attempts to root aspects of tantric traditions in the distant past are speculative at best, there is no doubt that these traditions, as they emerged, were heavily dependent on earlier Indian traditions of thought and practice. One of the biggest influences on tantric traditions was the far older Vedic tradition of Hinduism. Vedic Hinduism featured the priestly class, Brahmins, who had the sacred duty to memorize the oral sacred literature of the tradition, the *Vedas*, and also learn the complex ritual practices the tradition advocated. These rituals focused on offerings to the gods made into a sacred fire, which ranged from largely vegetarian offerings made into small domestic (*grhya*) fires that householders were to maintain to the larger “solemn” (*śrauta*) rites that required animal sacrifice. This tradition developed circa 1500–500 BCE, reaching its peak right around 500 BCE, just prior to rise of the renunciant traditions that would challenge it. Although there was tension between advocates of the Vedic tradition and advocates of *some* of the tantric traditions, the tantric traditions drew heavily from Vedic ritual practice traditions nonetheless.¹⁹

This borrowing includes wholesale adaptation of the key Vedic rite of fire sacrifice, *homa*,²⁰ and the transformation of the Vedic rite of royal consecration, *rājyasūya*, into the tantric rite of initiation qua “consecration,” *abhiṣeka*.²¹ Even the distinctly tantric practice of visualizing oneself as a deity had Vedic precursors; some Vedic rites required ritual identification with the deity, via both inner visualization and outer ritual actions.²² This was a natural outcome of the decline of the Vedic *śrauta* sacrificial system around the 5th through 13th centuries.²³ And its decline was accompanied by the parallel rise of the tantric traditions, which developed new ritual systems that borrowed heavily from Vedic precursors.

One of the key factors leading to the emergence of the tantric traditions was the rise of the world-renouncing *śramaṇa* movement a thousand years earlier around the mid-first millennium BCE. This movement, which started within Hinduism but led to the development of rival traditions, namely Buddhism and Jainism, was characterized by its highlighting of the goal of liberation (*mokṣa*) from cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*) as the key religious goal, as well as the articulation of distinct paths of practice for reaching this goal. These include, most notably, renunciation and asceticism as a key requisite for liberation. Buddhist and Hindu *śramaṇa* traditions held that liberation resulted from a process of “awakening” (*bodhi*) in which the practitioner achieves a special knowledge or gnosis (*jñāna*) that liberates one from the cycle of awakening. The practice of meditation and yoga were seen as key practices to develop this realization. Tantric traditions inherited this assumption, and many of the contemplative practices, from earlier renunciant traditions.

Buddhist tantric traditions, naturally, accepted the cosmological and philosophical frameworks developed by earlier Buddhist traditions, as well as many of their contemplative practices. Hindu tantric traditions, in turn, accepted and further developed the sophisticated cosmological and psychological doctrines developed by the Sāṃkhya school, as well as the contemplative practices developed by its sister Yoga school.²⁴ Both of these traditions facilitated the transmission of ideas and practices developed by Hindu *śramaṇa* groups.

The early first millennium CE also saw another important development in Hinduism, namely, the rise of the Bhakti devotional movement. This development occurred around the same time as the rise of the tantric traditions. It was characterized by tendency toward monotheism, in that devotion to a single supreme creator god was seen as the key to salvation. This tendency is ancient in Hinduism and is very clear in some of the later *Upaniṣads* dating to the second half of the first millennium BCE.²⁵ Relatively early works such as the *Bhagavad Gīta*, estimated to date circa 100 CE,²⁶ call for devotion to God as the supreme path to liberation.

The popularity and explosive growth of devotional Hinduism had a significant effect on the tantric traditions. Devotion to God is a central feature of most Hindu tantric traditions,²⁷ and the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra tradition in particular fused both Bhakti and tantric modes of practice.²⁸ Given Buddhism’s rejection of the notion of a supreme Creator God, one would expect that the Bhakti influence would be less apparent in Buddhist tantric traditions. This may be the case, but while the influence was less, it was not nonexistent. In the Buddhist context devotion is typically limited to the guru, but this is seen as an essential requisite for tantric practice. The necessity of devotion to the guru is strongly emphasized in later works such as the *The Fifty Stanzas on the Guru (Gurupañcāśikā)*.²⁹

The exact time in which tantric traditions emerged in India remains an enigma due to a dearth of historical evidence in South Asia from the first half of the first millennium CE. However, as we will see in the next section below, the available evidence suggests that the 5th century CE was the most likely period in which the first tantric traditions emerged, and they likely emerged first in the context of the Śaiva tradition of Hinduism.

Hindu Tantric Traditions

The Śaiva Traditions

While the origins of tantric traditions are unclear, available evidence indicates that distinctly tantric forms of Hinduism emerged first among unorthodox Śaiva Hindu traditions around the fifth century CE. Thence it spread to other Hindu traditions, as well as to Buddhism; distinctly tantric forms of Buddhism emerged during the 7th century. It is impossible to precisely date the emergence of tantric Hindu traditions due to the poor state of textual preservation in these traditions; no Hindu tantric manuscripts from earlier than the 9th century have been preserved.

Nonetheless, the available evidence points to the 5th century as the most likely time when Śaiva Hindu tantric traditions first emerged. One of the earliest references to tantric texts and/or practices is found in a 423 CE Gaṅgdhār stone tablet inscription. The inscription includes the following reference to a temple to the Mothers (*mātr*):

Also for the sake of religious merit, the king's minister caused to be built . . . this most terrible of abode, strewn with a multitude of [images of] Ḍākinīs [i.e.,] of the Mothers, that drove of joyous over-the-top gong-bangers who are pumped up to the rain clouds [on] the powerful winds raised by the Tantras.³⁰

This is the earliest datable reference both to the term *tantra* qua ritual manual, as well as to the ḍākinīs, a class of goddesses who are closely linked to the tantric traditions. While we do not know exactly what texts or ritual traditions were being deployed in early 5th century Gaṅgdhār, it was almost certainly Śaiva. This is because the Śaiva tantric tradition is the only tradition for which there is evidence to date to the 5th century.

Śaiva literature is traditionally divided into three “paths”: the “supreme path” (*atimārga*), the “path of mantra” (*mantramārga*), and the “path of the clans” (*kulamantra*). The Atimārga was produced by three distinct groups: the Pāñcārthika Pāśupatas, the Lākulas or Kālamukhas, and the Kāpālikas or Mahāvratins. These were ascetic groups who sought liberation and were also reputed to possess magical powers, and they likely constituted the context in which many practices that later came to characterize the tantric traditions first developed. The earliest of these groups, the Pāśupatas, likely formed no later than the 2nd century CE.³¹ The Kāpālikas, on the other hand, who apparently date to about the 5th century, were a major influence on the development of later Hindu and Buddhist tantric traditions due to the antinomian and violent nature of their observances.³²

The earliest tantric tradition to emerge was likely the Śaiva Mantramārga tradition of the 5th century. It was subdivided into the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition, which was widespread throughout India during the second half of the first millennium CE, but later was restricted to South India. It was characterized by public rituals performed by priests. The Mantramārga also included non-Siddhānta traditions that generally focused on the private worship. The latter was subdivided into works of two genres: the Mantrapīṭha, focusing on the deity Bhairava, and the goddess-centered Vidyāpīṭha.³³ The earliest Mantramārga works appear to date to the 5th century, around the same time as the Gaṅgdhār inscription. According to Alexis Sanderson,

the earliest text corpus of this tradition, the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*, which has come down to us in a Nepalese palm-leaf manuscript of the ninth century, was composed at a time from the fifth to seventh centuries and that the *Mūlasūtra* (*Niśvāsamūla*), which is certainly the earliest work within that corpus, was composed at a time between c. 450 and 550 AD.³⁴

The Vidyāpīṭha tantras are notable for their antinomian nature. They borrow from the older Kāpālīka tradition the focus on the charnel ground as the ideal site of practice and are characterized by practices connected with female divinities known as Yoginīs or Dākinīs. Both violent and sexual practices are common in these works. The Vidyāpīṭha tantras are poorly preserved, but they appear to have been popular around the 6th and 7th centuries.³⁵ While we have no definitive evidence proving the existence of Vidyāpīṭha texts around this time, there is circumstantial evidence. This evidence includes references to non-Buddhist *ḍākinītantras* and *bhaginītantras* that prescribe violent and sexual practices by the Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti in his auto-commentary on his *Pramāṇavārtika*, which was composed around the late 6th to early 7th century.³⁶

The erotic and transgressive practices and the focus on female deities that characterized the Vidyāpīṭha tantras were further developed in a final “path” of Śaiva tantric practice, the Kulamārga or “Path of the Clans,” the clans here referring to the clans of yoginīs into which the initiated male adept or “hero” (*vīra*) sought entry. This tradition of practice was widely known as the Kaula tradition. According to Alexis Sanderson this tradition shared five features with the earlier Kāpālīka and Vidyāpīṭha traditions that set them apart from other Śaiva traditions:

1. Erotic ritual with a female companion
2. Sanguinary practices for the propitiation of the fierce gods Mahābhairava/Bhairava and Cāmuṇḍā
3. The notion that supernatural powers may be attained through the extraction by yogic means of the vital essences of living beings
4. Initiation through the consumption of consecrated liquor
5. The centrality of states of possession³⁷

The Kaula tradition was clearly established by the 9th century and may have originated a century or so earlier. It also was the matrix from which the closely related Śākta tradition developed. It developed four well-known subtraditions. The Eastern transmission focused on

Śiva and the goddess as Kuleśvara and Kuleśvarī. From it developed the Trika tradition that focused on a trio of goddesses: Parā, Parāparā, and Aparā. The Northern transmission featured the fierce goddess Guhyakālī; from it developed the Krama tradition, focusing on the goddess Kālī. The Western transmission took the hunchbacked goddess Kubjikā as its central deity, while the Southern transmission focuses on the beautiful goddess Kāmeśvarī or Tripurasundarī.³⁸ These traditions were well established in Kashmir by the 9th century. Particularly important were the nondual Trika and Krama traditions that see no ultimate distinction between the deity and practitioner.³⁹

During the 10th century a new school of Śaivism developed, the Nondual School of Kashmir Śaivism. Alexis Sanderson argues that it was the product of the confrontation of the more conservative Śaiva Siddhānta tradition and the transgressive Kaula tradition. He describes this as follows:

By the tenth century the Śaiva scene was dominated by the confrontation of two radically opposed schools: on the one hand, a group of nondualistic traditions, principally the Trika and the Krama, and on the other, the dualistic Śaiva Siddhānta. The nondualists, upholding the doctrine that the world and persons are no more than the play of the power of a universal consciousness-self, operated from within transgressive cults “tainted” by the Kāpālīka culture of the cremation grounds and the erotico-mystical soteriology of the Kaulas.⁴⁰

The Nondual School of Kashmir Śaivism integrated elements of both the transgressive nondualistic traditions and the more orthodox dualistic Śaiva Siddhānta. The end result was a nondualistic system in which the transgressive elements were internalized and hence rendered less offensive to the orthodox.

One of the best known Kashmir Śaiva theologians was Abhinavagupta (c. 975–1025 CE). He was a prolific author who wrote a number of commentaries on major works from the Trika and Krama traditions, as well as works in philosophy and aesthetics. According to David White he bridged the divide between the conservative and transgressive schools operating at the time by transforming the way the “hard-core” Kaula practices were understood. In his exegesis of Kaula works he “sublimates, cosmeticizes, and semanticizes many of its practices into a type of meditative asceticism whose aim is to realize a transcendent subjectivity.”⁴¹ He thus played the role of domesticating the “hard core” practices, creating in their place “soft core” contemplative exercises. This is apparently the origin of the distinction in the tantric traditions between “left handed” or unorthodox practice (*vāmācāra*) and “right handed” or orthodox practice (*dakṣiṇācāra*). A similar development also occurred in Buddhist traditions; a tendency to neutralize the more transgressive elements of tantric practice, often by transforming the practice from external rituals to completely internalized visualizations.⁴²

The last of the major Śaiva tantric traditions to develop is the Nāth or “Split-Ear” Kānpḥaṭa tradition. It is a medieval tradition that grew out of the heterodox Śaiva renunciant orders, namely the Pāśupatas and Kāpālīkas.⁴³ While primarily Śaiva in orientation, some Nāths have also assumed Vaiṣṇava and Buddhist identities, and some also drew elements from Sikhism and Islam.⁴⁴ It emerged around the 12th or 13th century and quickly rose to prominence, “so much so that by the nineteenth century, the term ‘yogi’ was often construed, by India’s British colonizers, to refer to a member of one of the Nāth Yogī orders.”⁴⁵ This sect produced the

tantric texts of the Haṭhayoga tradition that are believed to have been revealed by the great adept Gorakṣa or Gorakhnāth. They produced several tantric scriptures, such as the *Gorakṣasaṃhitā*, the *Khercarīvidyā*, and the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, which were composed around the 14th and 15th centuries.⁴⁶ While a relatively late tradition, they have been a significant influence on the contemporary practice of yoga. They practice a distinct form of tantric yoga involving breath control (*prāṇāyāma*) and the retention and transformation of sexual fluids via complex yogic exercises.⁴⁷

The Śākta Traditions

The Hindu Śākta traditions are traditions focusing on the Goddess (*devī*) in one of her many manifestations, as the supreme deity. The Śākta traditions involve both devotional strands and tantric strands, with popular Śākta practice being largely devotional in practice. Nonetheless, the Śākta traditions have maintained strong tantric tendencies, having preserved ritual and contemplative practices originating in Hindu tantric circles.⁴⁸

The Śākta tradition is closely related to the Śaiva tradition, and the textual basis of many Śākta traditions are rooted in the goddess-oriented Vidyāpīṭha and Kaula traditions. The Kaula tradition, being almost entirely goddess oriented, is as much a Śākta tradition as it is Śaiva. This is because these are clearly overlapping categories. The nondual Śaiva and Śākta traditions both focus on the “bipolar, bisexual divinity within one’s own body,” as Goodriaan described it.⁴⁹ This divinity is typically conceived as a male deity (Śiva or Viṣṇu) in union with his wife, Śakti. The distinction between Śaiva and Śākta in the Kaula tradition is largely one of emphasis, the deity upon which one primarily focuses.

However, the Śākta tradition was not exclusively tied to the Śaiva tradition. The worship of goddesses was a venerable practice widespread throughout South Asia. While goddesses are relatively few in the ancient Vedic pantheon, there was tremendous growth in goddess worship during the first millennium CE, as indicated by the *Purāṇa* literature composed during this era.⁵⁰ One of the great works of the early Śākta tradition, the *Devī-Māhātmya*, which extols the goddess, in her numerous manifestations, as the supreme creator deity. This work was composed around the 6th century, around the same time as the goddess-oriented Vidyāpīṭha tantras were initially circulating.⁵¹

The Kaula tantras provide the early scriptural basis for the Śākta tradition. Of particular historical importance is the Kaula Southern transmission, which constitutes the tantras of the clan of the goddess Śrī (*śrīkula*), and the Northern and Eastern transmission, which gave rise to the tantras of the clan of the goddess Kālī (*kālīkula*).⁵² These became by far the most popular Śākta tantric traditions. The former, focusing on beautiful and erotic goddess Śrī, gave rise to the Śrī Vidyā tradition, which is an orthodox, “right handed” tradition that became particularly popular in South India.⁵³ It is also the tradition that gave rise to the Śrī Yantra, a mystical diagram consisting formed by nine interlocking triangles that is probably one of the most widespread and best known tantric images.

The Kālīkula tradition, focusing on the fierce goddess Kālī, gave rise to the traditions of practice focusing on Kālī, which are particularly important in East and South India. Kālī remains one of the best known and beloved of Hindu goddesses, despite her ferocious appearance.⁵⁴ She is also the focus of a considerable devotional tradition.⁵⁵ Kālī is also

included in the ten Mahāvidyās, a group of ten goddesses whose worship remains very popular in Bengal.⁵⁶ Two of the goddesses included in this group, Tārā and Chinnamastā, originated as Buddhist goddesses who were later absorbed into this Hindu tantric pantheon.⁵⁷

Śākta communities in northeastern India produced a number of tantras, such as the *Cīnācāra Tantra* and *Bṛhannīla Tantra* during the late medieval period, around the 15th and 16th centuries. These scriptures focus on the worship of goddesses and drew from both older Hindu as well as Buddhist works.⁵⁸

Other Hindu Tantric Traditions

The Vaiṣṇava tradition of Hinduism has tended to be far more engaged with the Bhakti devotional mode of Hindu practice and correspondingly less engaged with the tantric mode of practice. However, the Pāñcarātra sect, which dates back to the 5th or 6th century and focused on Viṣṇu qua Nārāyaṇa, produced a number of tantric works, although this sect no longer identifies as tantric.

The Pāñcarātra tradition claims to have had a canon of 108 texts, revealed by Viṣṇu in His form of Vāsudeva or Nārāyaṇa, most of which are apparently lost.⁵⁹ While some scholars have argued that the oldest Pāñcarātra texts may date to the 5th century CE,⁶⁰ Pāñcarātra scriptures are notoriously difficult to date due to a dearth of dateable early commentaries and manuscripts preserved by this tradition. One of the oldest works of this tradition, the *Ahirbudhnyasaṃhitā*, likely dates to the 8th century.⁶¹ There is indication of early influence from Kashmir Śaivism on Pāñcarātra scriptures. But as these works were later preserved by the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition in South India, there is also evidence of later Pāñcarātra influence on the South Indian Śaiva Siddhānta tradition.⁶²

During the medieval period another tantric Vaiṣṇava tradition emerged in Bengal. Known as the Sahajiyā tradition, it flourished in Bengal around the 16th through 19th centuries. It taught that each individual is a divinity, embodying the divine couple Kṛṣṇa and his consort Rādhā. This tradition integrated earlier Hindu and Buddhist tantric practices within a Vaiṣṇava theological framework.⁶³

A few minor Hindu tantric traditions also deserve a brief mention. The Saura tradition of Hinduism, which focuses on the Sun god Sūrya, produced several tantras, most notably the *Saurasaṃhitā* that was also known as the *Sauratantra*. This tradition went into decline during the medieval period and is now almost extinct, and very few copies of this work have survived. The South Indian Vīraśaiva tradition, generally not considered to be a tantric tradition, did in fact produce one tantra that has survived, the *Pārameśvaratantra*.⁶⁴

Hindu Tantra in Global Contexts

Hinduism, unlike Buddhism, has traditionally been primarily located in South Asia and has not fostered a great deal of missionary activity. However, Hindu traditions were disseminated to Southeast Asia along with Buddhism around the 5th through 11th centuries, and during this time Śaiva tantric traditions were established in the kingdoms of the Khmers and Chams, in

contemporary Cambodia and Vietnam, and in Java, in contemporary Indonesia.⁶⁵ Tantric forms of Hinduism continue to be practiced in the Hindu enclaves in Indonesia, most notably on the island of Bali, the majority of the residents of which are practicing Hindus.⁶⁶

Tantric Hinduism, in its Śaiva and Śākta forms, has also been disseminated around the world, most notably to Europe and America, by Hindu gurus during the 20th and 21st centuries. This was motivated both by the growing South Asian diaspora communities in the West as well as by growing interest in Asian religious traditions among non-Indian Westerners from the 1960s onward. Many of these gurus have been successful in establishing religious communities abroad, serving both diaspora Indian communities as well as converts to Hinduism.⁶⁷

Buddhist Tantric Traditions

The early history of Buddhist tantric traditions is far clearer than that of Hindu traditions. This is due to the international Buddhist network that led to the rapid dissemination of new Buddhist works. Many works of Buddhist tantric literature were rapidly translated into Tibetan and Chinese, and the date when a translation was made provides us with *terminus ad quem* for the respective work. While there are still many lacunae in our understanding of the early history of tantric Buddhist traditions, available evidence points to the mid-7th century as the most likely point at which historically datable traditions began to take shape. The earliest known dateable tantric text is the *Awakening of Mahāvairocana Tantra* (*mahāvairocanābhisambodhi-tantra*), which was composed around the mid-7th century and was reportedly be one of the texts collected by the Chinese pilgrim Wu-xing (無行) c. 680 CE.⁶⁸ The Chinese pilgrim Wu-xing also commented on the emergence of a new “teaching about mantra” (真言教法), which was very popular during his time in India.⁶⁹

The emergence of tantric Buddhist traditions at this times appears to have been the result of a slow process of development of magical literature in Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions over the course of several centuries. For at least two centuries, around the 5th century CE, Buddhists produced a growing number of works focusing on magical formulas known as *dhāraṇī* and ritual practices that employ them. These gradually became more sophisticated, leading ultimately to the composition of the “esoteric sūtras” and tantras.⁷⁰ Many of the early Buddhist tantric scriptures, which later were labeled “ritual tantras” (*kriyātantra*), are basically grimoires, compilations of magical rituals which were purported to achieve various worldly ends. Interestingly, the same is true of the early Śaiva tantric scriptures that were composed around the same time, around the 7th century.⁷¹ More sophisticated tantric traditions developed during the 8th century and onward. These new traditions featured practices advocating union with a deity, and they typically claim to promote a secret method for the rapid achievement of Buddhahood. These traditions focused upon scriptures that were later classified as Yoga, Mahāyoga, and Yoginī tantras.⁷² There was considerable Śaiva influence on the developing Buddhist traditions. The Buddhist Yoginītantras in particular, which focus on female goddesses known as Yoginīs or Ḍākinīs and feature antinomian practices, and which were composed around the 8th century onward, drew heavily from Śaiva Vidyāpīṭha scriptures.⁷³

There was rapid growth and dissemination of the newly emerging tantric Buddhist traditions. Within a few decades after their initial composition, early tantric traditions of text and practice were disseminated to East and Southeast Asia. This was facilitated by the active trade and diplomatic exchanges between India and China during the 7th and early 8th centuries, via overland trade routes via Central Asia and also maritime trade routes via South East Asia. The Sarvadurgatipariśodhana and Trilokavijaya mandalas, and, presumably, their associated practice and textual traditions, were introduced to Java c. 700 CE.⁷⁴ Moreover, the Central Asian monk Amoghavajra, who journeyed from China to India and back via the maritime route during the mid-8th century, reported that there was a new canon of eighteen tantras, which he attempted to convey back to China and partially translated into Chinese.⁷⁵ This suggests that there was a very rapid production of new tantric texts and practice traditions around the mid-7th through mid-8th centuries.

Tantric traditions were established in China during the Tang dynasty, and thence disseminated to Korea⁷⁶ and Japan.⁷⁷ While the institutionalized esoteric Buddhist school did not survive the Wuzong emperor's (武宗, 814–846; r. 840–846) infamous persecution of Buddhism in the mid-9th century, esoteric Buddhist traditions survived in peripheral areas in China.

It appears that tantric Buddhist texts and practices were first disseminated to Tibet during the 8th century, shortly after their initial dissemination to East and Southeast Asia. Buddhists traditions view the 7th century as the time when Buddhism first reached Tibet, although there might have been gradual dissemination of Buddhism into the region earlier. The translation of Buddhist scriptures began, apparently, during the late 7th century and continued with imperial support during the 8th and 9th centuries, with most of the “early” translations made between 779 and 838 CE.⁷⁸ As evidenced by imperial catalogs compiled during this period,⁷⁹ as well as tantric manuscripts preserved at Dunhuang, which were assembled around the mid-10th through early 11th centuries,⁸⁰ a significant number of tantric scriptures and ritual texts were translated into Tibetan during the imperial period. The rNying ma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism is based upon teachings transmitted to Tibet during the imperial period by renowned masters such as the great adept (*mahāsiddha*) Padmasambhava.⁸¹

With the collapse of the Tibetan empire in 841 CE and the consequent loss of imperial patronage, the transmission and translation of tantric works to Tibet appears to have slowed but did not cease altogether.⁸² Official patronage of translation activity resumed in the late 10th century, when King Lha bla ma Ye shes 'od is reported to have sent twenty-one novice monks to Kashmir to receive further training. One of them, Rin chen bZang po (958–1055 CE), became a renowned translator, thus initiating the second or “Later Transmission” (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism to Tibet.⁸³

The Later Transmission period focused on the transmission and translation of “new” *tantras* and their associated ritual literature. They were considered to be “unexcelled *tantras*” (*bla na med pa'i rgyud*), the highest category of Buddhist teaching. Their high status was due to the fact that many of the them (all of them, if creative commentarial strategies are employed) teach “perfection-stage” (Skt. *niṣpannakrama*; Tib. *rdzogs rim*) yogic practices involving manipulation of the “channels, winds, and drops” (Skt. *nāḍi*, *prāṇa*, and *bindhu*; Tib. *rtsa*, *rlung*, and *thig le*), the network of subtle channels and the energy centers (Skt. *cakra*; Tib. 'khor lo) that house the “wind” or vital energy and “drops” of subtle consciousness. Collectively these constitute what was known as the “subtle body” (Skt. *sūkṣmadeha*; Tib. *lus*

phra ba). Advocates of the new Tibetan traditions based on these scriptures claimed that yogic practices involving the manipulation of the subtle body were requisites to complete awakening.

The “new” schools that developed in Tibet beginning in the 11th century were largely based on these “unexcelled *tantra*” scriptures, also known as *mahāyogatantras* and *yoginītantras*, and the exegetical and ritual literature associated with them. They include the Kadam (Bka’ gdams), Kagyü (Bka’ brgyud), Sakya (Sa skya), Jonang (Jo nang), and Geluk (Dge lugs pa) traditions, which were established between the 11th and 15th centuries. Tibetan Buddhists would later play important roles in the dissemination of Buddhism (and associated tantric traditions) to China and Mongolia, and eventually throughout the world, with the diaspora of Tibetan lamas in the 20th century following the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet in 1950.

Influence on Other Religious Traditions

Tantric Hindu and Buddhist traditions influenced a number of other religious traditions, both within South Asia as well as in other areas of the world. Because tantric traditions first emerged in South Asia, their impact there is naturally the most significant. The South Asian traditions that were influenced by the tantric traditions to some degree include Jainism, Islam, and Sikhism. Daoism and the Shintō tradition in East Asia were influenced by East Asian tantric Buddhist traditions, and the Bön tradition of Tibet was thoroughly transformed by its encounter with tantric Buddhism. Lastly, the “New Age” spiritual movement that developed in the West during the latter half of the 20th century was also strongly influenced by Hindu and Buddhist tantric traditions.

While Jainism did not preserve any self-consciously “tantric” traditions, various Jain authors described a variety of tantric meditations and rituals, beginning circa 800 CE. Generally speaking, many Jains were interested in tantric practices, although given the Jain focus on nonviolence as well as strict celibacy for monks and nuns, Jain tantric texts did not advocate any of the transgressive ritual practices involving sex or violence.⁸⁴ Jains did produce several tantric texts, such as the 11th-century *Bhairavapadmāvatīkalpa*, which, as the name suggests, evinces influence from Hindu Śaiva-Śākta traditions.⁸⁵ Jaina borrowed goddesses from the Śaiva Mantramārga tradition, some of which served as lineage goddesses for prominent Jain families. The worship of these goddesses, however, was changed to suit Jain moral teachings. Jains, who worshipped their tantric goddesses with vegetarian offerings only, did not perform animal sacrifices.⁸⁶

Probably the best known mode of tantric practice during the medieval period is the tantric form of yoga focusing on the subtle body and the movement of vital energy within it. Sufi Muslims in Bengal also developed a form of tantric yoga under the influence of the Nātha and Sahajiyā Vaiṣṇava traditions. The Sufi tantric yoga tradition borrowed the concept of the subtle body and Islamicized it, translating it into Islamic categories. This development occurred rather late; none of the extant texts of this tradition predate the 16th century.⁸⁷

Tantric yogic practice was also adopted by some Sikhs. One of the best known advocates of this practice was Harbhajan Singh Khalsa (1929–2004), better known as Yogi Bajan, who widely taught Kundalini Yoga in America and Europe. Yogi Bajan claimed to be part of a

practice lineage going back to Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. While there is no evidence supporting this claim, it appears that, as Michael Stoeber suggests, “some form of Kundalini Yoga was practiced historically by some Sikhs, albeit perhaps secretly and in very small numbers.”⁸⁸

When tantric Buddhist traditions reached China at the beginning of the 8th century, there was already a long history of borrowing between Buddhist and Daoist communities. Many elements of tantric Buddhist practice were taken up by Daoist traditions. But tantric Buddhists, in turn, also borrowed the Daoist practice of venerating the Big Dipper constellation and developed distinctly tantric modes worshipping this divinity.⁸⁹ The Shintō tradition of Japan also borrowed elements of tantric Buddhist practice, most notably the *goma* (Skt. *homa*) rite of makings offerings into a sanctified fire.⁹⁰

The Bön tradition of Tibet, the indigenous Tibetan religious tradition, was transformed by its encounter with tantric Buddhist traditions, so much so that it should also be considered a tantric tradition. Tibetan Buddhist traditions borrowed significantly from the Bön tradition, but the Bön tradition was likewise deeply influenced by Buddhism.⁹¹ The Bön tradition developed a scriptural canon on Buddhist models and borrowed not only the genre of the tantras but also a number of tantric practices.⁹² Bön practitioners, for example, developed their own Mahāyoga and Yoginī or “Mother” tantras, based upon the Indian Buddhist models.⁹³

Lastly, the growth of interest in tantric practice in the West has led to the development of a number of new spiritual traditions deeply influenced by Hindu and Buddhist tantric traditions founded by Westerners, which Hugh Urban has labeled “New Age Tantra.” These include Pierre Bernard’s Tantrik Order, Aleister Crowley’s Ordo Templi Orientis, and Nik Douglas’s New Tantric Order in America.⁹⁴ These traditions have adapted venerable tantric ideas and practices to meet the needs of spiritual seeker in new and contemporary contexts.

Review of the Literature

There are three primary approaches to the study of the history of tantric traditions: textual, archeological, and ethnographic. The first two are most important for the study of history of tantric traditions in general and indispensable for those traditions that are now defunct, which persist only in the textual and archeological record. But as numerous tantric traditions have survived in South, East, and Central Asia, ethnographic studies in these communities are an important additional source of information concerning them.

As all of the known tantric traditions have been the products of literate communities, the study of the voluminous texts composed and preserved by these traditions has been one of our largest sources of information concerning them. Many thousands of texts have been composed and preserved by tantric communities, the majority of which have not been edited, studied, or translated. This literature was often ignored by past generations of scholars, some of whom deemed tantric literature as unworthy of study. Moriz Winternitz’s extensive *Geschichte der indischen Literatur*, for example, devoted only two pages to a very brief discussion of tantric literature.⁹⁵

Thousands of works of tantric literature have been preserved in South Asia, and several thousand, many for which the Sanskrit original is now lost, were also translated into Tibetan and Chinese and preserved by East and Central Asian communities. Tibetan, Mongolian, Chinese, and Japanese authors have also composed many thousands of original tantric works, such as commentaries and ritual and meditative manuals. Only a small fraction of these works have been critically edited, studied, or translated into Western languages. The study of these texts is an ongoing effort, which, as it proceeds, should deepen our understanding of the history of tantric traditions.

However, textual study alone is insufficient. This is partly because exclusive focus on written records leads to a distorted understanding of the traditions that gave rise to them, since these records, arguably, reflect an elite perspective.⁹⁶ In addition to textual evidence it is important to take into consideration as well archaeological and art historical evidence. This includes epigraphic and numismatic inscriptions as well as the wide range of different types of religious art. Inscriptions indicating the donors who contributed to the construction or fabrication of a temple, monument, or work of art can provide important information regarding the communities who supported tantric institutions. Moreover, some facets of tantric history are only known via archeological evidence. An example of this are the so-called Caṃsāṭha Yoginī temples, built during the 9th to 13th centuries throughout India, but particularly across the middle of the country. They feature depictions of the female divinities known as yoginīs, many of which are notable for their ferocious and/or erotic appearance. Various attempts have been made to connect these temples to the surviving scriptures, such as Śaiva/Śākta Kaula tantras,⁹⁷ but no convincing link has been established between these temples and surviving texts. They represent an important aspect of South Asian history that can only be understood via archeological and art historical approaches, although continued research into the large amounts of unstudied or poorly studied texts may also shed light on these temples.⁹⁸

Ethnographic study of contemporary tantric communities is an additional important source of information. From such study we can gain more information about the texts and practices preserved by the communities. These include questions such as which texts and practices are actually employed by these communities and how the practices as described in the texts compare to those undertaken by contemporary communities. These are important questions, as the study of ritual and contemplative practices via texts alone is problematic at best, if not completely impossible.

It is possible that the study of texts alone can lead to an incomplete or distorted understanding of history, and sometimes observing living communities can serve as a corrective to these problems. For example, a number of tantric texts call upon male practitioners to seek out low-caste or outcaste women to serve as partners in courses of practice (*sādhana*) involving sexual activity. Some of these texts appear to valorize these female partners; Miranda Shaw used this evidence to argue that Indian tantric communities often empowered women to serve as gurus or spiritual leaders.⁹⁹ It is of course possible that women were able to serve as gurus in early medieval India. However, ethnographic studies of low-caste women who serve as sexual partners for male tantric practitioners have painted a much darker picture of what life is like for such women,¹⁰⁰ suggesting that the textual passages that valorize these women should not be uncritically accepted at face value.

It goes without saying that our study of tantric traditions should take into consideration all available evidence. While this interdisciplinary approach is beyond the capacity of any individual scholar, the collective works of various scholars employing different methodologies will over time deepen our understanding of these traditions.

Primary Sources

There are an unknown number of tantric manuscripts, written not only in Sanskrit but also medieval dialects, the so-called Prakrit and Apabramśa dialects, as well as modern languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, and Newari. Many have survived in India despite the climate that is generally not conducive to manuscript preservation. However, the vast majority of surviving tantric works have been preserved by the Newar community of the Kathmandu valley, who have preserved a wide range of tantric Hindu and Buddhist texts and traditions and have been aided by a climate that is far more amenable to text preservation.

Many of these surviving texts were originally preserved in monastery and temple libraries as well as private text collections. There are also several collections in Kathmandu that are open to the public, most notably the National Archives of Nepal, the Kaiser Library <http://klib.gov.np>, and the Asha Archives <http://www.aioiyama.net/ask/Introduction/default.htm>. Over 18,000 rare manuscripts, many of which are of Hindu and Buddhist tantric texts, were microfilmed by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project, and these titles are now being cataloged by the successor project, the Nepalese-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project http://www.uni-hamburg.de/ngmcp/index_e.html. It is possible to request microfilm or digital scans of these manuscripts through this very important project. A smaller collection of scanned Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts is freely available online via the Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon <http://www.dsbcproject.org>, a project sponsored by the University of the West in Los Angeles. A number of tantric works are included in the works available on their website.

Many tantric manuscripts from Nepal and India are also owned by university libraries and archives around the world. Lists of library collections containing these manuscripts have been prepared by Dominik Wujastyk http://homepage.univie.ac.at/dominik.wujastyk/Sanskrit_Catalogues/ and Audrey Truschke <http://web.stanford.edu/~truschke/manuscripts/manuscript-catalogs/>. In addition to the resources listed on these websites, the University of Tokyo http://picservice.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/03_150219~UT-library_sanskrit_ms/ also has a large collection of tantric Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts, which are scanned and available on the library's website.

There are a number of resources for those interested in studying the tantric Buddhist literature translated into or composed in the Tibetan language. For those interested in studying Tibetan primary texts, one of the best resources is the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center <http://tbrc.org/#home>. Like the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project, the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center has sponsored the scanning of many thousands of Tibetan manuscripts, some of which are quite rare. Their collection includes scans of the entire Tibetan canon of translated works from India, the Kanjur (*bka' gyur*), Tenjur (*bstan gyur*), and the rNying ma tantric canon (*rnying ma rgyud 'bum*), as well as numerous works by Tibetan masters.

Several organizations are working to translate Tibetan Buddhist works to make them accessible to those who do not read Tibetan or Sanskrit. The organization 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha <http://84000.co> is sponsoring the English translation of the entire Tibetan Kanjur as well as the rNying-ma tantric canon, including translations of all of the canonical Buddhist tantras. These translations, as they are completed, are published as digital texts freely available on their web site. The Tsadra Foundation <http://www.tsadra.org> is also sponsoring the translation of Tibetan works. They are producing digital publications as well apps for accessing these on various devices.

A number of tantric works were also translated into Chinese, and these are included in one of the best known and most widely accessible canonical collections of Chinese Buddhist scriptures, the Taishō Tripiṭaka (Ch. 大正新脩大藏經; Jp. Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō). Much (but not all) of this canon has been digitally published by the organization CBETA http://www.cbeta.org/index_old.htm, and the tantric translations are included among the texts freely available on their website.

Links to Digital Materials

- **Himalayan Art Resources** <http://www.himalayanart.org>: One of the best resources for tantric art from South and Central Asia is Himalayan Art Resources, a web resource made possible by the Rubin Foundation. It contains high-quality digital images, freely available for download, of religious art from the Himalayan region. It features Tibetan Buddhist art but also contains images from the Bön and Hindu traditions as well. It features the artwork from the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art in New York as well as art from the collections from several other museums with excellent Himalayan art collections, namely the Los Angeles County Museum, the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, the Guimet Musee National in Paris, the Museum of Culture in Basel, Switzerland, the Tibet House Museum in New Delhi, and the Zanabazar Museum in Ulan Bator, Mongolia.
- **The Smithsonian Institution:** The Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Freer Gallery of Art at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. also has a great deal of tantric art <http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/southAsian.asp> in their collections, much of which is viewable and downloadable from their website. Some of the images from their recent exhibition on yoga <http://www.asia.si.edu/explore/yoga/gallery.asp> are available as well. The catalog for this exhibit, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, edited by Debra Diamond,¹⁰¹ contains numerous high-quality reproductions of stunning works of art, many of which originated in the South Asian tantric traditions.
- **84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha** <http://84000.co>: Provides free access to translations of Tibetan Buddhist canonical texts, including many tantras.
- **CBETA** http://www.cbeta.org/index_old.htm: Provides free access to digital versions of canonical Buddhist texts in Chinese translation from the Taishō Tripiṭaka. This includes a good number of tantric works.
- **The Nepalese-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project** http://www.uni-hamburg.de/ngmcp/index_e.html: Provides access to images of rare manuscripts from Nepal, including many tantric Hindu and Buddhist texts .

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- **The Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center** <<http://tbrc.org/#home>>: Provides access to a wide range of scanned Tibetan texts, including many works on tantric subjects.

Further Reading

General Introductions to Hindu Tantra

Several works provide good introductions to tantric traditions. For Hindu traditions, one of the best overall introductions to tantric Hindu traditions for nonspecialists is Gavin Flood's *The Tantric Body*. For specialists, on the other hand, Alexis Sanderson's monograph-length article, "The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism during the Early Medieval Period" provides a very rich introduction to the Śaiva tantric traditions and their influence on other Hindu and Buddhist traditions. David White provides in-depth introductions to the Hindu tantric traditions of alchemy and yoga, on the one hand, and "tantric sex" on the other, in his works *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* and *Kiss of the Yoginī: "Tantric Sex" in Its South Asian Contexts*. Hugh Urban's *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* is one of the best introductions to the Western reception of tantric traditions.

Flood, Gavin. *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion*. London: I. B. Taurus, 2006.

Sanderson, Alexis. "The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism During the Early Medieval Period." In *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, edited by Shingo EINO, 17-349. Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, 2009.

Urban, Hugh B. *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

White, David Gordon. *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

White, David Gordon. *Kiss of the Yoginī: "Tantric Sex" in its South Asian Contexts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

General Introductions to Buddhist Tantra

Ronald Davidson's works *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* and *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* provide excellent introductions to the rise of Indian Buddhist tantric traditions and their dissemination to Tibet, respectively. David Snellgrove's *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* provides slightly outdated but still useful introductions to both Indian and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. The best introductions to East Asian tantric traditions include the volume *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, edited by Charles Orzech, Henrik Sørensen, and Richard Payne, and Ryūichi Abé's monumental study on Kūkai and his role in the dissemination of tantric Buddhism to Japan.

Abé, Ryūichi. *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

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

Davidson, Ronald M. *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

Orzech, Charles D., Henrik H. Sørensen, and Richard K. Payne, eds. *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2011.

Snellgrove, David L. *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*. London: Serindia, 1987; reprint, Boston: Shambhala, 2002.

Translations and Textual Studies: Hindu

Teun Goudriaan and Sanjukta Gupta's *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature* remains one of the best introductions to classical and contemporary Hindu tantric literature. Dominic Goodall has edited a collaborative translation and edition of one of the oldest surviving tantras in his *The Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā: The Earliest Surviving Śaiva Tantra*. James Mallison, on the other hand, has edited and translated a much later but very influential text on *haṭhayoga*, *The Khecarīvidyā of Ādinātha*. Loriliai Biernacki's *Renowned Goddess of Desire: Women, Sex, and Speech in Tantra* is a textual study based on later Śākta literature, with particular focus on the light they shed on the role of women in Śākta Hindu traditions.

Biernacki, Loriliai. *Renowned Goddess of Desire: Women, Sex, and Speech in Tantra*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Goodall, Dominic, ed. *The Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā: The Earliest Surviving Śaiva Tantra*, Vol. 1. Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2015.

Goudriaan, Teun, and Sanjukta Gupta. *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature*. Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1981.

Mallinson, James. *The Khecarīvidyā of Ādinātha: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of an Early Text of Haṭhayoga*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Translations and Textual Studies: Buddhist

Stephen Hodge's *The Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra with Buddhaguhya's Commentary* is a translation of what appears to be the earliest Buddhist tantra, along with an influential commentary composed by the 8th-century master Buddhaguhya. Rolf Giebel's "The Chin-kang-ting ching yü-ch'ieh shih-pa-hui chih-kuei: An Annotated Translation" is a study and translation of an important 8th-century text that sheds considerable light on the history of Buddhist tantric literature. David Gray's *The Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* and David Snellgrove's *The Hevajra Tantra* are studies and translations of two important later Buddhist tantric works. Koichi Shinohara's *Spells, Images, and Maṇḍalas: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals* is a study of the early development of tantric Buddhist rituals and the scriptures that describe them. Christian Wedemeyer's *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism* attempts to explain the significance of transgressive textual passages in the Buddhist tantras. Sarah Jacoby's *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro* is a study of a major Tibetan female spiritual leader, based both on her autobiographical writings as well as the author's fieldwork in northeastern Tibet.

Giebel, Rolf. "The Chin-kang-ting ching yü-ch'ieh shih-pa-hui chih-kuei: An Annotated Translation." *Journal of Naritasan Institute for Buddhist Studies* 18 (1995): 107-201.

Gray, David. *The Cakrasaṃvara Tantra: A Study and Annotated Translation*. New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2007.

Hodge, Stephen. *The Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra with Buddhaguhya's Commentary*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

Jacoby, Sarah. *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Shinohara, Koichi. *Spells, Images, and Maṇḍalas: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014)

Snellgrove, David. *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study*. 2d ed. Bangkok: Orchid, 2010.

Wedemeyer, Christian K. *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, & Transgression in the Indian Traditions*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

Ethnographic Studies

Ethnographic studies of tantric communities are relatively uncommon, given the secrecy that usually shrouds these traditions. But several studies have been published on Hindu and Buddhist communities that deserve serious attention. June McDaniel's *The Madness of the Saints* and *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls* are studies of popular traditions of worship in Bengal that include the Śākta tradition. She provides accessible perspectives on Śākta worship as undertaken in contemporary India. Toni Huber's *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain* is a study of an important Tibetan pilgrimage site connected with the Yoginī tantras. Richard Kohn's *The Lord of the Dance: The Mani Rimdu Festival in Tibet and Nepal* is a detailed study of a rNying-ma tantric Buddhist festival among the Sherpas in Nepal.

Huber, Toni. *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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Notes

1. Richard Davis, *Ritual in an Oscillating Universe: Worshipping Śiva in Medieval India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3–10.

2. "abracadabra, n. and int." <<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.scu.edu/view/Entry/539?redirectedFrom=abracadabra>> OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.

3. "hocus-pocus, n., adj., and adv." <<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.scu.edu/view/Entry/87520?rskey=0BgqLr&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.

4. This film, given the title *Tantra Mantra* in English and *Tantram Mantram* in Hindi, was released in 2009 by Ambika films.

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5. Douglas Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 5.
 6. See Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 15.
 7. See André Padoux, "What Do We Mean by Tantrism," in *The Roots of Tantra*, edited by Katherine Ann Harper and Robert L. Brown (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 17–24.
 8. André Padoux, "A Survey of Tantric Hinduism for the Historian of Religions," *History of Religions* 20.4 (1981), 345–360.
 9. See Alexis Sanderson, "The Doctrine of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra," in *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism. Studies in Honour of André Padoux*, edited by T. Goudriaan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 281 (281–312), and Dominic Goodall, *Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha's Commentary on the Kiraṇatantra, Volume 1: Chapters 1–6* (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 1998), xxxvi.
 10. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Richard K. Payne, *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2011), 8–10.
 11. Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 119.
 12. Teun Goudriaan, "Hindu Tantric Literature in Sanskrit," in *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature*, edited by Teun Goudriaan and Sanjukta Gupta (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1981), 1–172.
 13. This point was made in a review published in *Journal Asiatique* 256 (1968): 267; quoted in Padoux, "What Do We Mean by Tantrism?," 19.
 14. Padoux, "What Do We Mean by Tantrism?," 23.
 15. See, for example, Thomas McEvilley's "The Spinal Serpent," in *The Roots of Tantra*, ed. Katherine A. Harper and Robert L. Brown (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 93–113. In this essay he argued that tantric yoga practices involving manipulation of energy in the central channel of the subtle body, such as Kuṇḍalinī Yoga, originated in the Indus Valley Civilization (3300–1300 bce) if not earlier.
 16. Goudriaan, "Hindu Tantric Literature in Sanskrit," 4–5.
 17. For a discussion of the revelatory nature of the Buddhist tantras, see David Gray, "On the Very Idea of a Tantric Canon: Myth, Politics, and the Formation of the Bka' 'gyur," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 5 (December 2009): 1–37.
 18. Alex Wayman reported the Buddhist claim that the tantras were disseminated secretly for centuries before being revealed and tentatively suggests that this occurred around the 5th century ce. There is, however, no evidence that any of the Buddhist tantras were composed by this early date. See his *Yoga of the Guhyasamājatantra: The Arcane Lore of the Forty Verses* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), 97.
 19. For a discussion of critiques of the validity of tantric revelation by advocates of the Vedas and the defense of Tantric revelation by advocates of tantric traditions, see Gavin Flood, *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 48–60.
 20. Regarding this see Richard K. Payne, *The Tantric Ritual of Japan, Feeding the Gods: The Shingon Fire Ritual* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1991); Richard K. Payne and Charles D. Orzech, "Homa," in Orzech, et al., *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, 133–140.

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21. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 124; Alexis Sanderson, "Religion and the State: Śaiva Officiants in the Territory of the Brahmanical Royal Chaplain," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 47 (2004): 229-300.
22. See Vrajavallabha Dviveda, "Having Become a God, He Should Sacrifice to the Gods," in *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism: Studies in Honor of André Padoux*, ed. Teun Goudriaan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
23. Alexis Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism During the Early Medieval Period," in *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, ed. Shingo Einoo (Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, 2009), 41-43 (41-350).
24. Flood, *The Tantric Body*, 69, 103-105.
25. Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 153.
26. Barbara Stoller Miller, *The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Council in Time of War* (New York: Bantam, 1986), 3.
27. Padoux, "What Do We Mean by Tantrism?," 20.
28. See Flood, *The Tantric Body*, 101, and Gerhard Oberhammer, "Beobachtungen zur 'Offenbarungsgeschichte' der Paramasaṃhitā," in *Studies in Hinduism II: Miscellanea to the Phenomenon of Tantras*, ed. G. Oberhammer (Vienna: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998), 21-41.
29. For a translation and study of this work see Gareth Sparham, *The Fulfillment of All Hopes: Guru Devotion in Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Wisdom, 1999).
30. Translated in David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī: "Tantric Sex" in its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 207. See as well D. C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Vol. 1. 2d ed. (Kolkata: University of Calcutta, 1965), 399-405.
31. Alexis Sanderson, "The Impact of Inscriptions on the Interpretation of Early Śaiva Literature," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 56 (2013): 211-244.
32. For more information on the Kāpālikas see David N. Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and the Kālāmukhas: Two Lost Śaivite Sects*. (1972; 2d rev. ed., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991).
33. Alexis Sanderson, "Śaiva Texts," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, Vol. 6, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 10-42.
34. Sanderson, "The Impact of Inscriptions on the Interpretation of Early Śaiva Literature," 234. It should be noted that Dominic Goodall and his collaborators in the editing and translating the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā* argue that the work as a whole was completed by the 7th century, while the "early kernel," the *Mūlasūtra*, was likely composed a century earlier. See Dominic Goodall, ed. *The Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā: The Earliest Surviving Śaiva Tantra, Volume 1*. (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2015), 72-73.
35. Sanderson, "Śaiva Texts," 21-22.
36. See David Gray, "Eating the Heart of the Brahmin: Representations of Alterity and the Formation of Identity in Tantric Buddhist Discourse," *History of Religions* 45.1 (2005): 45-69; Alexis Sanderson, "History Through Textual Criticism in the Study of Śaivism, the Pañcarātra and the Buddhist Yoginītantras," in *Les Sources et le temps. Sources and Time: A Colloquium, Pondicherry, 11-13 January 1997*, edited by François Grimal (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry/École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 2001), 11-12, no.10 (1-47).

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37. Sanderson, "Śaiva Texts," 28.
38. Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 166.
39. Alexis Sanderson, "Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions," in *The World's Religions*, edited by S. Sutherland, L. Houlden, P. Clarke, and F. Hardy (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 681–683 (660–704).
40. Alexis Sanderson, "Śaivism: Śaivism in Kashmir," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 12, 2d ed., edited by Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005), 8047–8048.
41. White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 16.
42. Regarding this see David Gray, "Disclosing the Empty Secret: Textuality and Embodiment in the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*," *Numen* 52.4 (2005): 417–444.
43. David White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 7.
44. See David Lorenzen and Adrián Muñoz, eds., *Yogi Heroes and Poets: Histories and Legends of the Nāths* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), x. For a discussion of a Buddhist Nāth yogī see David Templeman, "Buddhaguptanātha: A Late Indian *Siddha* in Tibet," in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Seventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995*, Vol. 2, edited by Ernst Steinkellner (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademieder Wissenschaften, 1997), 955–965.
45. David White, *Sinister Yogis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 14.
46. James Mallinson, *The Khercarīvidyā of Ādinātha: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of an Early Text of Haṭhayoga* (London: Routledge, 2007), 4–5.
47. For a detailed discussion of this tradition of yoga see David White, *The Alchemical Body*.
48. See June McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6–13.
49. Goudriaan, "Hindu Tantric Literature in Sanskrit," 1.
50. For a survey of this evidence see Tracy Pintchman, *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).
51. Pintchman, *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition*, 119.
52. Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 184–185.
53. See Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*.
54. See Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal, eds., *Encountering Kali: In the Margins, at the Center, in the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
55. McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls*, 145–208, 235–254.
56. See David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
57. See Sanderson, *The Śaiva Age*, 240–243.
58. Loriliai Biernacki, *Renowned Goddess of Desire: Women, Sex, and Speech in Tantra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 150–159.
59. Flood, *The Tantric Body*, 54.

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60. See H. Daniel Smith, "The Three Gems of the Pāñcarātra Canon: A Critical Appraisal," *Studies in the History of Religions*, supplement to *Numen* 22 (1972), 43.2 (41–49).
61. Sanderson, "History Through Textual Criticism," 35.
62. Sanderson, "History Through Textual Criticism," 37–39.
63. See Edward C. Dimock Jr., *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyā Cult of Bengal* (1989; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), 35–40.
64. Goudriaan, "Hindu Tantric Literature in Sanskrit," 110–111.
65. Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age," 117–123.
66. See Martin Ramstedt, ed., *Hinduism in Modern Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2003).
67. For profiles of a number of these gurus and the communities they have established in the West, see Ann Gleig and Lola Williamson, ed., *Homegrown Gurus: From Hinduism in America to American Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014).
68. Stephen Hodge, *The Mahā-vairocana-abhisambodhi Tantra, with Buddhaguhya's Commentary* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 14–15.
69. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 118.
70. For a fascinating analysis of the development of this literature see Koichi Shinohara, *Spells, Images, and Maṇḍalas: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
71. Goodall, *The Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*, 78–84.
72. For a discussion of the different classes of Buddhist tantras, see Jacob Dalton, "A Crisis of Doxography: How Tibetans Organized Tantra During the 8th–12th Centuries," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28.1 (2005): 115–181.
73. See Sanderson, *The Śaiva Age*, 124–240.
74. Max Nihom, "The Maṇḍala of Caṇḍi Gumpung (Sumatra) and the Indo-Tibetan Vajraśekhara Tantra," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 41.2 (1998): 251 (245–254).
75. Regarding Amoghavajra and his attempt at transmitting this canon of tantric literature, see Rolf Giebel, "The Chin-kang-ting ching yü-ch'ieh shih-pa-hui chih-kuei: An Annotated Translation," *Journal of Naritasan Institute for Buddhist Studies* 18 (1995): 107–201; David Gray, "On the Very Idea of a Tantric Canon: Myth, Politics, and the Formation of the Bka' 'gyur," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 5 (2009): 12–13 (1–37).
76. See Henrik Sørensen, "Early Esoteric Buddhism in Korea: Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla (ca. 600–918)," in Orzech, Sørensen, and Payne, *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, 575–596.
77. Regarding the establishment of the Shingon school of esoteric Buddhism Japan during the 9th century, see Ryūichi Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kukai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
78. Adelheid Herrmann-Pfandt, "The Lhan Kar Ma as a Source for the History of Tantric Buddhism," in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, edited by Helmut Eimer and David Germano (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2002), 132 (129–149).
79. According to Tibetan historical sources, three catalogs of translated texts were made during the Tibetan imperial period. These include the *Lhan/Dan kar ma*, which has been dated to 812 ce (Herrmann-Pfandt, "The Lhan Kar Ma as a Source for the History of Tantric Buddhism," 129), and the *'Phang-thang-ma*, which has been dated to 842 ce

(Brandon Dotson, “‘Emperor’ Mu rug btsan and the ‘Phang thang ma Catalogue,” *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 3 (December 2007): 4 [1–25]). The third catalog, the *mchims phu ma*, is apparently lost.

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

81. For an introduction to the rNying ma school and its tantric teachings, see Khetsun Sangpo, *Tantric Practice in Nying-ma* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1996); Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, Its Fundamentals and History* (Boston: Wisdom, 1991).

82. Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, *A Noble Noose of Methods: The Lotus Garland Synopsis: A Mahāyoga Tantra and Its Commentary* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012), 6–9.

83. See Ronald Davidson’s study of this era of Tibetan religious history, his book *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

84. Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (Bollingen Series 56), (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 210.

85. Goudriaan, “Hindu Tantric Literature in Sanskrit,” 111.

86. Sanderson, *The Śaiva Age*, 243–245.

87. Shaman Hatley, “Mapping the Esoteric Body in the Islamic Yoga of Bengal,” *History of Religions* 46.4 (2007): 351–353 (351–368).

88. Regarding this practice see Michael Stoeber, “3HO Kundalini Yoga and Sikh Dharma,” *Sikh Formations* 8.3 (2012): 358 (351–368).

89. See Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Daoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 141–146.

90. Regarding this see Richard Payne, “The Homa of the Northern Dipper,” in *Tantric Traditions on the Move: Their Development Through Time, and Transmission Through Cultural Space*, ed. David Gray and Ryan Overbey (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 292–293.

91. See David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and Their Tibetan Successors* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002), 403–404.

92. For a translation of a Bön tantra, see Michael Walter, “The Tantra a Vessel of bdud rtsi: A Bon Text,” *Journal of the Tibet Society* 8 (1987): 25–72.

93. See Andrea Loseries-Leick, “Symbolism in Bon Mother Tantra,” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes 1992, Volume 1*, ed. Per Kvaerne (Oslo: Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994), 501–506.

94. Urban, *Tantra*, 207–230.

95. Goudriaan, “Hindu Tantric Literature in Sanskrit,” 2.

96. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 8–9.

97. Peter Bisschop, “The Abode of the Pañcamudrās: A Yoginī Temple in Early Medieval Vārāṇasī,” in “*Yoginī*” in *South Asia: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. István Keul (London: Routledge, 2013), 47–60.

98. Bisschop's article, "The abode of the Pañcamudrās," provides an example of this; it concerns early medieval textual accounts of a Cauṃsāṭha Yoginī temple in Vārāṇasī which has not survived to the present day.

99. See Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

100. See Bholanath Bhattacharya, "Some Aspects of the Esoteric Cults of Consort Worship in Bengal: A Field Survey Report," *Folklore* (Calcutta) 18.10 (October 1977): 310–324; 18.11 (November 1977): 359–365; 18.12 (December 1977): 385–397.

101. Debra Diamond, ed., *Yoga: The Art of Transformation* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2013).

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