

# Tantric Traditions in Transmission and Translation



*Edited by*  
**DAVID B. GRAY &  
RYAN RICHARD OVERBEY**

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OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press  
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

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Cataloging-in-Publication data is on file at the Library of Congress  
ISBN 978-0-19-976368-9 (hbk.); 978-0-19-976369-6 (pbk.)

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2  
Printed by Webcom, Canada

# Contents

<i>List of Contributors</i>	vii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction: Tracing Tantric Traditions Through Time and Space—DAVID B. GRAY AND RYAN RICHARD OVERBEY	1
1. Buddhas, <i>Siddhas</i> , and Indian Masculine Ideals—JOHN POWERS	12
2. Converting the Ḍākinī: Goddess Cults and Tantras of the Yoginīs Between Buddhism and Śaivism—SHAMAN HATLEY	37
3. Vajrayāna Traditions in Nepal—TODD LEWIS AND NARESH MAN BAJRACHARYA	87
4. How <i>Dhāraṇīs</i> WERE Proto-Tantric: Liturgies, Ritual Manuals, and the Origins of the Tantras—JACOB P. DALTON	199
5. The Purification of Heruka: On the Transmission of a Controversial Buddhist Tradition to Tibet—DAVID B. GRAY	230
6. Vicissitudes of Text and Rite in the <i>Great Peahen Queen of Spells</i> —RYAN RICHARD OVERBEY	257
7. The Homa of the Northern Dipper —RICHARD K. PAYNE	284
8. The Tantric Teachings and Rituals of the True Buddha School: The Chinese Transformation of Vajrayāna Buddhism—TAM WAI LUN	308
<i>Index</i>	337



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## *Abbreviations*

- D. Situ Chos-kyi 'byung-gnas, ed. *sDe-dge par phud Kanjur*; facsimile copy of the 1733 blocks; Delhi: Karmapae Chodey Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1978. Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centr Volume No. 962.
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*Tantric Traditions in Transmission  
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# *Introduction*

## TRACING TANTRIC TRADITIONS THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

*David B. Gray and Ryan Richard Overbey*

THE PURPOSE OF this volume is to explore the movement of tantric Buddhist traditions through time and space. “Time,” of course, indicates a focus on the historical development of tantric traditions, which ranges from the mid-seventh century, when the earliest known tantric work was composed, to the present day. By “space” we refer not only to the obvious focus on movements across cultural boundaries, but also the conceptual “space” of religious traditions. Regarding the former, tantric traditions developed in India but were rapidly disseminated to Southeast, East, and Central Asia, and this dissemination has continued around the globe.

As many of the chapters in this volume discuss, tantric traditions have developed, and are developing, through transmissions across sectarian boundaries as well. Tantric Buddhist traditions in India drew, to varying degrees depending on the tradition, from Hindu textual and ritual sources. But once these traditions were transmitted to other cultural spaces, they continued to develop by exchanges with the native traditions of these spaces, such as the Bön tradition in Tibet, Daoism in China, and the Shintō tradition in Japan.

However, before we move on to explore these topics in more depth, it is important to clearly indicate exactly what we mean by “tantric traditions.” The adjective “tantric,” an English word derived from the Sanskrit *tāntrika*, means simply that which relates to the *tantras*, the genre of scripture that serves as the canonical source texts for the various traditions of tantric



practice. Tantras are works that primarily focus on ritual and meditative practices, so the term “tantric” also envelops the practices associated with these scriptures, and were traditionally disseminated by the *tāntrikas* (the Sanskrit term also designates tantric practitioners), along with the texts (Padoux 2002, 18). So “tantric traditions” are the communities of practitioners who practice, preserve, and transmit, through both time and space, both the texts and the practices that are traditionally associated with them.

It is important to note that we use this term in a plural form. Tantric or esoteric Buddhist traditions are multiple, and also originated as multiple, distinct traditions of both text and practice. Indeed, 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*. Lineages must be distinguished from institutionalized sectarian traditions, as they often are preserved by multiple sects, which typically make claims with respect to lineage to bolster their authority.<sup>1</sup> This focus on lineage is found throughout the tantric Buddhist world; originating in India, this emphasis was transmitted to Tibet and East Asia, and remains an important concern of contemporary tantric communities, as Tam Wai Lun’s chapter in this volume clearly indicates.

Eventually, circa the tenth century, advocates of these traditions developed broad rubrics to conceptualize the movement as a whole. These include the well-known South Asian formulation of the Vajrayāna, or “Adamantine Vehicle.” The earliest known reference to this term is found in a relatively early esoteric Buddhist work, the *Compendium of the Reality of All Tathāgatas Māhayāna Sūtra*, which interestingly retains an identity as a Māhayāna sūtra while nevertheless advancing the cause of the newly conceived Adamantine Vehicle. The third section of this work contains the following verse: “Well spoken is this sūtra, which is the secret of all Tathāgatas, the unexcelled Adamantine Vehicle, and is the compendium of the Great Vehicle.”<sup>2</sup> Another important rubric is the East Asian formulation of “Esoteric Teaching” (密教; Chinese *mijiao*, Japanese *mikkyō*). The labels “Esoteric Teaching” and “Adamantine Vehicle” both appear to have come into common use circa the tenth century, relatively late in the history of these traditions.<sup>3</sup> Broad rubrics, such as “Tantric Buddhism,” Vajrayāna, and Esoteric Teaching, are abstractions that have no basis in how actual tantric traditions are organized and practiced. And since there is no term for the tantric traditions as a whole that is universally accepted by all of them, we will use the term “tantric traditions” in this volume,

since the terms “tantra” and “tantric” are emic terms that are nonetheless well known in Western academic circles, despite their shortcomings.<sup>4</sup>

The plurality of tantric traditions is reflected by these tradition’s own self-understanding. Unlike early Buddhist traditions, which attributed to Śākyamuni Buddha the establishment of their textual and practice traditions, there is no singular point of origin for the tantric traditions, which developed multiple origin myths. These myths typically serve to provide a legendary account of the revelation of key scriptures associated with practice lineages, typically by a divine being such as Vajradhara or Vajrasattva, to a human sage, such as Nāgārjuna, Saraha, Lūpa, and so forth. These myths often invoke the classical Buddhist myth of the decline and eventual disappearance of Buddhadharma.<sup>5</sup> These myths include the myth that key tantric scriptures transmitted to East Asia during the eighth century, namely the *Mahāvairocanābhīṣambodhi* and *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha* tantras, originated in the revelation of these works by Vajradhara Buddha to Nāgārjuna inside an iron stūpa in Central India (Orzech 1995, 314–317), or the claim made by advocates of the Cakrasaṃvara tradition that the key scripture of this tradition, the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*, was revealed by Buddhist deities to the great Indian saints Saraha and Lūpa (Gray 2007, 35n107).

While there are many lacunae in our understanding of the early history of tantric Buddhist traditions, available evidence points to the mid-seventh century as the most likely point at which historically datable traditions began to take shape. The earliest known datable tantric text is the *Awakening of Mahāvairocana Tantra* (*Mahāvairocanābhīṣambodhi-tantra*), which was composed circa the mid-seventh century, and was reportedly one of the texts collected by the Chinese pilgrim Wuxing 無行 circa 680 CE (Hodge 2003, 14–15). Wuxing also commented on the emergence of a new “teaching about mantra” (*zhenyan jiaofa* 真言教法), which was very popular during his time in India (Davidson 2002, 118; Lin 1935), a fact that is confirmed in the account of another Chinese pilgrim who journeyed in India during the late seventh century, Yijing 義淨 (Hodge 2003, 10).

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 seventh and early eighth centuries, via overland trade routes through Central Asia and also maritime trade routes via Southeast Asia (Sen 2003,

203–211). Likewise, there is evidence that the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana and Trailokavijaya maṇḍalas, and, presumably, their associated practice and textual traditions, were introduced to Java circa 700 CE (Nihom 1998, 251). Moreover, the Central Asian monk Amoghavajra, who journeyed from China to India and back via the maritime route during the mid-eighth century, reported that there was a new canon of eighteen tantras, which he attempted to convey back to China, and partially translated into Chinese.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that there was a very rapid production of new tantric texts and practice traditions circa the mid-seventh through mid-eighth centuries.

Tantric traditions were established in China during the Tang dynasty, and thence disseminated to Korea (Sørensen 2011) and Japan.<sup>7</sup> 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-ninth century, esoteric Buddhist traditions survived in peripheral areas in China, and many elements of esoteric Buddhist practice were taken up by the “mainstream” non-esoteric traditions, as well as by Daoist traditions.<sup>8</sup>

Tibetan Buddhist traditions view the seventh century as the time when Buddhism first reached Tibet, although there might have been gradual dissemination of Buddhism into the region earlier. Both the development of the Tibetan script and the first Tibetan translations of Buddhist Sanskrit texts are traditionally attributed to Thon-mi Saṃbhoṭa, who was sent to India for these purposes by the great king Srong-btsan-sgam-po (617–649 CE).<sup>9</sup> The translation of Buddhist scriptures began, apparently, during the late seventh century, and continued with imperial support during the eighth and ninth centuries, with most of the “early” translations made between 779–838 CE (Herrmann-Pfandt 2002, 132). As evidenced by imperial catalogues compiled during this period, as well as tantric manuscripts preserved at Dunhuang, all of which predate the second or “latter transmission” of Buddhism to Tibet that commenced in the late tenth century,<sup>10</sup> a significant amount of tantric scriptures and ritual texts were translated into Tibetan during the imperial period.<sup>11</sup> This translation activity slowed with the collapse of the Tibetan empire in 841 CE, but accelerated in the late tenth 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 “latter transmission” (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism to Tibet.<sup>12</sup>

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 twentieth century following the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet in 1950.

The chapters in this volume seek to trace the development of tantric Buddhist traditions both in South Asia and beyond South Asia, as well as their dissemination across both religious and cultural boundaries. In Chapter 1 of this work, “Buddhas, Siddhas, and Indian Masculine Ideals,” John Powers explores the history of Buddhism through the lens of masculine studies. In it he traces the changing conceptions of masculinity from early Buddhism through the later tantric traditions. He demonstrates both the continuity and the changes and transformations regarding masculine ideals in Buddhist traditions. His chapter helps ground the volume; tantric Buddhist traditions, after all, developed from earlier Indian Buddhist traditions. It is important to keep this in mind since contemporary tantric Buddhist traditions generally identify with the larger Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition from which the tantric traditions emerged.

In Chapter 2, “Converting the Ḍākinī: Goddess Cults and Tantras of the Yoginīs between Buddhism and Śaivism,” Shaman Hatley explores the fascinating but still enigmatic relations between early Śaiva and Buddhist tantric traditions. Over the past two decades Alexis Sanderson, in a series of articles, has argued that Buddhist tantric traditions, particularly those associated with the Yoginītantras, drew from earlier Śaiva textual and practice traditions.<sup>13</sup> Hatley sheds further light on this phenomenon by tracing the development of the worship of goddesses, such as *ḍākinīs* and *yoginīs* in Śaivism circa the fifth century. He then presents evidence for early tantric Buddhist dependence on these traditions, with reference to works such as the *Mahāvairocanaḥśambodhi*. He moves on to the issue of the textual dependence of Buddhist Yoginītantras on earlier Śaiva works, deepening our understanding with detailed comparison of the Śaiva *Brahmayāmala* and Buddhist *Laghuśaṃvara Tantra*. Interestingly, he also finds evidence that the *Brahmayāmala*, in turn, drew from an earlier Buddhist source, suggesting that Hindu and Buddhist tantric traditions developed interdependently, each drawing on the other at various points in their histories.

Chapter 3 of this volume features Todd Lewis and Naresh Man Bajracharya’s “Vajrayāna Traditions in Nepal.” It is the longest chapter in this volume and deservedly so. The Kathmandu Valley, a relatively small region in the foothills of the Himalayas, has played a major role in the

preservation and dissemination of tantric Buddhist traditions. It has long been an important center of Buddhist tantric traditions, and it is the only non-ethnic Tibetan region of South Asia in which tantric Buddhist traditions have survived to the present day. The vast majority of surviving Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts has been preserved there, and most of these works are tantric in nature. The Kathmandu Valley also straddles an important trade route linking India with Tibet. The Newar community there has long played an important role in this trade. As a result, the Kathmandu Valley has also played an important role in the dissemination of Buddhist to Tibet. Moreover, the tantric Buddhist traditions of Nepal have continued to coexist with Hindu traditions, and have thus continued the process of development in dependence upon Hindu traditions that ceased elsewhere when Buddhism disappeared in most of South Asia. Despite the significance of the Kathmandu Valley to the history of Buddhism, the tantric Buddhist traditions preserved there remain among the most poorly studied Buddhist traditions. This chapter seeks to remedy this lacuna by shedding light on the history of these traditions.

In Chapter 4, “How Dhāraṇīs WERE Proto-Tantric: Liturgies, Ritual Manuals, and the Origins of the Tantras,” Jacob P. Dalton explores the early development of tantric Buddhist literature. Relying on ritual literature preserved in Chinese translation, as well as early Tibetan ritual literature preserved in Dunhuang, he argues that the rise of the tantric Buddhist traditions was preceded by an important development, namely the rapid development and proliferation of ritual manuals in Indian Buddhist circles during a period ranging from the mid-fifth to mid-seventh centuries. Several of these ritual manuals were retrospectively classified as *kriyātantras* by later Buddhist authors such as Buddhaguhya. Dalton suggests that while the earliest Buddhist tantras did likely appear circa the mid-seventh century, this development in turn is dependent upon two centuries of the development of Buddhist ritual practices and the literature written to inform this practice.

David Gray, in the Chapter 5, “The Purification of Heruka: On the Transmission of a Controversial Buddhist Tradition to Tibet,” focuses on a later phase of tantric Buddhist history, the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, at the start of the “later transmission” of Buddhism to Tibet. He focuses on a work attributed to Śraddhākaravarman, a Kashmiri Buddhist scholar with whom Rin-chen bZang-po studied, and translated. This work, entitled “The Purification of Heruka” (*he ru ka'i rnam par dag pa*), is somewhat anomalous. From the title one would expect a meditation

manual focus on the purification (*viśuddhi*) process in which one purifies elements of one's psycho-physical continuum, such as one's aggregates and elements, with divinities. Instead, the text focuses on Heruka himself, detailing the symbolism of his iconography. Gray suggests that this text may have been written to alleviate doubts about the authenticity of the Yoginītantras, doubts that were exacerbated by the dependence of these scriptures on "heretical" non-Buddhist works, and the descriptions of rituals in these works, involving violent ritual sacrifice and sex, that challenged the normative limits of Buddhist identity. The chapter thus seeks to shed light on the process by which these challenging texts were successfully defined as Buddhist to effect their transmission to Tibet.

In Chapter 6, "Vicissitudes of Text and Rite in the *Great Peahen Queen of Spells*," Ryan Overbey explores the corpus of Chinese translations of the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī*, an important early Buddhist apotropaic spell. This spell was translated six times into Chinese from the fifth to eighth centuries CE, and these versions also featured wildly varying ritual manuals. By analyzing Indian materials preserved in the Chinese record, Overbey shows how quickly texts and rituals could change, and reveals how older Buddhist spells and ritual texts were absorbed into the tantric traditions.

Richard Payne, in Chapter 7, "The Homa of the Northern Dipper" explores a fascinating example of multiple layers of borrowing to and from tantric Buddhist traditions. The chapter focuses on the rite of fire sacrifice, *homa*, which was adapted by tantric Buddhists from the ancient Vedic Hindu ritual of the same name, and which was disseminated with tantric Buddhism traditions across Asia. In China, a distinct version of this rite was developed that focused on the Northern Dipper (*beidou* 北斗) constellation, which has long held great significance in Chinese culture, and was the focus of Daoist ritual and contemplative practices. Esoteric Buddhists in China borrowed from Daoists to develop a uniquely Chinese form of the *homa* rite. This was transmitted to Japan by the Shingon tradition, and it was thence appropriated by advocates of the Shintō tradition, who developed their own version of the rite. Payne thus sheds light on the complex manner in which ritual practices were disseminated across both cultural and religious boundaries.

Lastly, in Chapter 8, "The Tantric Teachings and Rituals of the True Buddha School: The Chinese Transformation of the Vajrayāna Buddhism," Tam Wai Lun introduces us to a recently established Chinese tantric Buddhist tradition, the True Buddha School, which

was founded in the 1970s by a Taiwanese master named Lu Shengyan (盧勝彥, b. 1945). Raised as a Christian, a spiritual experience in 1969 led him to seek training as a Daoist priest. He founded a religious school in the 1970s that was originally oriented toward Daoist practice, but from 1979 onward he also began receiving transmissions of Tibetan tantric practices from various masters. Over the course of the 1980s he gradually moved toward a greater identification with Vajrayāna Buddhism, changing the name of his school in the process. Currently the True Buddha School is growing into an international movement largely serving the Chinese communities in diaspora. It self-identifies with the larger Vajrayāna tradition, and integrates Daoist, Tibetan Buddhist, and traditional Chinese Buddhist practices. It is a fascinating example of a contemporary tradition that displays the venerable tendency of tantric traditions to cross boundaries.

These chapters as a whole demonstrate the dynamic nature of tantric traditions. From their inception in the mid-first millennium CE to their contemporary manifestations, tantric Buddhist traditions have been in motion, rapidly borrowing and adapting elements from rival religious traditions. And they have quickly crossed cultural boundaries, and have renewed themselves in new milieu by continuing to borrow and adapt elements encountered therein.

## Notes

1. Matthew Kapstein provided a very helpful definition of the terms “sect” and “lineage,” which are overlapping categories in Tibetan Buddhism and, arguably, other tantric traditions as well: “By *sect*, I mean a religious order that is distinguished from others by virtue of its institutional independence; that is, its unique character is embodied outwardly in the form of an independent hierarchy and administration, independent properties and a recognizable membership of some sort. A *lineage*, on the other hand is a continuous succession of spiritual teachers who have transmitted a given body knowledge over a period of generations but who need not be affiliated with a common sect” (1996, 284n2).
2. My translation of the following Sanskrit text edited in Horiuchi (1974, 490): *subhāṣitam idaṃ sūtram vajrayānam anuttaram/sarvatāhāgatam guhyam mahāyānābhisamgraham*//. The canonical Tibetan translation reads: */rdo rje theg pa bla na med//de bzhin gshegs pa kun gyi gsang//theg pa chen po mngon bsdus pa'i// mdo sde 'di ni legs par bshad/(fol. 48a.2–3)*. I am indebted to Christian Wedemeyer for bring to my attention this text's use of the term *vajrayāna*.

3. Regarding the development of the “Esoteric Teaching” designation, see Sharf (2002, 269). Regarding “Adamantine Vehicle,” the dating of the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha-nāma Mahāyāna-sūtra* is a complex problem. While early versions of this or closely related texts such as the *Vajraśekhara Tantra* were disseminated to East Asia during the eighth century, the texts in circulation at this time likely differed substantially from the Sanskrit texts preserved in Nepal centuries later, or the Tibetan translation made in the late tenth century by Rin-chen bZang-po and Śraddhākaravarma. The verses of this text containing the term *Vajrayāna* thus cannot be reliably dated earlier than the tenth century.
4. Were this volume to address solely Indian and Tibetan traditions, then the use of the term *Vajrayāna* would be ideal, since this term came into common use on these cultural spheres. However, it did not come into common use in East Asia, where expressions like “Esoteric Teachings” and “Esoteric Buddhism” (*mizong fojiao* 密宗佛教) are more common. These terms, in turn, would be ideal for a volume focusing solely on East Asia (such as Orzech, Sørensen, and Payne 2011), but these expressions are not commonly used in Indian and Tibetan traditions, despite the importance of secrecy in these traditions. While the terms “tantra” and “tantric” derive from Sanskrit terms, it should be noted that they carry negative connotations. As Hugh Urban has shown in his book *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (2003), these terms have negative associations in both India and the West, being particularly associated with black magic in India, and with sex in the West. However, these associations are not entirely unwarranted, as many of the tantras are replete with descriptions of both violent magical rituals as well as sexual practices.
5. Regarding this, see Nattier (1991).
6. Regarding Amoghavajra and his attempt at transmitting this canon of tantric literature see Giebel (1995) and Gray (2009, 12–13).
7. Regarding the establishment of the Shingon school of esoteric Buddhism and the addition of esoteric Buddhist practice to the Tendai school in Japan during the ninth century, see Abé (1999) and Groner (2000).
8. The impact of esoteric Buddhism in China is a major focus of Orzech, Sørensen, and Payne’s *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia* (2011). See especially pp. 421–574.
9. See Skilling (1997, 87–89).
10. Regarding Dunhuang Tibetan tantric manuscripts, see Dalton and van Schaik (2006).
11. According to Tibetan historical sources, three catalogues of translated texts were made during the Tibetan imperial period. These include the *Lhan/lDan kar ma*, which has been dated to 812 CE (Herrmann-Pfandt 2002, 129), and the ‘*Phang-thang-ma*, which has been dated to 842 CE (Dotson 2007, 4). The third catalogue, the *mchims phu ma*, is apparently lost.
12. See Ronald Davidson’s (2005) study of this era of Tibetan religious history.



13. Sanderson recently published a book chapter (2009) that is his most extensive presentation of his argument of the dependence of Buddhist on Śaiva tantric traditions.

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# I

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## *Buddhas, Siddhas, and Indian Masculine Ideals*

*John Powers*

### *Masculinities in Conflict*

Discursive studies of societies from around the world have shown that notions of gender and bodies vary considerably across cultures and over time. As Judith Butler has noted, sex roles are “performative,” not natural (1999, 235). Societies develop and socialize certain traits, attitudes, and behaviors as normative for men or women, and this process is not under the conscious control of people who try to live them. R. W. Connell states that “[m]asculinities come into existence at particular times and places and are always subject to change. Masculinities are, in a word, historical” (2005, 185). For men and women attempting to conform to the sometimes conflicting norms of gender, the contingent nature of these discourses is seldom apparent, and in most cases they are widely hegemonic.

Indic texts that describe the life of the Buddha (ca. fourth to fifth centuries BCE) indicate that there were two primary male ideals during the time when his legend was being constructed: the brahman priest, devoted to religious performance and meditation, and the *kṣatriya* (warrior and ruler), who excels in martial arts, athletics, and warfare. In brahmanical literature, brahmins are portrayed as spiritually inclined and widely respected. Their high social status is a result of their virtuous actions in past lives, but in Buddhist sources there is a recurring counter-discourse in which the Buddha declares that birth alone is not enough: only those

who truly act in accordance with religious ideals merit the designation “brahman.”<sup>1</sup>

The *kṣatriya* is widely valorized as an ideal type, but brahmanical sources warn of the negative karmic effects of a life devoted to fighting and killing, and they depict brahmins as better suited to the higher goals of religion, particularly liberation (*mokṣa*) from cyclic existence.<sup>2</sup> This tension is never resolved in Indic sources, and though the two groups are presented as essential to the preservation and advancement of society, their contrasting roles and activities are clearly separated. Brahmins should only take up arms in extraordinary circumstances, and the predispositions (*adhikāra*) with which they are born make them uniquely qualified to perform the rituals that preserve social order and maintain the cosmos. *Kṣatriyas* rule states and fight wars, but these activities enmesh them in mundane concerns and actions that lead to negative karma, and thus constitute an impediment to religious pursuits.

This tension also figures in Buddhist texts. Traditional accounts of the Buddha’s life report that he was born into a *kṣatriya* family and was named Siddhārtha Gautama. His biographies provide lengthy descriptions of his exploits in athletics and martial arts, in which he easily bests all of his contemporaries. In addition, during his young adulthood he is depicted as a sexual “stallion” who has up to three wives and tens of thousands of courtesans.<sup>3</sup> He sexually satisfies all of them, and each believes that he only spends time with her. In several biographies, his father, King Śuddhodana, tries to keep Siddhārtha involved in worldly affairs and to turn his attention away from the pitfalls of cyclic existence so that he will engage in the activities expected of a *kṣatriya* and not become interested in religious practice. The prince lives in the “women’s quarters,” where he is surrounded by beautiful females skilled in the erotic arts, whose only task is to keep him entertained.<sup>4</sup> His sexual exploits form a key part of this narrative, and his performance exceeds the wildest dreams of most men. His courtesans all proclaim his erotic proficiency, and his energy never flags. In addition, he outshines all his contemporaries in sports and martial arts.

### *Masculinity and Sports*

An important event in this part of the future Buddha’s biography is his marriage to Yaśodharā, the most beautiful princess in the region. Śuddhodana wants his son to wed, produce male heirs, and inherit the kingdom, but

Yaśodharā's father, Daṇḍapāṇi, has doubts regarding the prince's manliness. Because Siddhārtha has grown up in the women's quarters surrounded by courtesans, Daṇḍapāṇi fears that he has become effeminate and has neglected the martial training required of *kṣatriyas*. Warriors are toughened by competition with other warriors and develop masculine traits through rough camaraderie; by spending too much time in sexual dalliances and living among women, Siddhārtha may have become soft and thus unfit to rule and to fight his kingdom's enemies.<sup>5</sup>

When Śuddhodana presents these concerns to his son, Siddhārtha assures him that while he may not have spent much time training or exercising, he can best any rival in sports and martial arts contests. A tournament is arranged and the hand of Yaśodharā is the prize. The strongest, fastest, fittest men compete in "archery, fighting, boxing, cutting, stabbing, speed, and feats of strength, use of elephants, horses, chariots, bows, and spears, and argument."<sup>6</sup> In every event Siddhārtha outshines them all. The *Extensive Sport* summarizes the result: "Then an exhibition was given by prince Siddhārtha in which he displayed his feats in all the [martial] arts. There was no one to equal him in either wrestling or boxing."<sup>7</sup>

None of the accounts that describe the tournament indicates that Siddhārtha trained for this event, nor did he need to lift weights, run sprints, or follow any special diet in preparation for his outstanding manly exploits. He was born with a perfect body, one that was naturally stronger and better coordinated than those of his contemporaries, and no amount of training on their part would have allowed them to match his strength and skill.<sup>8</sup> At the conclusion of the tournament Daṇḍapāṇi is satisfied that Siddhārtha is an outstanding *kṣatriya* and gladly agrees that he should marry Yaśodharā.

### *The Ultimate Man*

Indic sources that describe the Buddha emphasize the idea that he had a perfect male physique, one that completely surpassed the bodies of every man of his time and was testament to his extraordinary spiritual accomplishments in past lives and the vast store of merit he had accumulated through asceticism, generosity, ethics, patience, meditation, and particularly through his willingness to sacrifice his own body for the benefit of others. He is described as "handsome, good looking, graceful, possessing supreme beauty of complexion, with sublime beauty and sublime

presence, remarkable to behold.”<sup>9</sup> The fruition of his exertions in past lives was a birth with the body of the “ultimate man” (*puruṣottama*), adorned with the physical characteristics of a great man (*mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa*). In the earliest extant descriptions, there are thirty-two major physical characteristics, and later literature adds a further eighty secondary ones.<sup>10</sup>

Indian Buddhist texts devote considerable attention to elaborate descriptions of his unique physiognomy, particularly the details of the physical characteristics of a great man, and also to discussions of the past practices that produced the merit that made their actualization possible. The most extensive description in the Pāli canon is found in the “Discourse on the Physical Characteristics” (*Lakkhaṇa-sutta*).<sup>11</sup> Another detailed account of the Buddha’s extraordinary physique is given in the “Brahmāyu Discourse” (*Brahmāyu-sutta*) by a brahman named Uttara, who visits the Buddha intending to ascertain for himself whether or not he really is a “great man” as his followers claim. A great man epitomizes wisdom and has attained the pinnacle of spiritual realization, but his attainments can only be definitively confirmed by his physique. Uttara listens to a sermon by the Buddha but is unconvinced. Fools may parrot words of wisdom, but they cannot fake the body of a great man, and only by verifying the Buddha’s possession of the thirty-two physical characteristics can Uttara determine his level of spiritual realization.

Uttara examines the Buddha’s body and ascertains that he possesses thirty of the major physical characteristics, which include a fist-sized lump on top of his head (*uṣṇīṣa*); a bright silver tuft of coiled hair between his eyebrows about a meter in length (*ūrṇā*); flat feet with a spoked wheel pattern on the soles; webbed fingers and toes; arms that can reach down to his knees without him bending over; legs like an antelope’s; eyelashes like a cow’s; and golden colored skin so smooth that no dust or dirt can settle on it. Two crucial features cannot be verified by Uttara’s detailed examination: a long, copper-colored tongue and a sheathed penis. Reading his mind, the Buddha allows the audience to view his sheathed penis, and then he extrudes his tongue, touching the tip into each earhole and then covering his forehead with it.<sup>12</sup>

This display—and the Buddha’s physique—would probably strike most contemporary readers as freakish, but Uttara is deeply impressed and concludes that there is no doubt that the Buddha is indeed a great man. Brahmāyu, Uttara’s teacher, hears his student’s description of the Buddha’s body and decides to see the ultimate man for himself and also asks to see the master’s sheathed penis and tongue, which he links with

ideal masculinity: "Upon your body, Gotama, is what is normally concealed by a cloth hidden by a sheath, greatest of men? Though named by a word of the feminine gender, is your tongue really a manly (*narassika*) one?"<sup>13</sup> Is your tongue also large? . . . Please stick it out a bit and cure our doubts."<sup>14</sup> The Buddha obliges, and Brahmāyu is also convinced that he is a great man. After a similar display in the "Discourse on the Physical Characteristics," the Buddha informs his audience that he attained this perfect body as a result of "mighty deeds, generosity, discipline, abstinence, honoring parents, ascetics, and brahmans."<sup>15</sup>

The Buddha's sheathed penis figures in a number of accounts. It is associated with stallions, bulls, and elephants, all symbolic of masculinity in Indic sources. In addition to convincing skeptical brahmans of his spiritual attainments, it is used as a basis for religious instruction in some narratives. According to tradition, a "first council" of *arhats* was convened following the Buddha's death, during which his attendant Ānanda was chastised for lifting up the robes covering the Master's corpse so that a group of female devotees could view his phallus. Ānanda defended his actions on the grounds that upon beholding the Buddha's perfect organ the women would become disgusted with the female form and would set their minds on future male rebirths, which would constitute a significant spiritual advance for them (La Vallée Poussin 1976, 4–7).

In a Mahāyāna text entitled *Discourse on the Ocean-Like Meditation of Buddha Remembrance*, the Buddha uses his penis to convert heretics. He creates a huge mountain and lays on his back, extruding his phallus and wrapping it around the mountain seven times, and then extends it to the heaven of Brahmā. A group of naked Jain ascetics who witness this display are so impressed that they decide to convert.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, there is no indication in this or other Indian Buddhist sources that size matters. The Buddha's male organ and tongue may be extended for instructional purposes, but the size of his penis has no bearing on his masculinity, nor is there any indication that it was longer than those of other men in its normal state. Length and diameter are not related to his ability to sexually satisfy his courtesans in his early life. This reflects a general sense in Indic sources that a long penis is not a desirable feature for men. The *Kāma Sūtra*, for example, declares that men with small organs are better lovers and have calm and agreeable personalities, while those with large, bulky bodies and long penises tend to be violent and aggressive.<sup>17</sup> Men fortunate enough to have small phalluses also live longer and enjoy greater happiness.

Female sexual satisfaction is not connected with the size or diameter of the penis in any Indic text I have seen; rather, the key factor is the amount and quality of semen they receive. Women crave semen, and the more a man ejaculates, the greater their sexual pleasure. Caraka indicates that the ideal is ejaculation “like an elephant,” in which a copious amount of semen is transferred.<sup>18</sup> Large amounts of semen attest to male virility, and the quantity and quality are directly related to the odds of conceiving a son. Sons are highly valued in India, both in past times and today, and a man who produces large amounts of high-quality semen is more likely to engender a son than others whose output is more meager and of inferior potency. Women desire both semen and sons, so men with copious seminal discharges satisfy their mates and continue their family lines.<sup>19</sup>

An example of the linkage between volume and potency of semen and masculinity is a story from Laos reported by Charles Archaimbault, in which the Buddha overhears some monks gossiping. An evil disciple attempts to besmirch the Master’s reputation by stating that the Buddha has no difficulty maintaining celibacy because he is a eunuch, and so lacks the natural desires of other men. Hearing this, some monks become confused and begin to doubt his masculinity. The Buddha asks them, “Do you really question my virility? Do you really think my virtues are a reflection of impotence?” He then walks into a secluded grove and emerges with his cupped hands brimming with semen and declares, “Here is proof of my manhood!” His monastic followers are left with no doubts regarding his manly *bona fides*, and then he tosses his emission into a nearby river and washes his hands. The seminal discharge is so potent that a female fish that swims through it becomes pregnant, and later gives birth to a human son, who grows up to become the *arhat* Upagupta (Archaimbault 1972, 55).

Similar scenarios recur in a number of accounts of the Buddha’s life. He often shrugs off insults that disparage his meditative accomplishments or his claims to have attained awakening, but vigorously defends himself when his consummate masculinity is questioned. An example is a story in the *Monastic Code of the Original Everything Exists School*, in which Siddhārtha is preparing to leave his father’s palace and pursue the life of a wandering religious mendicant, but he fears that if he does so before conceiving a son, other *kṣatriyas* might think that he is not a manly man, which would undermine his reputation and that of his monastic order. He then impregnates his wife—after having already resolved to abandon her—in order to forestall this potential problem.<sup>20</sup>



As these stories indicate, Indian Buddhist texts devote considerable attention to the Buddha's body and emphasize his paradigmatic masculinity. His physique elicits admiration from his male compatriots in his early life, and even after he renounces the world and pursues the path of an ascetic seeker of liberation, men, particularly kings, proclaim the perfection of his form and affirm that he has lost none of his strength or athleticism and continues to look the part of a warrior. At the same time, he is described as the ultimate sage who has fully understood the truth (*dharma*) and who possesses perfect eloquence and clarity of insight. He surpasses the religious leaders of his time, and many members of other religious orders who meet him are converted. His body is often the decisive factor. The Buddha's spiritual attainments are also described in detail, and they are linked with the physical attainments of a great man, which proclaim his perfect virtue and wisdom. Buddhaghosa declares that the body of a buddha "impresses worldly people, and because of this he is fit to be relied upon by laypeople."<sup>21</sup>

Because the Buddha is the ultimate man, he must perfectly perform the two apparently contradictory roles of the contemplative, religiously inclined brahman and the vigorous, martial, athletic *ksatriya*. Indian texts maintain this tension throughout their accounts of the Buddha's life, and neither is downplayed or diminished. Several narratives indicate that even as an old man the Buddha retained exceptional vitality and physical beauty, along with undiminished wisdom and insight.

The physical characteristics of a great man are extolled in Indian Buddhist sources as the perfection of male beauty and are linked with extraordinary acts of virtue in past lives. According to Vasubandhu, each is produced by the cultivation of one hundred merits,<sup>22</sup> and Buddhaghosa states that each "is born from its corresponding action."<sup>23</sup> The *Extensive Sport* indicates that the Buddha's acquisition of a sheathed penis was the consequence of celibacy and generosity in past lives and testifies to his perfection of these qualities.

The Buddha's unusual tongue is also linked with past practice of virtue connected with speech and eating and is a testament to his perfection of truthfulness and eloquence. In one narrative in the *Divine Legends*, the Buddha upbraids a skeptical brahman who doubts his teachings. The Buddha sticks out his tongue and covers his face up to the hairline, and then he asks: "What do you think, brahman, could a man able to extrude his tongue from his mouth and cover the entire surface of his face knowingly lie, even for the sake of hundreds of thousands of kingdoms of

universal monarchs?" The chastened brahman agrees that this display proves the Buddha's integrity.<sup>24</sup>

A number of conversion stories begin with an encounter with a doubter who is impressed by the Buddha's physique. Many of these include a head-to-foot description of his body that emphasizes the physical characteristics of a great man and proclaims him to be the epitome of masculine beauty. Several kings who describe the Buddha's body to him lament that such a perfect physical specimen, one clearly suited to ruling a kingdom and subduing enemies, has renounced the life of a *kṣatriya* for religious pursuits. In the *Extensive Sport*, the king of Magadha says to the Buddha, "You are in the flower of your youth! Your complexion is brilliant; you are clearly robust. Accept from me abundant riches and women. Stay here in my kingdom and enjoy yourself!"<sup>25</sup> The Buddha responds that he has overcome any interest in the body and is fully aware of what he has left behind: "I no longer have any impulse of desire. I abandoned everything that is desirable and gave up thousands of beautiful women. I found no happiness in the things of the world and renounced them all in order to gain supreme awakening, the greatest happiness."

The *Acts of the Buddha* dwells on the effect that his body has on women, who are unable to resist staring at him. Even after years of asceticism and living as a wandering mendicant, "his beautiful body was transformed by shaving his head and wearing cast-off garments, but he was still covered in the color of gold [radiating] from his body." A group of women who saw him in a monk's robes opined that he "should be humbling enemy princes" and "be gazed at by hordes of women."<sup>26</sup>

### *Beauty and Virtue*

Indian religious literature assumes a close linkage between physical beauty and virtue. A beautiful body is the result of the successful practice of meritorious actions, while ugliness proclaims moral deficiency. As Daniel Boucher notes, "The classical Indian world . . . formulated an essential connection between bodily and moral attainment. Brahmanical writers . . . regularly saw bodily appearance as an indicator of character and virtue" (2008, 3).

The *Questions of Milinda* posits a direct association between physical endowments and virtue. It states that people who are short-lived, ugly, or sickly display past negative karma on their bodies, while those who

suppress evil thoughts and engage in positive actions will be healthy and beautiful.<sup>27</sup> The *arhat* Nāgasena compares acquired merit to a currency that can be used to purchase birth in families of good lineage, a beautiful body, wealth, wisdom, worldly glory, heavenly glory, and even nirvana. He compares the situation of a virtuous person to that of a wealthy man in a bazaar, who can buy whatever he wants, and he adds that the teachings of the Buddha provide people with opportunities to accumulate this currency.<sup>28</sup>

These ideas are linked to notions of karma and rebirth that are commonly accepted by Indian religions, including Buddhism. Practice of virtue results in better rebirths, and this includes enhanced physical endowments, wealth, good fortune, and high social status. Birth as a brahman or *kṣatriya* is due to meritorious deeds in past lives. Several Buddhist sources state that all buddhas are born into either brahman or *kṣatriya* families, depending on which group is most highly regarded at a particular time. In the Buddha's time, *kṣatriyas* had the better reputation, and that is why he chose *kṣatriya* parents.<sup>29</sup>

If we look at the Buddha's life as narrative, other factors are apparent. As the ultimate man, the Buddha must excel in both religious pursuits and in martial arts. Brahmins are forbidden by their social function as priests from engaging in athletic contests and martial pursuits, except in exigent circumstances. Physical contact between a brahman and someone belonging to a lower social group (including *kṣatriyas*) leads to a transfer of ritual pollution from lower to higher, and so if the Buddha were born a brahman, he would not have been able to compete with *kṣatriyas* merely to secure a marriage. *Kṣatriyas* are the group in traditional Indian society that excels in martial arts, and so the Buddha as the ultimate man must be a member of this group in order to prove himself against the best competition. If he were to out-wrestle brahmins and best them in archery, his victory would be a hollow one because brahmins are not warriors or athletes. But *kṣatriyas* are fully capable of entering the religious life and can attain nirvana and other proximate goals, such as supernatural abilities and entry into advanced meditative states. Had the life stories of the Buddha cast him in the role of a brahman, he would have had difficulty proving himself in the martial aspects of the ultimate man's persona, but birth as a *kṣatriya* presents no barrier to his religious pursuits.

In order to perform his role as a buddha, Siddhārtha required a perfect male body that publicly proclaimed his consummate virtue and wisdom. Had he been born with an unattractive physique or in a destitute

family, people of the time would have assumed this to be the result of sinful actions in past lives, which would have made it difficult or impossible for him to become established as a religious teacher. As the *Questions of Rāṣṭrapāla Discourse* states, “Fools, due to their arrogance, will be thrown into evil states, destinies among unfortunate rebirths, and rebirths in poor and despised families. They will be blind from birth, ugly, and will have little strength.”<sup>30</sup>

Gender is also a factor. A buddha must be male because males are the dominant sex in Indian society. Indian Buddhist sources assume that male bodies are better suited to religious pursuits and are naturally more conducive to cultivation of self-control than those of females. The female body is conceived as oozing fluids and is difficult to control and discipline, and in many sources women are portrayed as slaves to their carnal desires. Men are naturally stronger, hardier, better suited to physical regimens and discipline, and they outperform women in martial pursuits and in withstanding the rigors of religious asceticism.

As noted earlier, one of the physical characteristics of a great man is a sheathed penis, and the eighty secondary physical characteristics include a perfectly formed male organ, and so presumably only men can become buddhas. This reflects the social standing of men in Indian society. A buddha is the most exalted of all beings as a result of past religious practice, and his final life must reflect this status. A buddha cannot be born among the lower classes because the final birth of a bodhisattva (buddha in training) is the culmination of countless lifetimes spent engaging in virtuous deeds and accumulating vast stores of merit. An incipient buddha will have the best of all possible bodies and will be born into a wealthy family at the apex of society. And he must be a man because the social status of males is superior to that of females. The logic is clear, even if the premises are flawed. The creators of the Buddha legend presumed that the main features of their society are reproduced in other worlds and at other times. As we have seen, a number of sources state that buddhas are always born into either brahman or *kṣatriya* families, assuming that Indian social groupings are universal rather than specific to a certain region and time.

Moreover, the gender discourses they assume, while specific to their culture, are deemed to be universal. Descriptions of the Buddha's perfect body differ considerably from current notions of paradigmatic masculinity, but there is no indication that the authors of his legend were aware that there are other possible ideal masculine types.

### *Performing Masculinity*

An emphasis on performance runs through the stories of the Buddha's life. In the *Extensive Sport*, a recurring narrative theme has him reflecting on the standard sequence of events in a buddha's life and considering how best to display the actions expected of him. Gods and sages know this sequence and eagerly anticipate his demonstration of paradigmatic actions. During his mother's pregnancy, gods come to her chamber to watch him enact particular paradigmatic events, and the *Extensive Sport* states that while in her womb he was encased in a transparent crystal casket that allowed others to view him. Throughout this period, gods visit him, and he appears to enjoy the attention.<sup>31</sup> The bodhisattva regularly ponders upcoming events in his progression toward full attainment of buddhahood and considers how his actions will impact on his audiences.

His perfect body is a necessary aspect of this narrative trope because it demonstrates to all that his past practice of virtue resulted in a form that epitomizes the highest development of the human physique, and it is said to surpass even those of the gods in beauty. The physical characteristics of a great man are a crucial distinguishing feature: the bodies of gods may be radiant and powerful, but they lack the major and minor physical characteristics. Their exalted positions are also a result of past practice of virtue, but their lives as deities are merely temporary and will end when their accumulated store of virtue is exhausted. The great man, however, has attained the summit of cyclic existence and is the teacher of gods and humans. His unique physiology is a public statement of his supreme spiritual accomplishments. Despite this emphasis on the spiritual, the fact that stories about his life repeat the themes of his physical beauty, strength, manliness, and athletic prowess, along with descriptions of his supernatural powers and unsurpassed insight, shows that the authors felt a need to maintain both aspects of his ultimate manhood in their development of the literary character of the Buddha.

### *The Adepts: A New Paradigm*

The tropes discussed so far are found throughout Pāli literature and Mahāyāna works. In the tantras, however, some significant conceptual shifts occur, but some earlier discourses are retained. The notion that past practice of virtue is reflected by a person's physique is assumed, but new meditative techniques are presented that allow ill-favored people,

members of despised castes, and women to make rapid progress on the path and attain the highest levels of accomplishment. In the *Lives of the Eighty-Four Adeptes*, stories of simple, extraordinarily effective, and often personalized instructions enable newly initiated practitioners to reach the supreme attainment after a fortuitous encounter with a yogi who bestows the teachings of the great seal (*mahāmudrā*), followed by a relatively short period of intense practice (commonly twelve years). Many of the adepts have little or no previous familiarity with the dharma, some are brahmans who follow a different path, and some are well advanced in years and in poor health before they receive instructions. The notion that past practice of virtue is proclaimed on a person's physique is articulated in several stories, including that of Anaṅga, who is said to be extremely handsome due to meditating on patience in a past life (Dorje 1979, 2:251). The same is true of Kalapa, who also had a beautiful physique due to past cultivation of patience, but his good looks led to frustration because people constantly stared at him and followed him. To get away from the unwanted attention, he moved to a cemetery (*ibid.*, 2:106–107).

Reflecting assumptions about the linkage between physical attributes and morality in Indian society, negative deeds produce correlative bodily effects. Before encountering the dharma, Thaganapa was a compulsive liar, and he was warned that liars will have bad breath, their tongues will not work properly, and others will not be convinced by their words (*ibid.*, 2:85–87). An underlying message of the stories of the *siddhas* is that for ordinary beings caught up in the karmic whirl, positive and negative actions leave corresponding imprints on both present and future bodies, and these can be read by others as indicators of a person's moral stature.

For those who receive the extraordinary teachings of *mahāmudrā*, however, the situation is different. Catrapa is told, "Your body shows what you have done previously; what happens later depends on the mind" (*ibid.*, 2:97). Adepts who successfully grasp the teachings they receive make rapid progress, and in some cases this is accompanied by physical transformation. Tantipa was an unexceptional person who had reached old age before encountering a teacher. His children banished him to a hut, where he chanced to encounter a yogi who was willing to give him the highest esoteric lore. As a result of his practice, he quickly attained tantric accomplishments (*siddhi*), and one night his family was amazed to see that he was engaged in meditation, surrounded by beautiful celestial maidens. The next day his body was transformed into that of a handsome sixteen-year-old: "From his body immeasurable rays of light arose, and none of the

people could bear to look at him. His body was like a clear polished mirror, and everything appeared as light" (ibid., 2:58).

In most of the stories of the adepts, however, their bodies remain unaltered. They may develop greater vigor and their demeanor changes, but there is no indication that any of them acquire the physical characteristics of a great man. At the end of each account, the reader is informed that the *siddha* traveled in that very body to the realm of the *ḍākas*, which is characterized as the ultimate attainment.

Indian tantras often assert that their meditative techniques far surpass those of the common Mahāyāna and enable those fortunate enough to encounter tantric teachings (and practice them effectively) to make rapid progress and greatly shorten the time spent on the path to awakening. They generally assume a linkage between beauty and virtue and the trope of the physical characteristics of the great man as testament to buddhahood, but they also promise that their techniques can result in the highest attainment without the necessity of transformation of one's present body into one resembling that of the Buddha. The Buddha is still depicted in tantric works as having the physical characteristics of a great man, but adepts constitute a new ideal, one that retains some aspects of earlier tropes while downplaying others. The tantras often contain transgressive images and enjoin trainees to engage in actions that were condemned in traditional Indian society, and the lives of the adepts reflect these transgressive tendencies. Several belong to outcaste groups, some like Lūyipa ingest offensive substances (in his case, fish entrails), and they often inhabit liminal places like cemeteries and cremation grounds, which are shunned by ordinary people.

A common narrative element in the tales of the eighty-four *siddhas* depicts a person who is receptive to the dharma encountering an existential crisis. A wandering yogi recognizes this and offers the teachings of the great seal, generally in the form of pithy and personalized verses that provide a template for practice. The focus of this training is the mind, rather than the body, and the resulting transformation is mainly cognitive. Sometimes there are physical benefits, including a return to youth and vitality, but for the most part their exterior appearance remains the same. In the case of Gorakṣa, whose hands and feet had been cut off in punishment for a crime he did not commit, his limbs are restored, and other adepts acquire magical abilities that enable them to alter their physical circumstances and the world around them (ibid., 2:38–43). These powers are testament to their spiritual accomplishments, much as they are

in biographies of the Buddha, who assuaged the doubts of skeptics by his performance of magical feats.

### *Sexual Yogas*

Indian tantric texts present a range of practices and paradigms. In the *yoginī* tantras, there is a pervasive emphasis on the extraordinary efficacy of sexual yogas to facilitate spiritual development. This notion is seen in the opening stanzas of several of these works, in which the Buddha appears in sexual embrace with a female consort before a shocked audience. The opening statement of the *Hevajra-tantra* declares that the Buddha was “residing in the vagina (*bhaga*) of the Vajrayoginī who is the essence of the body, speech, and mind of all thus gone ones” (Snellgrove 1959, 2:2). The assembly is scandalized by the sight of the founder of the Buddhist monastic order—who enjoined strict celibacy to his followers as the precondition for effective dharma practice—in *flagrante delicto* and engaged in a public act of coitus. They faint, but are revived by the Buddha’s power; he informs them that the earlier discourses of celibacy were merely expedient teachings delivered for practitioners of inferior capacity and that the most advanced trainees have the ability to skillfully use desire as part of the path.

According to tantric medical theory, these sexual yogas make use of a natural phenomenon: at the moment of orgasm, coarser levels of mind fade away and more subtle ones manifest. The subtlest of these is the mind of clear light (*prabhāsvara-citta*), which arises at the time of death and precedes entry into the intermediate state (*antarābhava*). At the moment of orgasm, one also experiences the arising of subtle levels of mind, but most people take no notice of this and may fall asleep or transition back to coarser forms of cognition. Through training, a yogic adept can enhance the manifestation of more profound levels of consciousness and can maintain this state, which creates greater familiarity with the clear light nature of mind and enables one to simulate the world of a buddha.

Buddhas live in the clear light nature of mind, and their actions are spontaneous responses to their environment, informed by the recognition that all appearances are an interplay of luminosity and emptiness (*śūnyatā*). For ordinary beings, sexual activity is born of desire, and engagement in coitus serves to further increase attachment and inauspicious mental states. Adepts, however, learn to channel the energy of desire and