Origins of the Ancient Tantras

Timeline, Locations, and Key Figures in the Development of the Lineages of the Nyingma Higher Tantras

An M.A. Thesis

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Abstract

This study shows how the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism employs the triple-transmission framework, the Mind Transmission, Symbolic Transmission, and Whispered Transmission, as an apparatus for authenticating its tantric corpus. This modular system interweaves sacred geography, visionary bestowal, *mahāsiddha* mediation, and the *trikāya* framework. Akaniṣṭha, Laṅkā, and Uḍḍiyāna function both as sacred loci of transmission and as geographical–mythological anchors within a pan-Indic cosmology. Revelations and supernatural interventions by Samantabhadra/Vajradhara, Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, Vajrapāṇi, and Vajrasattva provide recognizable warrants, while figures such as Vimalakīrti, Indrabhūti/King Ja, Kukkurāja, and Garab Dorje ground the narratives in the living lineage of Śākyamuni and in the broader Indian *mahāsiddha* movement. Human and supramundane agents interact within an ever-changing *trikāya* framework that shifts according to authenticating needs. In particular, Atiyoga foregrounds a self-authorizing model in which Garab Dorje's direct recognition of the primordial ground, the *dharmakāya*, operates as "mind transmission," with *trikāya* overlays supplying public provenance.

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I dedicate this work to my mother and my father, the worldly union who gave me this body and the means to be able to invest my time in such a fruitful manner; to my daughter, the quintessential space-element; and to my partner, the Nāginī, whose patience and support sustained me throughout this journey. Without them, this would not have been possible.

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Part 1. Introduction

The present study examines the mythological and historical origins of the scriptures conventionally designated as Ancient Tantras (*rnying rgyud*). Over the centuries, these texts coalesced into an early tantric canon now known as the *Collection of Ancient Tantras*, or *Nyingma Gyubum* (*rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, hereafter NGB). This corpus of esoteric scriptures constitutes the doctrinal, cultural, and historical foundation of the Nyingma (*rnying ma)* transmission lineage, whose origin myths have served to establish and affirm its legitimacy. Focusing on the twentieth-century master Dudjom Jigdral Yeshe Dorje (*bdud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje*, 1904–1987, hereafter Dudjom Rinpoche), this study shows how the Nyingma transmission, as articulated in the translated version of his treatise *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History* (hereafter *The Nyingma School*), deploys a tripartite model of transmission as an apparatus of scriptural legitimization: the Mind Transmission of the Victorious Ones (*rgyal ba'i dgongs brgyud*; hereafter the Mind Transmission), the Symbolic Transmission of the *Vidyādharas* (*rig 'dzin brda'i brgyud*; hereafter the Symbolic Transmission), and the Whispered Transmission of the Yogins (*rnal 'byor pa'i snyan brgyud*; hereafter the Whispered Transmission). Within this framework, Dudjom Rinpoche presents a modular system that interweaves sacred geography, visionary bestowal, *mahāsiddha* mediation, and the *trikāya* schema to anchor these narratives in broader Buddhist Indian cosmological and doctrinal tradition, thereby creating a multifaceted authenticating lineage.

The significance of this study may be considered on two levels. First, from the perspective of religious practice, for the Nyingma tradition, lineage is of paramount importance. Transmission is not conceived as mere human interaction; it constitutes a living continuity of the attributes of buddhahood, transmitted from realized master to disciple, who in turn attains

realization and transmits these further. This lineage is ultimately traced back to the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra who first expounded these teachings. As Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (*'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas*, 1813–1899) describes, this constitutes an unbroken lineage in which "there has been no degeneration in the blessings."[1] Consequently, it is incumbent upon practitioners of the tantric path to investigate and understand their lineages with care and thoroughness, to ensure its authenticity. Second, from the standpoint of academic inquiry, this study aims to elucidate the Nyingma method of legitimization within the tripartite transmission scheme in detail, offering a coherent doctrinal defense in response to claims that these Ancient Tantras are apocryphal, or that the Nyingma transmission fails to meet the necessary criteria to assert that its scriptures constitute *buddhavacana*.

The first section focuses on the *Mind Transmission*, and considers the functional dynamics of transmission between the *dharmakāya* (*chos sku*) and *saṃbhogakāya* (*lungs sku*), with particular attention to their dwelling site, identified as Akaniṣṭha. The Second section on the *Symbolic Transmission*, is an exploration on the special transmission between the *saṃbhogakāya*, mainly Mañjuśrī (*'jam dpal dbyangs*), Avalokiteśvara (*spyan ras gzigs*), and Vajrapāṇi (*phag na rdo rje*), and their *vidyādhara* (*rig 'dzin*) receptacles. The first section covers the general transmission in the celestial realms, and the second the specific transmission in the human realm, to the five *vidyādharas*, which includes the bodhisattva Vimalakīrti (*dri med grags pa,* ca. 5th-4th c. BCE), who became one of the main sources through which the tantras proliferated in the human realm. The Final section will discuss the Whispered Transmission, a supposed human-to-human transmission, which at least in its inception, Dudjom Rinpoche

[1] Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, *The Treasury of Knowledge: Book Eight, Part Four: Esoteric Instructions: A Detailed Presentation of the Process of Meditation in Vajrayāna*, trans. Sarah Harding (Snow Lion Publications, 2007), 296-7.

presents in a similar light to The Mind and Symbolic Transmissions. This section has two sections. The first section involves the figures of Vimalakīrti, King Indrabhūti (*rgyal po in tra bhu ti,* ca. 8th c.), and Kukkurāja (*khyi'i rgyal po*, ca. 8th c.). This section presents the most divergent content across narratives which will be contrasted with each other. The second section contains the last of these narratives involving the manifestation of Atiyoga through the first human master, Garab Dorje (*dga' rab rdo rje,* ca. 8th c.). This research closes with some concluding thoughts as well as a glossary of terms and some additional helpful content in the Appendixes.

1.1 The Arrival of the Ancient Tantras to Tibet

According to the Nyingma tradition, the higher tantras materialized in India sometime after the *parinirvāṇa*[2] of Śākyamuni Buddha. It is not clear how many tantras first appeared in the human realm; what is clear, according to the emic perspective, is that some of these made their way to Tibet, were they were translated and later compiled during the initial induction of the Dharma (*snga dar*) between the seventh and ninth centuries.[3] It was at this time that the Tibetan King Trisong Detsen (*khri srong lde btsan*, ca. 742-800) undertook the monumental task of importing the Indian tantras into his kingdom. To accomplish this, he invited great Indian *paṇḍitas* such as Padmasambhava (*pad ma 'byung gnas,* ca. 8th c.) and Vimalamitra (*dri med bshes gnyen,* ca. 8th c.) who each transmitted their respective lineages into the Himalayan region.

[2] Fully passing beyond suffering. See glossary entry "*parinirvāṇa.*"
[3] Cantwell & Mayer, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra*, 1.

The Nyingma tradition asserts that these scriptures were translated into Tibetan by a team of translators organized under the king and led by Vairocana (*rnam par snang mdzad,* ca. 8th c.).[4] These young Tibetans were trained and supported in their work by the Indian *paṇḍitas*, most notably Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra.[5] Some accounts further include the involvement of other masters like Śrī Saṃgha (*dpal gyi seng ge,* ca. 8th c.), Jñānagarbha (*ye shes snying po,* ca. 8th c.), and Śilendramitra (ca. 8th c.).[6] Among the early Tibetan translators, Nyak Jñānakumara (*gnyags dznyā na ku mā ra,* ca. 8th c.) and Nubchen Sangye Yeshe (*gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes,* ca. 8th-9th c.) are considered especially significant. Together with the three masters of the Zur (*zur*) clan, Zurchen Shakya Jungne (*zur chen shakya 'byung gnas*, 1002–1062), Zurchung Sherab Drakpa (*zur chung shes rab grags pa*, 1014–1074), and Zur Shakya Senge (*zur shakya seng ge*, 1074–1134), they are regarded as the principal recipients and transmitters of the tantric teachings of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and the Mind Class (*sems sde*) of Atiyoga within the Nyingma tradition.[7]

These tantras mark some of the earliest points of contact between the Indian tantric tradition and the emerging Tibetan Buddhist community, having been translated and/or composed between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Some were very likely produced or modified in Tibet itself, a fact that has prompted extensive debate and, at times, pointed criticism from the Sarma (*gsar ma*), or New Schools of Tibetan Buddhism.[8] Nevertheless, the available

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[4] Samten G. Karmay, *rDzogs Chen: A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. II, Brill's Tibetan Studies Library (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1-14.
[5] Orna Almogi, "Tantric Scriptures in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* Believed to Have Been Transmitted to Tibet by Kashmiris: A Preliminary Survey," in *Around Abhinavagupta: Aspects of the Intellectual History of Kashmir from the Ninth to the Eleventh Century* (LIT Verlag, 2016).
[6]Jean-Luc Achard, "La Liste Des Tantras Du *rNying Ma'i Rgyud'bum* Selon L'edition Et Ablie Par Kun Mkhyen'Jigs Med Gling Pa," *Revue d'Études Tibétaines* 3 (2002): 43–89.
[7] Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles: Lives of the Great Buddhist Masters of India and Tibet* (Shambhala Publications, 2014), 94.
[8] Almogi, "Tantric Scriptures in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*," 2; Robert Mayer, "Indigenous Elements in Tibetan Tantric Religion," *Mongolo-Tibetica Pragensia '14: Ethnolinguistics, Sociolinguistics, Religion and Culture* 7, no. 2

evidence suggests that a significant portion of these esoteric scriptures were indeed of Indian origin, with some even predating the Dunhuang manuscripts, making them, in fact, the oldest extant esoteric scriptures in the Tibetan language.[9]

Over time, these tantras coalesced into the NGB, the tantric canon of the Nyingma transmission.[10] Some of these works, however, continued to circulate independently such as the *Seventeen Pith Instruction Tantras of the Great Perfection* (*rgyud bcu bdun*), or in other collections, like the *Ancient Oral Transmission* (*rnying ma bka' ma*), and the *Collected Tantras of Vairotsana* (*bairo rgyud 'bum*), Other important exemplars, including the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, and the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, were transmitted within different compilations of the *Kangyur* (*bka' 'gyur*). The decisive factor in whether Nyingma tantras were included in different *Kangyur* compilations was their perceived authenticity, compilers tended to favor those tantras for which a Sanskrit original could be verified.[11] For the Sarma, Nyingma tantras that could not demonstrate a verifiable Indic origin were deemed apocryphal and regarded as Tibetan compositions rather than authentic scriptures.[12] For example,

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(2014): 36–40; The distinction between the Nyingma and Sarma traditions is rooted in Tibet's historical trajectory from the imperial period through the era of fragmentation and the subsequent Buddhist revival. During the imperial age (seventh to ninth centuries), beginning with Songtsen Gampo's (*srong btsan sgam po, 618-649*) consolidation of the Tibetan state and its first encounters with Buddhism, and continuing under Trisong Detsen, who invited Indian masters and established Samye as Tibet's first monastery, a vast body of translations from Sanskrit was produced. Under Ralpachen (*ral pa can, 815-841*), these efforts reached their height. This period is known as the "first diffusion" of the Dharma into Tibet and saw the consolidation of what would later be known as the Nyingma, or "Ancient Translation" school. With the assassination of Langdarma (*glang dar ma, 838-842*) in 842 and the collapse of the empire, Tibet entered the so-called Age of Fragmentation, a period of political disunity and decline in centralized religious institutions. Yet from the 10th century onward, a new revival took shape: Samye was restored, royal patrons in western Tibet sponsored Buddhism, and figures like Rinchen Zangpo brought fresh translations from India. This "second diffusion" gave rise to the Sarma, or "New Translation" schools, whose textual corpus and institutional bases developed in contrast to the earlier Nyingma inheritance.

[9] Cantwell & Mayer, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra,* 3-4.

[10] For a discussion of this canon please refer to next section "The Compilation of the NGB."

[11] Cantwell & Mayer, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra,* 1; Jonathan C. Gold, *The Dharma's Gatekeepers: Sakya Paṇḍita on Buddhist Scholarship in Tibet* (State University of New York Press, 2007), 5-6; Sam Van Schaik, "A Catalogue of the First Volume of the Waddell Manu- Script *rNying Ma Rgyud 'Bum*," *The Tibet Journal* 25, no. 1 (2000): 27.

[12] Mihai Derbac, "*rNying Ma 'i Rgyud 'bum*: A Tibetan Buddhist Canon" (University of Alberta, 2007), 6-7.

in the fourteenth century the Kagyu master Tsalpa Kunga Dorje (*tshal pa kun dga' rdo rje*, 1309-1364) sponsored an early edition of the *Kangyur* compiled at the Tsel Gungtang Monastery (*tshel gung thang dgon pa*). The editors of this edition recognized as genuine only three volumes of Nyingma tantras;[13] these were not placed in the main Tantra (*rgyud*) section but rather set apart in a separate division labeled "Ancient Tantras" (*rnying rgyud*).

Besides the question of origin, the late tenth and early eleventh centuries witnessed an organized campaign to discredit several of the Ancient Tantras, particularly the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*. The main charge was that these scriptures contained the controversial doctrine of "union and liberation" (*sbyor sgrol*), that is, esoteric practices involving sexual union. This climate of skepticism culminated in a well-known episode in which the eminent translator Rinchen Sangpo (*rin chen bzang po*, 958-1055), together with twenty contemporaries, traveled to Kashmir to determine whether these scriptures were authentic Indic works or mere Tibetan fabrications.[14] The broader polemic also included vigorous critiques by other *Sarma* translators and scholars, notably Go Khukpa Lhetse (*'gos khug pa lhas btsas*, 11th c.), who composed a treatise entitled *Refutation of False Mantras* (*sngags log sun 'byin pa rgyas pa*), aimed directly at the *Guhyagarbha*. In his critique, Lhetse contends that the tantra had, in fact, been composed by Ma Rinchen Chok (*rma rin chen mchog*, 8th c.), a disciple of Vimalamitra who played a crucial role in its early translation and transmission. According to Lhetse, Rinchen Chok allegedly

[13] Paul Harrison, "A Brief History of the Tibetan *bKa' 'gyur*," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre* (Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 78.
[14] Dorji Wangchuk, "An Eleventh-Century Defense of the Authenticity of the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*," in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism* (Brill, 2002), 265-6.

interpolated additional verses (*'phyong*), thereby becoming the true author of the text and rendering the *Guhyagarbha* a Tibetan invention, an apocryphal work lacking Indic authority.[15]

It is also well documented that sectarian bias, particularly within the Shakya tradition, played a significant role in canonical exclusions.[16] Sakya Paṇḍita (sa skya paṇḍita kun dga' rgyal mtshan, 1182–1251) composed extensive polemical writings against the Nyingma system, challenging both the doctrinal validity and the scriptural authenticity of the Nyingma transmission. In one of his well-known critiques, Sa Paṇ sought to portray the Atiyoga system as a derivative Tibetan formulation influenced by the teachings of the Chinese monk Hwashang (8th c.), whose views were famously refuted by Kamalaśīla during the Samye debate in the eighth century.[17] This characterization was intended not only to undermine the philosophical rigor of the Atiyoga system, portraying it as a defective approach that could not withstand analytical examination, but also to relocate its origins from India to China, hence labeling it derisively the "Chinese Tradition."[18]

These sustained challenges to the authenticity and authority of the Ancient Tantras, ranging from Go Khukpa Lhetse's accusations of interpolation to Rinchen Sangpo's doctrinal skepticism and Sakya Paṇḍita's sectarian critiques, created enduring pressures on the Nyingma tradition. In response, Nyingma scholars undertook a deliberate effort to collect, authenticate, and preserve their scriptural heritage. This process culminated in the compilation of the NGB, an

[15] Wangchuk, "An Eleventh-Century Defense of the Authenticity of the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*", 265-87.
[16] Mayer, "Indigenous Elements in Tibetan Tantric Religion," 39–40.
[17] Tomoko Makidono, "An Entrance to the Practice Lineage as Exemplified in Kaḥ Thog Dge Rtse Mahāpaṇḍita's Commentary on Sa Skya Paṇḍita's Sdom Gsum Rab Dbye," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 22 (2011), 228-9.
[18] David Jackson, "Sa-Skya Paṇḍita the 'Polemicist': Ancient Debates and Modern Interpretations," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 13, no. 2 (1990): 17–116, 95.

autonomous tantric canon established to affirm the Indic legitimacy and doctrinal integrity of the Ancient Tantras amidst their exclusion from mainstream *Kangyur* editions.[19]

1.2 The Compilation of the NGB

According to the *Inventory of Phangthang* (*dkar chag 'phang thang ma*), [20] the NGB has existed, in one form or another, since the time of King Trisong Detsen. Although the earlier compilations are not considered to be NGBs, they can be regarded as distinct collections of Ancient Tantras that, at least from the perspective of the Nyingma tradition, culminated in the eventual production of the NGB. These may be considered to be proto-NGBs. The earliest known of these compilations was undertaken by Zurchen Shakya Jungne in the eleventh century. Known as the Zur Compilation or the Collection of Zur Ukpalung (*zur 'ug pa lung*), it contained an unspecified number of scriptures gathered from Samye Chimphu (*bsam yas mchims phu*), including the Mahāyoga tantra *The Union with All the Buddhas* (*Sarvabuddhasamāyoga*).[21]

The second early collection was compiled by Ngadak Drowagonpo Namkha Pel (*gnas bdag 'gro ba mgon po nam mkha' dpal*, 1159–1232) between 1205 and 1235. Namkha Pel, the son of the renowned treasure revealer Nyangrel Nyima Ozer (*gnas bdag nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer*, 1124–1192), succeeded his father as doctrinal heir after his passing, assuming responsibility for the Mawochok (*smra bo lcogs*) hermitage in Lhodrak (*lho brag*). Celebrated as a great patron of the Dharma, Namkha Pel sponsored numerous religious works, including this early

[19] Almogi, "Tantric Scriptures in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*," 2.
[20] Translation in Appendix I.
[21] Appendix I

compilation of Ancient Tantras. According to tradition, this collection was written in gold and prepared as a memorial offering in honor of his father.[22]

The third proto-NGB collection was compiled by Zur Zangpo Pal (*bzang po dpal*, 1262–1324) in the early fourteenth century. He is believed to have served at the royal court of the Chinese emperor Buyantu. During his tenure there, he established a tantric college in China and, with the emperor's favor and patronage, expanded upon his predecessor Zurchen Shakya Jungne's *Zur Ukpalung* edition to produce his proto–NGB. As part of this endeavor, he commissioned woodblock xylographs for twenty-eight texts, including the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*. However, his untimely death prevented him from completing the xylograph series for the entire collection.[23]

The first proper version of the NGB came to be in the fourteenth century and is said to have been compiled by Ratna Lingpa (*rat na gling pa*, 1403–1478) and his son Rigdzin Tsewang Drakpa (*rig 'dzin tshe dbang grags pa,* 15th c.). They rearranged the Zur Ukpalung edition into their Lhundrub Phodrang (*lhun grub pho brang*) NGB. In his desire to preserve the Ancient Tantras, Ratna Lingpa gathered the texts and the transmissions of the tantras that were omitted in the circulating versions of the *Kangyur* form his time. After compiling these into his canon, he committed it to writing at Drushul Lhundrub Podrang in a version made with golden ink. This version is of particular importance to the Nyingma heritage since it became the version used to bestow the oral transmission (*āgama*) of the collected Ancient Tantras.[24]

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[22] Robert Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-Pa Bcu-Gnyis* (Kiscadale Publications, 1996), 224; Daniel Hirshberg, "Namkha Pel," Treasury of Lives, accessed August 15, 2025, https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Namkha-Pel/6010; Mihai Derbac, "*rNying Ma 'i Rgyud 'bum*, 10; Appendix I.
[23] Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection,* 225; Appendix I.
[24] Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection,* 226; Derbac, "*rNying Ma 'i Rgyud 'bum*, 12-3; Appendix I.

In the centuries that followed, multiple variants of the NGB appeared, perhaps the most prominent being the Padma Odling (*padma 'od gling*) version commissioned by the treasure revealer Jigme Lingpa (*'jigs med gling pa*, 1729–1798) in 1772.[25] He is believed to have expanded Ratna Lingpa's version into twenty-five volumes containing his additional compositions on his history and analysis of the NGB alongside some of his own scriptural revelations. Jigme Lingpa's version served as the basis for the printing of the Dege (*sde dge*) NGB, which was sponsored by the Dege queen Tsewang Lhamo (*sde dge rgyal mo tshe dbang lha mo*, d. 1812) and supervised by Getse Mahāpaṇḍita Gyurme Tsewang Chokdrub (*dge rtse paṇ chen 'gyur med tshe dbang mchog grub*, 1761–1829). It is said that this version was carefully revised by Jigme Lingpa and scrupulously redacted by Tsewang Chokdrub who personally inspected the woodblocks before printing. The Dege NGB became the standard and most authoritative version of the NGB. It was widely regarded as the ultimate completion of a century's old effort in the compilation of these Ancient Tantras.[26]

Over the centuries the study of these scriptures declined, since these fell out of favor with the Nyingma followers who instead turned their focus to the *terma* (*gter ma*) scriptures that began manifesting in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[27] For the Nyingma tradition, these *termas* were not only modeled and formatted according to these early tantric scriptures, but they

[25] Jean-Luc Achard, "Rig 'dzin Tshe Dbang Mchog Grub (1761-1829) et La Constitution Du *rNying Ma Rgyud 'bum* de sDe Dge," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 3 (June 2003), 1.
[26] Derbac, "rNying Ma 'i Rgyud 'bum, 17-9; Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection,* 234-5; Alexander Gardner, "Jigme Lingpa," Treasury of Lives, accessed August 15, 2025, https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Jigme-Lingpa/5457; Appendix I.
[27] Jacob P. Dalton, "The Uses of the *Dgongs Pa 'dus Pa'i Mdo* in the Development of the Rnying -Ma School of Tibetan Buddhism" (Ph.D. diss, University of Michigan, 2002), 15-17; Cantwell & Mayer, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra,* 2; Daniel Hirshberg, *Remembering the Lotus-Born: Padmasambhava in the History of Tibet's Golden Age* (Wisdom Publications, 2016), 85-96.

have their root in these.[28] Some of these are presented as condensed editions of these tantras, in fact, some contemporary masters like Khenpo Namdrol (*mkhan po rnam grol*, b. 1953) assert that, for example, the three Vajrakīlaya (*rdo rje phur pa*) *terma* lineages of Padmasambhava, which were revealed by Jigme Lingpa, Ratna Lingpa, and Lerab Lingpa (*las rab gling pa*, 1865-1926), stem from the Vajrakīlaya tantras that Padmasambhava himself brought to Tibet.[29] Other masters like Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche (*mkhan chen dpal ldan shes rab rin po che*, 1938-2010) also expound similar claims, in his case, he asserts that Karma Lingpa's (*kar ma gling pa*, 1326-1386) Zhitro (*zhi khro*) teachings are a condensation of the materials presented in the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*.[30]

Whatever the case might be, as the *terma* scriptures rose to prominence, most Ancient Tantras became mere objects of veneration to enshrine in altars, and to serve as a ritualistic tool for conferring blessings.[31] In contemporary Nyingma circles, most of these tantras have fallen into relative disuse. Out of the approximately 1,000 NGB texts, only a few continue to be studied alongside their commentaries, which are often regarded as indispensable for understanding their meaning.[32] Notable among these are the Seventeen Tantras of the Dzogchen Esoteric Class (*man ngag sde rgyud bcu bdun*) and the *Guhyagarbha Tantra,* both of which retain vibrant commentarial traditions, particularly through the writings of Longchenpa. The latter continues to enjoy a rich living tradition extending from Mipham Rinpoche to contemporary exegeses by masters such as Khenpo Namdrol. Beyond these, two further exemplars contained in the NGB,

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[28] Andreas Doctor, *Tibetan Treasure Literature: Revelation, Tradition, and Accomplishment in Visionary Buddhism* (Snow Lion Publications, 2005), 76; Cantwell & Mayer, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra*,1-2.
[29] Khenpo Namdrol, *The Practice of Vajrakīlaya* (Snow Lion Publications, 1999), 25-6.
[30] Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche, *A Modern Commentary on Karma Lingpa's Zhi Khro: Teachings on the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* (n.p., 2000), 4.
[31] Cantwell & Mayer, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra,* 1-2; Jacob P. Dalton, "The Uses of the *Dgongs Pa 'dus Pa'i Mdo*," 134-6.
[32] Cantwell & Mayer, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra,* 2-3.

the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* and the *Guhyasamāja*, remain popular, the former being frequently recited in contemporary Nyingma circles. However, these two are not exclusive to the NGB, as they are also preserved in the Kangyur with their respective commentaries kept in the Tengyur (*bstan 'gyur*). For the majority of other tantras, however, the commentarial literature has been lost, leaving the texts themselves relatively inaccessible and difficult to interpret.[33] Even the study of the famed *Sūtra Which Gathers All Intentions* (*mdo dgongs 'dus*), the root text of the Anu Yoga and instrumental in the consolidation of the Nyingma tantric scriptural framework, has seen a steep decline since the twelfth century.[34] Likewise, the details surrounding their origins and early development have become obscured. Given that the manifestation of the Ancient Tantras in this world remains a categorical mystery, even a cursory review of the Nyingma traditional accounts of their origins reveals intractable controversies. Since these tantras hold immense historical, doctrinal, and philological significance, their careful research and analysis is of vital importance.

1.3 Literature Review

The origin myths of the Ancient Tantras are embedded within traditional Nyingma presentations of the doctrines of the three higher tantric vehicles. A few sources describe the inner workings of the Nyingma system and present diverse origination narratives; the English translation of Dudjom Rinpoche's *The Nyingma School,*[35] is one of these. Although not the most exhaustive treatise of its kind, this nearly 1,000-page text immerses the reader in the nuances of the

[33] Cantwell & Mayer, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra,* 1-4.
[34] Jacob P. Dalton, "The Uses of the Dgongs Pa 'dus Pa'i Mdo," 135-6; Jacob P. Dalton, *The Gathering of Intentions: A History of a Tibetan Tantra* (Columbia University Press, 2016), xiii-xix.
[35] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, ed. Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein, 2 vols. (Wisdom Publications, 1991).

Nyingma system, its origins, doctrinal framework, and distinctive perspectives on many aspects of Tibetan Buddhism. Its original version also holds the authoritative status of being among the principal treatises taught at major Nyingma monastic colleges (*bshad grwa*), such as Mindrolling (*min grol gling*), where it serves as a key reference for the study of the manifestation of the higher tantras.[36]

Complementing Dudjom Rinpoche's work is Tulku Thondup's *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*,[37] which provides rich hagiographical accounts of Indian and Tibetan masters, particularly those of the Longchen Nyingtik (*klong chen snying thig*) lineage. Like many traditional works of its kind, it begins with the threefold transmission scheme that traces the Nyingtik lineage from the Primordial Buddha Samantabhadra (*kun tu bzang po*) to its first human masters.[38]

Finally, the English version of Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorje's (*smyos shul mkhan po 'jam dbyangs rdo rje*, 1932-1999) *The Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems: Biographies of Masters of Awareness in the Dzogchen Lineage* documents the lives and transmissions of the *vidyādharas* of the Atiyoga lineage. As with Dudjom Rinpoche and Tulku Thondup, Nyoshul Khenpo introduces the three modes of transmission before turning to the specific narratives associated with each lineage holder.[39]

Before turning to the origin myths of the Ancient Tantras, it is necessary to first consider what these scriptures are and how they came to be classified and canonized within the Nyingma

[36] This information came about in conversations with Khenpo Urgyen Tenphel, resident monk of Ka Nying Shedrub Ling. Khenpo mentioned that in his youth he studied this topic from this treatise at Mindrolling Monastery.
[37] Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles.*
[38] Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles,* 18-22.
[39] Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorje, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems: Biographies of Masters of Awareness in the Dzogchen Lineage* (Padma Publishing, 2005)*,* 31-53.

system. An examination of the particularities of Nyingma canonical literature is essential. Yet research on these texts quickly reveals their understudied status. Most of the Ancient Tantras are neither systematically studied nor widely known, even within Nyingma circles, and many have lost their explanatory commentaries.[40] What survives most often are fragments that the Nyingma tradition deploys as a means of doctrinal and historical authentication. This strategy is evident in Dudjom Rinpoche's *The Nyingma School*, where citations from the tantras are employed to authenticate the tantras themselves and to assert their provenance.[41] Despite such usage, the Ancient Tantras as a whole remain largely enigmatic, necessitating a closer investigation.

Turning to academic studies: the work of Orna Almogi has been paramount in advancing the study of these scriptures, particularly through her research on the history and variant versions of the NGB. Her article "Tantric Scriptures in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* Believed to Have Been Transmitted to Tibet by Kashmiris: A Preliminary Survey" provides an insightful overview of the early translation efforts, with special attention on the roles of the Kashmiri masters Vimalamitra and Ānanda. In "Spiritual Masters and Master Copies on the Move: On a Recentrly Discovered Manuscript Edition of the rNying ma rgyud 'bum from East Tibet and its Origins," and "The *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* Set at the National Archives Kathmandu: The History of Its Production and Transmission," Almogi documents the discovery of important variant exemplars. The first study describes a manuscript found in Kham, which represents an Eastern Tibetan transmission of the NGB. This discovery is significant, since much remains unknown about the diverse versions of the NGB that circulated over the centuries, many of which have been

[40] Cantwell & Mayer, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra,* 1-4.
[41] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School,* 275-289.

overshadowed by the better-known Dege edition representing the Central Tibetan transmission.[42] The second article focuses on the exemplar found in the National Archives in Kathmandu, also known as the NAK manuscript, as well as the Nubri version. Almogi work offers a comprehensive overview of the currently accessible NGB recensions and thereby deepening the understanding of this particular canon.

In addition to Almogi's contributions are the studies of Cantwell and Mayer. Their joint article "The *sGang steng-b rNying ma'i rGyud 'Bum* manuscript from Bhutan" and their monograph *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: two texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection* offer an exhaustive introduction to the NGB. These works provide valuable information on the categories within the collection, its constituent scriptures, and the controversies surrounding them, as well as insights into their perception and use in contemporary Nyingma circles.[43] Further, Mayer's *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-pa bcu-gnyis*, offers a detailed account of the developmental construction of the NGB, tracing its evolution from archaic compilations to its present form.[44] Jean-Luc Achard's "La Liste Des Tantras Du rNying Ma'i Rgyud'bum Selon L'edition Et Ablie Par Kun Mkhyen'Jigs Med Gling Pa," and "Rig 'dzin Tshe Dbang Mchog Grub (1761-1829) et La Constitution Du rNying Ma Rgyud 'bum de sDe Dge," also contribute valuable insights on the Ancient Tantras as well as a the complete inventory of scriptures found in Jigme Lingpa's NGB, alongside Mihai Derbac's dissertation "rNying Ma 'i Rgyud 'bum: A Tibetan Buddhist Canon," which is a compelling and

[42] Orna Almogi, "Spiritual Masters and Master Copies on the Move: On a Recentrly Discovered Manuscript Edition of the *Rnying Ma Rgyud 'bum* from East Tibet and Its Origins," in *On a Day of a Month of the Fire Bird Year: Festschrift for Peter Schwieger on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (Lumbini International Research institute, 2020), 5.
[43] Cathy Cantwell and Rob Mayer, "The *sGang Steng-b rNying Ma'i rGyud 'Bum* Manuscript from Bhutan," *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*, no. 11 (2006), 4–6; Cantwell & Mayer, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra*, 1-4.
[44] Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection,* 223-42.

completer overview on the NGB, its formation and its current versions. In addition to these scholarly works, the *Inventory of Phangthang*[45] summarized on the BUDA project's NGB overview page, provides a concise historical account of the collection's development and serves as a useful complement to the more detailed studies of Almogi, Cantwell, and Mayer.

1.3.1 Sacred Geography

The origin narratives of these esoteric tantras are rooted in specific sites that function as *terra sacra* for their most precious transmission. These accounts unfold across three distinct locales situated in different temporal frameworks: first, the atemporal pure land of Akaniṣṭha, where the transmission originates; second, the island of Laṅkā, where the tantras are said to have appeared in the decades after the Buddha's lifetime (5th c. BCE); and finally, Uḍḍiyāna, long regarded by Tibetans as the cradle of Vajrayāna, where scholars generally situate the flourishing of tantric Buddhism between the seventh and ninth centuries.[46]

With respect to Akaniṣṭha, Almogi, in her article "Akaniṣṭha as a Multivalent Buddhist Word-Cum-Name: With Special Reference to *rNying Ma* Tantric Sources," observes that the term appears in numerous Buddhist sources, where its meaning varies according to context.[47] In

[45] Guru Tashi et al., "*Rnying Ma Rgyud 'bum*/ (*sde Dge Par Ma*/)," BUDA: The Buddhist Digital Archives, https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW21939?

[46] Fréderic Moronval, "Uddiyana, Cradle of Vajrayana," in *Tantric Buddhism: Uddiyana and Odisha* (Bod - Books on Demand, 2024); These three locations are examined in greater detail in Section 2. The discussion of Akaniṣṭha, particularly its relationship to the *dharmakāya* and *saṃbhogakāya*, appears in Section 2.1, "Mind Transmission of the Victorious Ones." The treatment of Laṅkā, focusing on its role in the transmission of the tantras into the human realm through Vajrapāṇi and Vimalakīrti, is found in Section 2.2.2, "The Dissemination of the Tantras to the Vidyādhara Vimalakīrti." Finally, the account of the arrival of the tantras in the kingdom of Uḍḍiyāna is presented in Section 2.3.1, "The Dissemination of the Tantras to Indrabhūti of Uḍḍiyāna."

[47] Orna Almogi, "Akaniṣṭha as a Multivalent Buddhist Word-Cum-Name: With Special Reference to rNying Ma Tantric Sources," in *Archaeologies of the Written: Indian, Tibetan, and Buddhist Studies in Honour of Cristina Scherrer-Schaub* (UniorPress, 2020), 23-51.

this study, Almogi elaborates on the typologies of Akaniṣṭha, identifying across scriptures an Ontological, Semeiological, Gnoseological, Physiological, Conceptual, and Cosmological Akaniṣṭhas.[48]

Although Akaniṣṭha is regarded as the ultimate source of the Ancient Tantras, the Nyingma tradition maintains that they subsequently manifested in the human realm, specifically in the geographical locations of Laṅkā, Zahor (*za hor*), and Uḍḍiyāna,[49] the latter two sometimes identified as the same place or as one being a subsidiary of the other.[50] The transmission of the tantras into the human realm is consistently framed in terms of supernatural events and miraculous circumstances. One account describes the transmission atop Mount Malayagiri (*ri ma la ya*) in the land of Laṅkā, where five *vidyādharas*, including Vimalakīrti, having gathered through their magical powers after the Buddha's passing, summoned Vajrapāṇi by means of prayer, who then bestowed the tantric transmission upon them.[51] Another account retells how Vajrapāṇi miraculously delivered the tantras to King Indrabhūti of Uḍḍiyāna, who received them when they spontaneously descended from the sky upon his palace.[52] Such narratives highlight the supramundane quality of these esoteric scriptures: they are not considered ordinary teachings, and therefore their mode of transmission, too, must be extraordinary. This raises the enduring question of where these teachings first emerged, why in those particular places, and who their initial human recipients were.

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[48] Almogi, "Akaniṣṭha as a Multivalent Buddhist Word-Cum-Name," 33-4.
[49] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School,* 454-504.
[50] Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp, "On the Edge of Myth and History: Za Hor, Its Place in the History of Early India Buddhist Tantra, and Dalai Lama V and the Genealogy of Its Royal Family," in *Studies on Buddhist Myths: Texts, Pictures, Traditions and History* (Zhongxi Bookstore, 2013), 124-6.
[51] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 454-6.
[52] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 458-62.

The second sacred locale is the island kingdom of Laṅkā which has historically, maintained a close connection with both the Buddha and the Dharma. Today it remains a stronghold of Theravāda Buddhism, yet it has also been linked to Mahāyāna (*theg pa chen po*) and Tantrayāna. For the latter traditions, Laṅkā holds exceptional importance as one of the sites associated with the historical Buddha, who is said to have delivered the teachings of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* there.

In his study "The Historical Significance of the Opening Chapter *Rāvaṇādhyeṣaṇa* of the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*," Gishin Tokiwa explores this connection in detail. He discusses the Buddha's intervention in establishing the Dharma, alongside descriptions of Laṅkā's geography, inhabitants, and conditions during the Buddha's time.[53] This period is significant, as tantric transmission is traditionally said to have occurred only twenty-eight years after the Buddha's passing, placing these accounts within a proximate timeframe. Complementing Tokiwa's historical analysis are the contemporary teachings of the Nyingma master Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche (*o rgyan stobs rgyal rin po che*, b. 1951). His teaching, "The Sacredness of Sri Lanka and Sri Pada,"[54] further elucidates the island's historical and mythological importance, explaining why it became a suitable setting for the transmission of the higher tantras.

If Laṅkā is to be considered important to Mahāyāna and Tantrayāna traditions, Uḍḍiyāna, the third of these sanctified landscapes, should be noted to occupy an even greater role in Tibetan tantric thought. As Frederic Monorval argues in the chapter "Uddiyana, Cradle of Vajrayana," in *Tantric Buddhism: Uddiyana and Odisha*, Uḍḍiyāna stands at the heart of tantric transmission.

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[53] Gishin Tokiwa, "The Historical Significance of the Opening Chapter *Rāvaṇadhyeṣaṇā* of the *Laṅkavatāra* Sūtra," *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 40, no. 1 (1991), 504-5.
[54] Tulku Orgyen Tobgyal, "The Sacredness of Sri Lanka and Sri Pada," Nothing but the Truth: Conversations with Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche, January 13, 2022, https://all-otr.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=68-the-sacredness-of-sri-lanka-and-sri-pada&catid=81.

Monorval challenges the widely accepted theory of Giuseppe Tucci, whose *Travels of Tibetan Pilgrims in the Swat Valley*, grounded the identification of Uḍḍiyāna in historical Gandhāra through archaeological and philological evidence. Instead, Monorval locates Uḍḍiyāna in Odisha, emphasizing the lack of compelling tantric material in the Swat Valley.[55] which, though rich in art-historical analysis, yields little explicit tantric iconography.

Adding further depth to the geographical and archaeological discussion, Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp's "On the Edge of Myth and History: Za Hor, Its Place in the History of Early India Buddhist Tantra, and Dalai Lama V and the Genealogy of Its Royal Family" provides a comprehensive investigation of Zahor. Drawing on a wide range of sources, such as the *Śrīsaṃvarottaratantra*,[56] van der Kuijp examines the historical connections between Zahor and Uḍḍiyāna and the intertwined roles of Indrabhūti and King Ja.[57]

This discussion of geographies, variously understood, naturally leads to the question of the figures involved in the bestowal and reception of esoteric transmissions. According to Dudjom Rinpoche, the primary transmitters of the tantras were Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Vajrapāṇi. These deities are said to have first disseminated the teachings in the celestial realms before transmitting them to humans, with Vajrapāṇi playing the central role in human transmission.[58] While these figures are widely revered in the Tibetan tradition, accessible sources offering detailed account on their origins and function within the tantric cosmological construction remain relatively scarce. Among Western works, Robert Beer's *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs* stands out for its thorough iconographic descriptions, while

[55] Moronval, "Uddiyana, Cradle of Vajrayāna."
[56] van der Kuijp, "On the Edge of Myth and History," 124-32.
[57] van der Kuijp, "On the Edge of Myth and History," 120-22.
[58] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 452-6.

Benoytosh Bhattacharyya's *Indian Buddhist Iconography*, provides concise hagiographical accounts rooted exclusively in Indic sources. This focus anchors Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Vajrapāṇi within the Indian tantric milieu.

Further studies deepen this portrayal. On Mañjuśrī, Alex Wayman's *Chanting the Names of Mañjuśrī: The Mañjuśrī-Nāma-Saṃgīti* and Anthony Tribe's "Mañjuśrī: Origins, Role and Significance (Parts 1 & 2)" examine both ritual and doctrinal dimensions. Tribe, in particular, draws attention to one of Mañjuśrī's origin narratives, which recounts his mythic reshaping of the Kathmandu Valley with his sword.[59] On Avalokiteśvara, Nicolas Revire, Rajat Sanyal, and Rolf Giebel, "Avalokiteśvara of the 'Three and a Half Syllables': A Note on the Heart-Mantra Ārolik in India" outlines the deity's iconographic and functional dimensions, while Georgios T. Halkias' *Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet* examines the integration of the Pure Land imaginary into the Tibetan tradition, focusing on Avalokiteśvara. Among the narratives it treats is one of his origin stories, in which Avalokiteśvara is dismembered and subsequently reconstituted by Amitābha (*'od dpag med*).[60] In contrast, Vajrapāṇi remains relatively understudied in Western scholarship. Notable exceptions include Etienne Lamotte's "Vajrapāṇi in India," which draws extensively on Chinese sources portraying him as a guardian of the Buddha, and David Snellgrove's *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and Their Tibetan Successors,* which recounts the transformation of Vajrapāṇi into his wrathful form through Vairocana's power in order to subdue Śiva and his retinue.[61]

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[59] Anthony Tribe, "Mañjuśrī: Origins, Role And Significance (Parts 1 & 2)," *The Western Buddhist Review* 2 (1997): 43–123, 55-7.
[60] Georgios T. Halkias, *Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet* (University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 29.
[61] David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and Their Tibetan Successors* (Shambhala Publications, 2002), 134-41.

1.3.2 Primary Agents of Transmission

Turning to the human recipients of transmission, Dudjom Rinpoche identifies Vimalakīrti the Licchavi as the first human receptacle of the tantric transmission.[62] A figure in early Mahāyāna, Vimalakīrti is best remembered as the protagonist of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra*, which has been translated by Robert Thurman as *The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra The Teaching of Vimalakīrti* and commented by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche's (*rdzong gsar mkhyen brtse rin po che*, b. 1961), whose "A Celebrity Falls Sick" is a modern take on this scripture, offering a rare contemporary reflection on Mahāyāna archetypes such as Vimalakīrti. Unlike many modern analyses that emphasize only the doctrinal content of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra*, Rinpoche's work foregrounds the personalities and narrative relationships within the *sūtra*, shedding new light on the character of Vimalakīrti and his role in early Mahāyāna. Subsequent figures include King Indrabhūti and the master Kukkurāja. Keith Dowman's *Masters of Mahamudra: Songs and Histories of the Eighty-Four Buddhist Siddhas*, although not a scholar work, remains the most comprehensive English-language source, presenting vivid biographies and interpretive commentary on their visionary lives, alongside the stories of the other masters of the Indian Mahāsiddha (*grub thob chen po*) movement. Additional insights on Indrabhūti appear in van der Kuijp's aforementioned study, and in Ronald Davidson's *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, where he carefully constructs the Indian setting that saw the *mahāsiddha* movement develop and flourished, and in "Hidden Realms and Pure Abodes: Central Asian Buddhism as Frontier Religion in the Literature of India, Nepal, and Tibet," where he explores and contextualizes the role of Uḍḍiyāna in the Tibetan imaginarium. Davidson further explores the intricacies of the revival of tantric buddhis in Tibet in *Tibetan Renaissance:*

[62] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 452-6.

Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture, and its role in the interplay between the Nyingma tantras and the Sarma tantras.

Finally, Dudjom Rinpoche's narrative culminates with Garab Dorje, the legendary founder of the Atiyoga lineage. His life and teachings are treated most fully in John Reynolds' *Golden Letters*, a richly annotated exposition of his life and teachings. Reynolds offers both doctrinal commentary and critical historiography, analyzing the evolving identity of Garab Dorje through multiple hagiographical traditions and philological evidence.

Together, these studies illuminate the multifaceted narratives surrounding the origins of tantric transmission. They underscore the importance of situating these accounts within their current canonical context, particularly the NGB. A comprehensive exploration requires attention not only to mythological and geographical origins but also to the attributes of those who bestowed and those who received transmission. In this way, the reading of origin myths acquires both depth and nuance.

1.4 Methodology

This study adopts a textual-historical methodology rooted in the close reading of Tibetan historiographical literature, with particular emphasis on the doctrinal and mythological structuring of the threefold transmission of the tantras. The core source for this investigation is the first volume of Dudjom Rinpoche's *The Nyingma School*, which serves both as a primary textual foundation and as a representative articulation of Nyingma scholastic synthesis. The work is read not merely as a chronicle of historical claims but as a narrative embedded in a symbolic and cosmological framework designed to assert doctrinal authority and spiritual continuity.

Therefore, the analysis engages with the text on two levels: first, as a historical account composed within the Tibetan tradition of religious historiography,[63] and second, as a mythological systematization of tantric revelation and transmission.

Throughout the study, attention is given to the interplay between myth and geography, particularly the symbolic landscapes of Akaniṣṭha, Laṅkā, and Uḍḍiyāna, as they are presented in the narratives. Rather than attempting to distinguish between historical and mythical strata in a reductive sense, the approach here follows scholarship that identifies such categories as fluid within Tibetan religious literature.[64] Mythic accounts are thus treated as meaningful vehicles for cosmological and soteriological truth-claims, especially in the context of legitimating tantric lineages.

Primary and secondary sources are employed to contextualize Dudjom Rinpoches's account within broader Indian and Tibetan developments. References to canonical works such as the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra*, and the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha*, *Guhyagarbha*, and *Guhyasamāja Tantras*, are used to elucidate doctrinal frameworks, while contemporary academic studies provide historiographical tools for interpreting how the narratives function within Tibetan sectarian identity.

Where appropriate, distinctions are made between the Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga frameworks, particularly regarding their divergent origin narratives. Rather than seeking to harmonize these accounts, the study considers narrative inconsistency as a feature of Nyingma scriptural pluralism. In this way, the methodology remains attentive to both the internal

[63] The term to describe this genre in Tibetan is *lo rgyus* which roughly translates as "annals or stories."
[64] David Germano, "The Seven Descendents and the Early History of *Nying Ma* Transmissions," in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism* (Brill, 2002), 234-6.

coherence of individual transmission models and the broader strategies by which they are integrated into a unified tantric lineage system.

1.5 Structure Outline

This study is organized into five sections. Section 1 introduces the thesis and method. Section 2 is divided into four subsections, each examining one phase of the traditional Nyingma presentation of tantric transmission as articulated in *The Nyingma School*, followed by a final conclusion.

Section 2.1 presents the Mind Transmission, in which Akaniṣṭha functions as the *dharmakāya* locus. Here Samantabhadra/Vajradhara is the primordial source. These are spoken of as distinct yet functionally equivalent. The mind-to-mind conferral among realized beings provides a self-authorizing ground for the corpus. Throughout, *trikāya* attributions are read as functional (*kāya*-equivalent) perspectives, not as competing origins.

Section 2.2 treats the Symbolic Transmission in two parts. The first introduces Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi as the primary agents of tantric transmission in the celestial realms, anchoring the Nyingma tantras within a pan-Indic cosmological order. The second shifts to the Laṅkā account, where Vajrapāṇi transmits the tantras to Vimalakīrti. This narrative ties the scriptures to Śākyamuni via the sacred land of Laṅkā and the figure of his close disciple, Vimalakīrti, thereby supplying public provenance.

Section 2.3 turns to the Whispered Transmission. Although centered on the human lineage, it offers two further origin accounts of the tantras' entry into the human realm. The first

is a direct transmission from Vajrapāṇi to Indrabhūti, with Vajrasattva serving as the ritual intermediary who inaugurates the stream of tantric empowerment; their interchangeability perfectly exemplifies *kāya*-equivalence. The second narrates the manifestation of the Atiyoga lineage within Garab Dorje's own mindstream, received as a self-manifestation from the primordial ground. Since this transmission is personal and rests on the adept's realization, it permits an ongoing production of authentic scripture that is not bound to any particular place or time. Together, these narratives anchor the tantras in the sacred land of Uḍḍiyāna and in the Indian *mahāsiddha* movement, thereby linking them to the broader Indian Buddhist sphere and to Uḍḍiyāna as the paradigmatic locus of tantric transmission.

1.6 Notes on Style

In an effort to make this research as accessible as possible, particularly for Western Vajrayāna practitioners unfamiliar with the Tibetan language and Wylie transliteration, I have adopted a consistent terminological system. Romanized Sanskrit and English translations are used for the titles of treatises and key doctrinal terms, with corresponding Wylie transliterations provided in parenthesis. Personal and place names follow standard anglicized Tibetan forms commonly used in internet searches; this ensures that readers can locate reputable online resources for further information, while followed by Wylie transliterations in parenthesis. Sanskrit terminology follows the IAST transliteration scheme, with occasional adjustments based on the most widely accepted versions found in reputable sources such as *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* and Chandra Das *A Tibetan-English Dictionary with Sanskrit Synonyms*. All foreign terms appear in the Glossary at the end of the research, and therefore no footnotes have been added unless deemed necessary. This glossary was created using the ChatGTP AI interface to condense the

definitions found in *The Rangjung Yeshe Tibetan-English Dictionary of Buddhist Culture*, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, the 84000 Glossary of Terms, Dr. Sanjib Kumar Das's *Basic Buddhist Terminology*, and Sarat Chandra Das's *A Tibetan-English Dictionary with Sanskrit Synonyms*. Where additional sources have been consulted, these are indicated in the corresponding individual entries.

Part 2: The Manifestation of the Ancient Tantras

2.1 Mind Transmission of the Victorious Ones

This section argues that the Mind Transmission functions as the Nyingma's metaphysical warrant of authenticity, locating the tantras in the *dharmakāya*, presented as Samantabhadra manifest as Vajradhara, so they qualify as *buddhavacana*, the word of Buddha, independent of historical chains. With this framework in view, Dudjom Rinpoche open his chapter on the lineage of the higher tantras by explaining the workings of this first stage of the transmission in the following manner:

> Samantabhadra, who completely encompasses both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and who is the all-pervading lord, embodying the sixth enlightened family, appears in the indestructible Great Akaniṣṭha realm, the utterly pure expanse that is manifest in and of itself, in the form of Vajradhara, perfectly endowed with the signs and marks of buddhahood. There, his intention is the pristine cognition of just what is, the inconceivable abiding nature of reality, entirely free from verbal expression; and through its blessing he confers realization upon the Teachers of the Five Buddha Families, the assembly that appears as the countless maṇḍalas of self-manifesting peaceful and wrathful conquerors. This is conventionally referred to as the "speech of the buddha-body of reality". It says in the *Penetration of Sound*:
>
> Thus, in the celestial expanse of reality,
> There appeared the natural sound,
> Blessed by the speech of the Great All-Pervader…
>
> And in a *Commentary on the Secret Nucleus* (*snying-'grel*):
>
> The Teacher, who is the body of reality,
> communicates to the assembly,
> which is the ocean of pristine cognition,
> by unborn speech of genuine meaning.
>
> In particular, according to the profound and extensive teachings whose perspective is that of the Indestructible Nucleus of Inner Radiance: The doctrinal wheel is turned without straying from the single savour [of all that arises] in the vast equilibrium of reality, which transcends all objects of speech and of thought. This

> even transcends [sublime notions] such as that "the place, teacher, assembly, and doctrine have emanated from the infinite expanse of pristine cognition or naturally present awareness, whose nature is a spontaneous precious enclosure or vast self-manifesting array of the three buddha-bodies."[65]

According to Dudjom Rinpoche, Mind Transmission occurs between fully awakened beings as a direct, non-conceptual transfer of wisdom. It unfolds in two phases: in the first, the *dharmakāya* Buddha Samantabhadra manifests as the *saṃbhogakāya* Buddha Vajradhara. Here the role of "the Teacher" is taken as Vajradhara, which on a *kāya*-equivalence reading, signals the same source named elsewhere as Samantabhadra or Śākyamuni.[66] In the second phase, the actual transmission happens between *saṃbhogakāya* forms, in this case, from Vajradhara to the buddhas of the five families.[67] This is not to be understood as the interaction of multiple entities but rather as two inseparable aspects of the same awakened reality. In his introduction to *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, the renowned twentieth century Dzogchen master Nyoshul Khenpo presents this process as the natural manifestation of *saṃbhogakāyas* from within the sphere of primordial basic space, which is none other than the *dharmakāya* itself. He explains that this basic space is imbued with the five aspects of timeless awareness, which are also known as the five wisdoms (*rigs lnga*), which serve as the basis for the manifestation of the multiplicity of buddhas of the five families.[68] These buddhas in essence are all functional expressions of the *dharmakāya*, which in this case is Samantabhadra.[69]

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[65] Dudjom, *The Nyingma School*, 447-8.
[66] Terminology: I treat shifts in the identity of "the Teacher" (Samantabhadra/Vajradhara/Śākyamuni/Three Families) as *kāya*-equivalent designations of a single source; variation is rhetorical, not contradictory. By *kāya*-equivalence I mean that *dharmakāya*/*saṃbhogakāya*/*nirmāṇakāya* attributions indicate perspective, not different ultimate sources; see §2.1.
[67] These are the *vajra, ratna, padma, karma, and buddha or tathāgata.* See glossary entry "*pañcatathāgata*."
[68] Dorje, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 31-2.
[69] There are other contexts where the three or five buddhas of these three or five families were seen as *dharmakāya* buddhas. See: Buswell & Donald, "Pañcakula," in *The Princeton Dictionary.*

Within the framework of the three *kāyas*,[70] the *dharmakāya* is the state of absolute purity, it is timeless, formless and without location. It is described as Samantabhadra, but this is not a being in the conventional sense: the *dharmakāya* is awakening itself.[71] Since it lacks form and qualities, how can it communicate? It does so by manifesting as *saṃbhogakāya*. From the *dharmakāya* or *saṃbhogakāya* side, no distinction exists; the difference is perceptual. *Dharmakāya* is perceptible only to buddhas, while *saṃbhogakāya* is also perceivable by *bodhisattvas* and *vidyādharas*.[72] Dylan Esler provides his definition of *saṃbhogakāya* within his translation of *The Dhāraṇī for Secret Relics* as: "The luminous manifestation of the buddhas' enlightened communication, perceptible to advanced *bodhisattvas*."[73] This form functions as the communicative expression of the *dharmakāya*, enabling the transmission of wisdom to those of advanced realization. Nevertheless, for ordinary beings who lack such a refined perception, the *saṃbhogakāya* form remains imperceptible. Hence arises the necessity of a further manifestation as the *nirmāṇakāya*.[74] It is through this *nirmāṇakāya* that the triad of awakening becomes accessible to ordinary beings. Longchenpa characterizes the operation of these three *kāyas* as "the buddhas' self-experience,"[75] clearly indicating that they are three facets of the same nature rather than three distinct entities endowed with individual agency. Since this is the case, Vajradhara and the other buddhas of the five families are to be regarded as equal in nature. Any

[70] See glossary entry "*Trikāya*."
[71] Karmay, *rDzogs Chen*, 177-8.
[72] Dudjom Rinpoche uses these terms synonymously, as becomes evident in the following section, where he introduces the Symbolic Transmission of the *Vidyādharas* by referring to them as *bodhisattvas*.
[73] Dylan Esler, trans., *The Dhāraṇī for Secret Relics: Guhyadhātudhāraṇī* (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2022), https://84000.co/translation/toh507.pdf.
[74] Buswell & Lopez, "Nirmāṇakāya," in *The Princeton Dictionary.*
[75] Longchenpa and Khangsar Tenpa'i Wangchuk, *The Precious Treasury of the Fundamental Nature*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Shambhala Publications, 2021), 181.

distinctions among them arise only from the perspective of an external witness, in essence, they are nothing other than the expanse of primordial basic space itself.

2.1.1 Akaniṣṭha

The site of this metaphysical transmission is the realm of Akaniṣṭha.[76] Across various Buddhist sources, Akaniṣṭha is identified as the highest stratum within the *rūpadhātu*, the "realm of subtle materiality" (*gzugs kyi khams*).[77] Nevertheless, this stratum is described in different ways thorough diverse contexts. For example, Akaniṣṭha is sometimes identified as a physical realm inhabited by supreme celestial deities. In the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, it is portrayed as the domain of the desireless Akaniṣṭha gods and serves as the location where buddhas attain awakening.[78] While Akaniṣṭha can be described in such manner, in this particular context, Dudjom Rinpoche is explicit in framing it as a self-manifested, immaculate expanse. It is clear that he is not referring to a literal place within the cosmological hierarchy, which represents the highest level before the form realm gives way to the *ārūpyadhātu,* the formless realm (*gzugs med khams*), but rather to the expanse of awakening itself. As previously noted, the *dharmakāya* is beyond any spatial designation and thus cannot be situated within a defined cosmological coordinate. This reinforces the view that Akaniṣṭha functions as a symbolic or metaphorical construct, as a way of expressing the "dwelling place" of awakening, rather than a heavenly realm inhabited by buddhas.

[76] Below No Other. See glossary entry "Akaniṣṭha."
[77] Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., "rūpadhātu," in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton University Press, 2014).
[78] Almogi, "Akaniṣṭha as a Multivalent Buddhist Word-Cum-Name," 27-9.

Following the traditional Nyingma framework, any account of an adequate transmissions is situated within the schema of the five excellences (*pun sum tshogs pa lnga*): the excellent place, teacher, retinue, time and teachings. In this case, conventionally speaking, the excellent place is identified as the Akaniṣṭha realm of utter purity, the excellent teacher as Samantabhadra manifested in the form of Vajradhara; the excellent retinue as the *saṃbhogakāya* buddhas of the five families, the excellent time, though not explicitly mentioned, is understood to be beyond temporal delimitation since the *dharmakāya* itself transcends time; and the excellent teachings are the unborn speech of genuine meaning. Ultimately, however, as Nyoshul Khenpo explains, the Mind Transmission occurs in the excellent place of the pure expanse of the *dharmakāya*; the excellent teacher is Samantabhadra; the excellent retinue is the assembly of the myriad of aspects of timeless awareness; the excellent time is that of the duration of the essence of phenomena which is by nature immutable; and the excellent teachings is that of complete lucidity within the natural and spontaneous presence.[79] If these presentations where to be Juxtaposed, they would suggest that Great Akaniṣṭha is the pure expanse of the *dharmakāya*, where the Teacher Samantabhadra, manifested as Vajradhara, abides in the natural spontaneity of awakened presence, expressing the aspects of timeless awareness within a timeless sphere. Since no aspect of this transmission can be ultimately understood as separate, it must be concluded that Dudjom Rinpoche's presentation of the Mind Transmission should be regarded as purely symbolic, intended to illustrate what is otherwise inexpressible. It may be further inferred that, since Vajradhara and the buddhas of the five families are essentially indistinguishable, as all are manifestations of the primordial buddha Samantabhadra, any one of them can serve as the functional agent of transmission for any given tantra. On this reading, the Mind Transmission is

[79] Dorje, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 31.

not a chain among historical persons but a disclosure from the *dharmakāya* itself. For Nyingma authentication this is decisive: it locates the origin of their tantras in the primordial Buddha, who is capable of appearing in any form, including that of Śākyamuni, so that, whatever form is named, the source is the same and the teachings qualify as *buddhavacana*. This *kāya*-equivalence anchors the lineage in the pan-Buddhist authority of "the Buddha" while avoiding dependence on any single historical conduit or locale.

2.1.2 Conclusion

Taken together, the Nyingma presentation of Mind Transmission furnishes a metaphysical warrant of authenticity: the tantras arise as the self-disclosure of *dharmakāya* manifesting as *saṃbhogakāya* within Akaniṣṭha, construed not as a cosmological abode, but as the symbolic expanse of awakening. This account successfully renders the teachings *buddhavacana* without recourse to a historical chain; the play of *dharmakāya* and *saṃbhogakāya* marks transmission as intrinsic to realization rather than an event in time. On this reading, *kāya*-equivalence between Samantabhadra, Vajradhara, Śākyamuni, and so on, neutralizes disputes over "the Teacher" by locating source and speaker in the same awakened continuum. The result is a cosmology in which "transmission" names the ongoing, communication of wisdom that never departs from utter purity. What the Mind Transmission establishes metaphysically, the Symbolic Transmission renders cosmologically, mapping that same source across beings, realms, and places; the next section traces how this authorization is extended through bodhisattva mediations and sacred geographies toward a human receptacle.

2.2 Symbolic Transmission of the *Vidyādharas*

2.2.1 The Dissemination of the Tantras in the Celestial Realms

The Symbolic Transmission extends authentication into the Indic cosmography, mapping the tantras onto revered bodhisattvas, sacred geographies, and imperial-era legitimations. After the tantras "proliferated" within the Buddha realm of Great Akaniṣṭha, the sphere of awakening, they were transmitted to the *vidyādharas* and *bodhisattvas*, first to non-human awareness holders and subsequently to the human ones. [80] Dudjom Rinpoche continues with the account on the dissemination of the tantras in the celestial realms, he states:

> Within the assemblies of bodhisattvas or sons of the conquerors, the Teacher appeared as the emanations who are [the Lords of] the Three Families [i.e. Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi]. They symbolically instructed and taught disciples who were, respectively, devas, nāgas, and yakṣas.
>
> In other words, in the youthful and handsome form of Tīkṣṇavajra, Mañjuśrī instructed the deva Yaśasvī Varapāla in the realm of the gods. The latter, in turn, instructed the deva Brahmaratnaprabha. The teaching was then transmitted successively through Prajāpatibrahmā, Brahmasarvatāra, Brahmaśikhandara, and Indraśakra, who instructed a mass of one hundred thousand awareness-holders among the devas.
>
> In the form of Amṛtabhaiṣajya, Avalokiteśvara instructed the nāga king Kālagrīva in the domain of the nāgas. The teaching was then transmitted successively through the nāginī Khandülma, the nāginī Dültsangma, the nāga Manorathanandin, and the nāga Takṣaka, who instructed a mass of one hundred thousand awareness-holders among the nāgas.
>
> And in an awesome and menacing form, Vajrapāṇi instructed the yakṣa Samantabhadra in the domain of the yakṣas. Then, the teaching was transmitted successively through the yakṣa Vajrapāṇi, the yakṣa Yaśasvī Varapāla (*grags-ldan mchog-skyong*), and the yakṣa Ulkāmukha (*skar-mda'-gdong*), who instructed a mass of one hundred thousand awareness-holders among the yakṣas.
>
> All those instructed, in turn, instructed their own congregations, as a result of which they and their followers attained to the level of Vajradhara.

[80] "Awareness holder" is an English rendering of the Tibetan *rig 'dzin*, which itself is a Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit *vidyādhara*. See glossary entry "*vidyādhara."*

> Concerning the Great Perfection: It is said that Adhicitta (*lhag-sems-can*), the son of the god Bhadrapāla, who resided in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven, had four special dreams. Accordingly, Vajrasattva, being consecrated by all the buddhas of the ten directions and three times and by all the buddhas of the five families, bestowed upon Adhicitta, the son of the gods, the "empowerment of the vase that is the Conqueror's means" and granted him the esoteric instructions of the Great Perfection. So it was that the Great Perfection spread in the realm of the gods. [81]

This passage presents the second stage of transmission: "the Teacher" manifest as Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi, in a *saṃbhogakāya* display, issuing *nirmāṇakāya* emanations to *devas*, *nāgas*, and *yakṣas*, in keeping with the principle of *kāya*-equivalence. A logical assumption is that the framework of Mind Transmission continues; thus, by "the Teacher," Dudjom Rinpoche must be referring to Vajradhara, now manifesting in the aforementioned bodhisattvas. This aligns with the *Guhyasamāja's* presentation of "the Teacher" as Vajradhara. [82] However, in Dudjom Rinpoche's version, only a few pages later, he identifies Vajrapāṇi's source of transmission as Śākyamuni, stating that Vajrapāṇi was "empowered by the Buddha to teach the secret mantra… which the Teacher had previously conferred in the Akaniṣṭha realm."[83] This notion of Śākyamuni as a source of the higher tantras aligns with other presentations like that of Trinley Norbu, another prominent twentieth-century Nyingma master, who in his work *The Ruby Rosary: Joyfully Accepted by Vidyadharas and Dakinis as the Ornament of a Necklace,* asserts that "the Buddha entrusted the tantras to King Indrabhūti of Oḍḍiyāna, although some claim that it was Vajrapāṇi."[84] Tulku Thondup echoes this in *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, where he

[81] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 452-3.
[82] Francesca Fremantle, "A Critical Study of the Guhyasamāja Tantra" (Ph.D. diss, London University, 1971), 39, 45, 54, 65.
[83] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 454.
[84] Thinley Norbu, *The Ruby Rosary: Joyfully Accepted by Vidyadharas and Dakinis as the Ornament of a Necklace*, Kindle Edition, trans. Heidi Nevin (Shambhala Publications, 2022), 65-6; Further information on this transmission is found in section 2.3.1 The Dissemination of the Tantras to Indrabhūti of Uḍḍiyāna.

states that "Shākyamuni Buddha himself gave tantric teachings by manifesting as various deities of the tantra."[85] Yet Thondup also distinguishes between the "old" tantras, spread by the wisdom bodies of buddhas, and the "new" tantras, many of which were taught directly by Śākyamuni.[86] This apparent discrepancy is reconciled through Nyoshul Khenpo's explanation that Śākyamuni was the twelfth in a line of *nirmāṇakāya* emanation of Vajradhara charged with disseminating the tantric teachings.[87] From this perspective, this triad of *kāyas* consists of Samantabhadra as *dharmakāya*, Vajradhara as *saṃbhogakāya*, and Śākyamuni as *nirmāṇakāya*, rendering the three indistinguishable, and eliminating any real conflict in identifying any one of them as "the Teacher." This likely explains why the figure of "the Teacher" varies across sources, as in the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, where it is explicitly stated that "the Teacher" is none other than Samantabhadra who may also appear as other buddhas beside Vajradhara, such as Vajrapāṇi.[88]

This lack of consistency across sources is likely the result of the various interpretative layers embedded in these narratives, as well as the centuries-long process of their consolidation. The fact that contemporary Nyingma voices ascribe the tantric transmission to Śākyamuni, who doesn't not appear to hold this role in the Ancient Tantras, suggests both a merging of Nyingma and Sarma narratives, and the perceived necessity among the Nyingma to anchor their tantric transmission to the universally accepted figure of Śākyamuni. The *trikāya* presentation outlined above seems to resolve this issue, while maintaining intact the hierarchical scheme articulated in the tantras consisting of Samantabhadra as *dharmakāya* and Vajradhara as *saṃbhogakāya*.

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[85] Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 22.
[86] Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 15-6.
[87] Dorje, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 33-6.
[88] Longchen Rabjam, *The Guhyagarbha Tantra: Secret Essence Definitive Nature Just As It Is*, trans. Lama Chonam and Sangye Khandro (Snow Lion Publications, 2011), 141.

In any case, "the Teacher" manifests in the forms of Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi. This triad of bodhisattvas, known as the "protectors of the three families," frequently appears together in both Mahāyāna and Tantrayāna contexts."[89] Within Mahāyāna thought, they are portrayed as tenth-stage bodhisattvas who embody qualities of buddhahood yet deliberately refrain from entering nirvāṇa in order to continue serving sentient beings.[90] In this context the Three Families appear as *saṃbhogakāya* beings who issue *nirmāṇakāya* emanations. These emanations are identified as Tīkṣṇavajra for Mañjuśrī, Amṛtabhaiṣajya for Avalokiteśvara, and an unnamed "awesome and menacing form" for Vajrapāṇi. Dudjom Rinpoche treats them all as emanations of "the Teacher," and just as with the *dharmakāya* and *saṃbhogakāya*, he does not draw a hard line between any of the three *kāyas*, they are different modalities of a single source. As for the *nirmanakāya,* common definitions describe this as the Buddha's emanation body, capable of appearing to ordinary beings,[91] sometimes described as assuming a material from, at other times an ethereal one,[92] whose principal purpose is the benefit of beings.[93] However, as it will be shown in the following paragraphs, *kāya* designations shifts according to context.

Since one of the major functions of these accounts is to authenticate the higher tantras within the broader Indian Buddhist context, it makes sense that Dudjom Rinpoche's narrative would include a section that, although entirely irrelevant to the transmission lineage of the highest tantras in the human realm, and therefore irrelevant to the Nyingma lineage, nonetheless establishes a strong link to significant figures within the Indian Buddhist cosmological order,

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[89] Buswell & Lopez, "Vajrapāṇi," in *The Princeton Dictionar*y.
[90] Alex Wayman, *Chanting the Names of Mañjuśrī: The Mañjuśrī-Nāma-Saṃgīti* (Shambhala Publications, 1985), 3-4.
[91] Buswell & Lopez, "Nirmāṇakāya," in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*.
[92] Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 165-6.
[93] Guang Xing, *The Concept of the Buddha: Its Evolution from Early Buddhism to the Trikāya Theory* (Routledge, 2004), 133-4.

such as Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara.[94] These two bodhisattvas, while not actual agents in the transmission of the tantras into the human realm, carry a symbolic weight that cannot be overlooked. Without their presence, The Symbolic Transmission in the celestial realms would appear to bear no real relevance.

2.2.1.1 Mañjuśrī

Mañjuśrī for example, embodies wisdom, brandishing a flaming sword that severs ignorance and dualistic fixations. He has been the focus of an extensive cult following since the first centuries CE, and appears in several Mahāyāna scriptures as an interlocutor, engaging the Buddha in dialogues that become teaching opportunities for the wider assembly. [95] One such text is the *Perfection of Wisdom in 700 Lines,*[96] in which the Buddha and Mañjuśrī engage in a lengthy exchange aimed at clarifying the *prajñāpāramitā*, the perfection of wisdom, which is equated with the awakened state.[97] In this sense, the role as conversational partner to the Buddha, enabling this discourse to reach the assembly, parallels the function attributed to him in this present narrative as the *nirmāṇakāya* aspect of the primordial Buddha, through whom the latter communicates with ordinary beings. It is worth noting that in other tantric contexts, such as the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* and the *Kālacakra Tantra,* he is presented as the primordial Buddha himself.[98]

Beyond his prominent Mahāyāna associations, Mañjuśrī also maintains a profound tantric connection to the land of Nepal, a crucial locus for both Tibetan and Newari tantric

[94] Vajrapāṇi is the principal figure in the transmission of the tantras into the human realm and will be discussed in detail in the following sections.
[95] Wayman, *Chanting the Names of Mañjuśrī*, 3-4.
[96] *Saptaśatikā Prajñāpāramitā*
[97] Edward Conze, "The Perfection of Wisdom in 700 Lines," in *Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajñāpāramitā Texts* (Buddhist Publishing Group, 1993), 79-121.
[98] Wayman, *Chanting the Names of Mañjuśrī*, 3-4.

traditions. Nepal is amongst the most sacred places connected to Padmasambhava. According to Nyingma accounts, in a previous life Padmasambhava, alongside King Trisong Detsen, Śāntarakṣita (*zhi ba 'tsho,* ca. 8th c.), and others, was responsible for the construction of the Boudhanath Stupa, one of the most prominent sacred Buddhist sites in the world.[99] He is also said to have attained the Mahāmudrā level, which is the attainment of the realization of a tenth-stage bodhisattva, in the cave of Yanglesho in present-day Pharping.[100] As to Mañjuśrī's relation to Nepal, in the *Svayaṃbhū Purāṇa,* Mañjuśrī is portrayed as a Chinese master who travels to Nepal with his retinue to pay homage to the newly manifested Ādibuddha.[101] He dwelled on a hill surrounded by the Kālīhrada lake. Upon arrival, they realized the hill was inaccessible because the surrounding lake was infested by *nāgas*. In response, Mañjuśrī used his sword to carve six valleys from the encircling mountain range, thereby draining the lake. He then created a second lake and offered it to the *nāgas* as their new home. This act cleared the path towards the hill and defined the topography of the Kathmandu Valley. He built a temple at the site of the Ādibuddha, which became the *Svayambhūnāth stūpa*. He then returned to the Five-Peaked Mountain in China, becoming a divine *bodhisattva*.[102]

Finally, within the emergent Tibetan Buddhist tradition of the imperial era, Mañjuśrī assumed a distinctive place. King Trisong Detsen for example, was widely regarded as his emanation.[103] Later during the reign of King Ralpachen, a royal decree standardized translators' opening homages to signal a text's canonical section, replacing earlier personal *yidam*

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[99] Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyal, *The Legend of the Great Stupa of Boudhanath*, 2nd ed., trans. Keith Dowman (Dharma Publishing, 1973), 11-8; Yeshe Tsogyal and Nyang Ral Nyima Ozer, *The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava*, trans. Erik Pema Kunsang (Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 2004), 75-76.
[100] Tsogyal & Ozer, *The Lotus-Born*, 213-4. The cave of Yanglesho is known as Asura cave and its currently under the custody of the Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery.
[101] Ādibuddha is translated as Primordial Buddha, see the glossary entry "Ādibuddha."
[102] Tribe, "Mañjuśrī: Origins, Role and Significance," 55-7.
[103] Julia Elikhina, "Cults of the Main Bodhisattvas in Tibet and China (the Collection of the Hermitage Museum) in Comparison with Korean Materials," *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* 16, no. 0 (2011), 77-9.

dedications. Accordingly, Vinaya texts begin with a homage to the Omniscient One, reflecting the Buddha's unique authority over karmic cause and effect; Sūtra texts, being dialogues between Buddha and his bodhisattva retinue, open with a homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas; and Abhidharma texts commence with a homage to the noble Mañjuśrī, thereby elevating him as the emblematic patron of analytic wisdom at the heart of Abhidharma's scholastic authority.[104]

Taken together, these links to the early Mahāyāna tradition, to Nepal, and by extension to Padmasambhava, and to the Tibetan imperial era, suggest that Dudjom Rinpoche's inclusion of Mañjuśrī is hardly incidental; it functions as a symbolic affirmation of the Nyingma transmission's authority within the broader Buddhist context, and to a certain extent it also links the Ancient Tantras to the most prominent figure associated with the awakened aspect of wisdom.

2.2.1.2 Avalokitesvara

Avalokiteśvara, like Mañjuśrī, embodies a quintessential Buddhist quality, he is the embodiment of compassion, and the chief *bodhisattva* of the lotus family. He appears in multiple forms, ranging from a two-armed version to a thousand-armed one, [105] and is closely associated with Amitābha who frequently appears upon his crown. Indian sources portray him as the cosmic offspring of Amitābha and his consort Pāṇḍarā, sovereign Dhyāni-Buddha and Buddhaśakti of this present *kalpa*. In the absence of Śākyamuni and until the coming of Maitreya, Avalokiteśvara

[104] Kunzang Pelden, *The Nectar of Manjushri's Speech: A Detailed Commentary on Shantideva's Way of the Bodhisattva*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Shambhala Publications, 2010), 32-4.
[105] Nicolas Revire, Rajat Sanyal, and Rolf Giebel, "Avalokiteśvara of the 'Three and a Half Syllables': A Note on the Heart-Mantra Ārolik in India," *Arts Asiatiques* 76 (2021): 6.

is regarded as the Lord of the World (*'jig rten dbang*).[106] Chinese versions of the *Sukhāvatīvyūhasūtra* even identify Avalokiteśvara as Amitābha's successor in Sukhāvatī,[107] a claim consistent with depictions of Amitābha as his progenitor.

A popular Tibetan narrative describes how Avalokiteśvara's faith faltered upon witnessing the vast multitude of beings descending toward the torments of the lower realms. Overwhelmed by despair, he renounced his bodhisattva vows, and in that moment of anguish, his body and head shattered into a thousand fragments. Seeing this, Buddha Amitābha gathered the broken pieces, blessed them, and reassembled Avalokiteśvara in a new form endowed with eleven faces and a thousand arms.[108] This episode encodes a doctrinal template in which Avalokiteśvara is "assembled" into the compassionate expression of Amitābha. The same mapping is made explicit in tantric *maṇḍalas,* for example, the Nyingma *terma* cycle revealed by Chokgyur Lingpa (*mchog gyur gling pa,* 1829-1870) known as *The Heart Practice of the Guru: Dispeller of Obstacles,*[109] presents the *trikāya* as consisting of the *dharmakāya* Amitabha, the *saṃbhogakāya* Avalokiteśvara, and the *nirmāṇakāya* Padmasambhava. This relationship between Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara thus parallels that of Samantabhadra and Vajradhara, each in their respective *dharmakāya* and *saṃbhogakāya* forms.

Avalokiteśvara's connection to Tibet is equally pronounced. He is linked to the imperial era though Songtsen Gampo, widely regarded as his earthly incarnation.[110] *Maṇḍala* presentations, such as the one just noted, connect him directly to Padmasambhava. His

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[106] Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography: Mainly Based on THE SĀDHANAMĀLĀ and Cognate Tāntric Texts of Rituals* (Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1958), 124.
[107] Halkias, *Luminous Bliss*, 16.
[108] Halkias, *Luminous Bliss,* 29.
[109] *thugs sgrub bar chad kun sel*
[110] Elikhina, "Cults of the Main Bodhisattvas in Tibet and China," 74-5.

prominence is also tied to narratives about Buddhism's adoption in Tibet. In *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies,*[111] Lama Dampa Sonam Gyaltsen (*bla ma dam pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan,* 1312-1375) relates how, while the Buddha was residing in the Grove of Veṇu, a five colored ray of light stemmed from the curly hair between his eyebrows, and created a rainbow to the north, towards the land of Tibet. At this, the Buddha smiled serenely. When asked about this marvel, he explained that this signified the auspicious fortune of Tibet: many lifetimes earlier, Avalokiteśvara had vowed to be reborn there to subdue the host of demons and guide human to the Dharma. Lama Dampa further records Avalokiteśvara's miraculous birth from the pistil of a lotus blossoming in the midst of a lake, an evident allusion to Padmasambhava's own lotus birth. In this narrative, Lama Dampa explicitly presents Avalokiteśvara as reborn in a *nirmāṇakāya* form.[112]

The Inclusion of Avalokiteśvara in this transmission lineage reinforces both a Mahāyāna horizon and the nascent Tibetan Buddhist milieu, where he was already emerging as a central figure.

2.2.1.3 Vajrapāṇi

Vajrapāṇi in turn, embodies awakened power.[113] In his peaceful form, he is commonly depicted in *saṃbhogakāya* attire, seated in the posture of royal ease and holding a vajra at his heart. A rarer portrayal can be seen in the image depicting the Laṅkā transmission,[114] where he sits

[111] *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*
[112] Lama Dampa Sonam Gyaltsen, *Tibetan Buddhis Historiography: The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies: An Annotated Translation of the XIVth Century Tibetan Chronicle: rGyal-Rabs Gsal-Ba'i Me-Long*, trans. Per K. Sørensen (Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994), 97-102.
[113] Kurt A. Behrendt, "Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, and Vajrapani: Lords of the Three Worlds," *Arts of Asia* 51, no. March-April (2021): 94–103, 94-5.
[114] Appendix II. This is the topic discussed in the next section.

crossed-legged, his right hand lifting a vajra skyward and his left holding a flower upon which a text, presumably the tantras, rests. Some forms are almost identical to Vajrasattva, showing him sitting cross-legged in the lotus posture with vajra and bell. This is consistent with the presentations found in the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha* and the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, identifying Vajrasattva and Vajrapāṇi as equivalent.[115] In Indian sources Vajrapāṇi is crowned with Akṣobhya, reflecting his lineage as the cosmic offspring of Akṣobhya and Māmakī,[116] the sovereigns of the *vajra* family.

In Indian narratives such as *The Great Miracle at Śrāvastī,* attested in the Divyāvadāna as well as in the Pāli Vinaya, Vajrapāṇi is rendered as a powerful *yakṣa* bodhisattva who served as a protector of the Buddha and his retinue.[117] The account relates of an occasion when the Buddha was challenged by the Brahmin Pūrana Kāśyapa and his followers to a public demonstration of miraculous powers, intended to reveal the depth of their spiritual realization. King Prasenajit arranged for the spectacle to take place in a twin pavilion constructed on the east side of the city. There, The Buddha and the Brahmin gathered with their respective retinues, each group occupying one of the two pavilions. During the event, the Buddha performed a series of awe-inspiring miracles. He vanished from his seat and reappeared suspended in the sky, where he proceeded to fly in all directions. He then emitted water and fire from his body, alternately from the upper and lower parts, astonishing all who witnessed the display. Pūrana Kāśyapa was ultimately exposed and humiliated by the miraculous powers displayed by the Buddha. In some versions of the account, the Brahmin and his disciples respond by attacking the Buddha's

[115] Buswell & Lopez, "Vajrasattva," in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*; Rabjam, *The Guhyagarbha Tantra*, 128, 725.
[116] Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography,* 53.
[117] Etienne Lamotte, "Vajrapani in India (I)," *Buddhist Studies Review* 20, no. 1 (2003), 14-5.

pavilion, prompting the fierce intervention of Vajrapāṇi. Unsheathing his vajra scepter, which blazes with flames from its upper end, Vajrapāṇi confronts them with his characteristic wrath. Terrified by the sight of the enraged *yakṣa*, the Brahmin and his followers flee in panic. In other versions, to drive them from the presence of the Bhagavat, Vajrapāṇi conjures a violent hailstorm that demolishes the Brahmin's pavilion and scatters his followers, forcing them to seek refuge wherever they can. Remarkably, throughout the tempest, the Buddha's own pavilion remains completely untouched by the storm.[118]

Vajrapāṇi's role as protector of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha carries forward into tantric cosmology, where he subdues forces opposed to the Buddhist doctrine and guards the tantras and their practitioners, especially in his wrathful form.[119] The *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha Tantra* offers a vivid account of his initial wrathful manifestation. According to the text, Maheśvara, also identified as Śiva, refused to participate in the teachings of the Tathāgata. Witnessing this defiance with dismay, Vajrapāṇi brought his vajra to his heart and earnestly appealed to the assembly of Buddhas for support. In response, Vairocana entered the meditative absorption known as Wrathful Pledge-Vajra and pronounced the syllable HŪṂ. At that moment, from the vajra at Vajrapāṇi's heart emerged Vajradhara, manifesting in a myriad of wrathful Vajrapāṇi forms. Vairocana then uttered the invocation HŪṂ ṬAKKIJJAḤ which instantaneously summoned all the gods of the threefold universe, including Maheśvara, into his presence. In his newly assumed wrathful form, Vajrapāṇi commanded the assembled gods to enter the *maṇḍala* of the Tathāgatas. Offended by this order form a *yakṣa*, Maheśvara, who saw himself as supreme lord of the threefold universe, responded with fury. The two exchange

[118] Lamotte, "Vajrapani in India," 9-15.
[119] Buswell & Donald, "Vajrapāṇi," in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*.

threats, and Maheśvara conjured his own terrifying wrathful form, surrounded by blazing flames and marked by a dreadful, resounding laugh designed to strike fear into his adversary. A contest of power ensued. Vajrapāṇi countered Maheśvara's intimidation by pronouncing the syllable HŪṂ, which caused all the gods to collapse face-down to the ground. The force of Vajrapāṇi's utterance led to Maheśvara's death, and the subsequent conversion of the remaining gods to the Dharma. Following this, Vairocana requested Vajrapāṇi to revive Maheśvara, which he did. To their astonishment, however, Maheśvara still refused to embrace the Dharma. This refusal sparked a final battle in which Vajrapāṇi, empowered by his magical incantations, overwhelmed Maheśvara. In the climax of the encounter, he subjugated the deity by stepping on him with his left foot, and simultaneously subdued Umā, Maheśvara's consort, by pressing her down with his right foot.[120]

Beyond narrating the genesis of Vajrapāṇi's wrathful aspect as subduer of non-Buddhist deities, the episode provides a template adopted in later tantric texts.[121] For example, in the *terma The Single Form of Vajrakīlaya*,[122] from Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye's cycle *The Seven Heart Essences*,[123] a clear analogue to the structure above appears: Vajrakīlaya has at its heart center a vajra from which innumerable Vajrakilayas emanate, pervading space and overcoming obstructors. Iconographically, Vajrakīlaya is shown trampling Maheśvara and Umādevī, an explicit visual reminiscence of the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha* subjugation recounted in the preceding paragraph. Although these are different deities, they are often treated as functionally interchangeable in tantric sources, as previously noted.

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[120] Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 134-41.
[121] Kazuo Kano, "Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism Vol. 1: Literature and Language* (Brill, 2015), 373.
[122] *gsang tig phur pa*
[123] *gsang tig snying po 'khor bdun*

Unlike Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara, Vajrapāṇi is directly implicated in the tantric transmission that reached Tibet, a topic taken up in the following sections. He is also linked to the imperial era as the third Dharma king Ralpachen, is widely regarded as his earthly emanation.[124]

2.2.1.4 Adhicitta

In the final paragraph of this section, Dudjom Rinpoche shifts the focus to the Trāyastriṃśa heaven,[125] where he explains that the Atiyoga tantras manifested. This is the celestial realm of Śakra, the king of the gods, also known in the Vedic tradition as Indra. It is notably the location where the Buddha ascended to teach the Abhidharma to his mother, Māyādevī.[126] According to Dudjom Rinpoche, it is here that Vajrasattva, having been empowered by all the buddhas, bestows the complete transmission of the Atiyoga tantric system to the god Adhicitta. Dudjom Rinpoche provides little detail beyond naming Adhicitta's father as Bhadrapāla,.[127] Nevertheless, in the Atiyoga section, Adhicitta will be identified not as Vajrasattva's student, but as his celestial emanation, and the metaphysical father of the Atiyoga founder Garab Dorje.[128] This account stands out within the broader narrative. Its placement appears somewhat disconnected from the structured transmission sequences described earlier. As will become clearer in the next section,

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[124] Elikhina, "Cults of the Main Bodhisattvas in Tibet and China," 77.
[125] The Heaven of the Thirty-Three. See glossary entry "Trāyastriṃśa."
[126] Buswell & Lopez, "Trāyastriṃśa," in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*.
[127] The name Bhadrapāla appears across several Buddhist traditions. In Japanese Buddhism, particularly within the Nichiren school, Bhadrapāla is known as a *bodhisattva* who appears in the Lotus Sūtra. According to Japanese folklore, he is said to have attained awakening through the contemplation of water, and as a result, he became the patron of bathhouses. In Tibetan sources, he is known as *bzang skyong*. As noted in the 84000 Glossary, his name translates as "Protector of Excellence," and he appears in numerous *sūtras*, such as *The Sūtra on the Samādhi in which the Buddhas of the Present All Stand Before One*. It is, however, unlikely that this figure is connected to the Bhadrapāla said to reside in Trāyastriṃśa.
[128] See section 2.3.2.

the origin narratives of the three higher tantric vehicles have, over time, become a composite of diverse sources and oral traditions. Within this context, the inclusion of the Atiyoga episode appears as a later interpolation, woven into the larger narrative framework with noticeable seams.

2.2.1.5 Conclusion

Taken together, these narrative strata of the Mind and Symbolic transmissions; the appearance of "the Teacher" as Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi instructing *devas*, *nāgas*, and *yakṣas*; the Nepalese sacred geography; the imperial encodings (e.g., Trisong Detsen as Mañjuśrī, Ralpachen's translator's homages); and the Vajrapāṇi narrative in the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha*, function as a hermeneutic apparatus of authentication. They embed the Nyingma tantras within an unmistakably Indic genealogy, mapped through the *trikāya* schema, the *dharmakāya* Samantabhadra, *saṃbhogakāya* Vajradhara, and *nirmāṇakāya* Śākyamuni, and tether them to widely recognized figures, sites, and scriptural idioms of Mahāyāna and early Vajrayāna. The variability of "the Teacher" is thereby reframed not as contradiction but as *kāya*-equivalence, neutralizing sectarian objections and asserting continuity from Buddha-field to human realm. By routing transmission through non-human *vidyādharas* and through royal–bodhisattva lineages, these accounts yoke soteriological efficacy to cultural and political legitimacy, anchoring the most esoteric teachings in a canonical cosmography and thus consolidating the Nyingma claim to orthodoxy within the broader Indian Buddhist dispensation.

Having established a cosmological circulation through non-human *vidyādharas*, the account now pivots to its first human receptacle. In what follows, Laṅkā, long inscribed in

Buddhist sacred history, becomes the stage, and Vimalakīrti of the Licchavis the exemplar through whom the tantras enter the human world.

2.2.2 The Laṅkā Transmission

This subsection argues that the turn to Laṅkā and Vimalakīrti marks the human ingress of the transmission and thus a new mode of authentication: a Mahāyāna authority receives the tantras on a canonically charged stage, Mount Malayagiri, converting cosmographic diffusion into human lineage. Methodologically, I treat Laṅkā here as a textual topos that legitimates the choice of recipient rather than a claim about a historical conduit. After the stage of transmission to non-human beings is complete, Dudjom Rinpoche moves on to describe the moment when the tantras enter the human realm:

> In accordance with this prophecy, twenty-eight years after the supreme emanational body of the Teacher in this world [Śākyamuni] had passed into nirvāṇa, five noble ones of the genuine enlightened family – namely, the god Yaśasvī Varapāla, the nāga king Takṣaka, the yakṣa Ulkāmukha, the ogre Matyaupāyika and the human awareness-holder Vimalakīrti the Licchavi – each learnt by supernormal cognitive powers that, in this world, the Lord had passed into nirvāṇa. They then aroused themselves from their inner meditative absorptions and miraculously assembled on the peak of Malayagiri in Laṅkā. There, they cried out in twenty-three verses of lamentation beginning:
>
> Alas! when the light from the Teacher's lamp
> Is gone from the whole universe,
> Who will dispel the world's darkness?
>
> So they wept to the point of exhaustion.
>
> The Transcendent Lord had predicted that the secret mantra would become renowned throughout the world at some future time and, as that time had arrived, Vajrapāṇi, the Lord of Secrets, appeared there in person; for he had been empowered by the Buddha to teach the secret mantra. He instructed the five noble ones, as well as most of the community of awareness-holders, repeating the teachings of the secret mantra vehicle which the Teacher had previously conferred

> in the Akaniṣṭha realm, and elsewhere. The ogre Matyaupāyika inscribed them in a golden book with melted beryl; and then by the seven powers of his intention the book was concealed, invisibly sealed in space.[129]

As the narrative turns to the human world, it emphasizes historical specificity: the source of the tantras, the time of transmission, the location, and the qualified recipients. As discussed previously, to anchor the tantras in the Buddha's legacy, Śākyamuni is identified as their ultimate origin. In this version, Dudjom Rinpoche states that Vajrapāṇi received the teachings directly from Śākyamuni in Akaniṣṭha. After this, twenty-eight years after the Buddha's passing, Vajrapāṇi appears on Mount Malayagiri in Laṅkā,[130] and bestows the tantras upon the five *vidyādharas.*

The choice of Laṅkā as the site of transmission is highly symbolic. This kingdom holds deep historical and scriptural ties with the Buddha. It is a setting described in several Pali sources as a place the Buddha frequented. In one account, following his awakening, the Buddha had a prophetic vision of Laṅkā as an ideal place for the Dharma to flourish. Although formerly inhabited by Buddhas and sages, it had fallen under the influence of fierce *yakṣas* and *rākṣasas*.[131] The *yakṣas* and *yakṣiṇīs* spread terror by devouring children alive and feasting on corpses.[132] *Rākṣasas* are shapeshifting, flying demons that devour flesh and run as fast as the wind. They grow stronger at night, gaining supernatural power at sundown.[133] Unable to be subdued by ordinary beings, Rāvana, the chief of the *rākṣasa*, sought the help of the Bhagavat.

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[129] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 454-5.
[130] It is sometimes identified as Mt. Malaya in present day Sri Lanka. See: van der Kuijp, On the Edge of Myth and History, 120-1.
[131] Tokiwa suggests that these demons may in fact represent the indigenous inhabitants of Laṅkā, "The Historical Significance of the *Rāvaṇadhyeṣaṇā*," 505.
[132] Buswell & Lopez, "yakṣa," in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*.
[133] Buswell & Lopez, "rākṣasa," in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*.

The Buddha, foreseeing that the presence of these beings on the island would bring about much suffering to its inhabitants and lead to the proliferation of false doctrines,[134] called upon Kassapa of Uruvela. Together, they drove the demons into the uninhabited island of Giri.[135] In another account, five years after his awakening, the Buddha returned to Laṅkā to contain a civil war between the greater and lesser *nāgas*. Using his supernatural powers, he subdued these serpent-like beings and brought the conflict to an end before returning to Jeta's Grove.[136] In a third account, three years after resolving the *nāga* conflict, the then *nāga* chief Maniakkhika invited the Buddha and his five hundred disciples to return to Laṅkā. Wishing to express his gratitude for the Buddha's intervention, he hosted the Bhagavat and his retinue. The Buddha and his disciples traveled through the air to reach Laṅkā. During this visit, while in the Mahāmegha forest, the Buddha foresaw that the very bodhi tree, which had sheltered him on his journey to awakening, would one day sprout at that spot.[137]

Similar Mahāyāna accounts narrate how the Buddha flew to Laṅkā and landed atop Malayagiri, leaving his footprint impressed in the solid rock.[138] It was there that he delivered the renowned *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* to his retinue. [139]

Given this sacred history, Laṅkā emerges as a natural anchor for situating the tantric transmission within the broader Buddhist context. With its ties to the Buddha and early Buddhism, and given that during the seventh and eighth centuries, precisely as the tantras were

[134] *Śāsanantaram.*
[135] Tokiwa, "The Historical Significance of the *Rāvaṇadhyeṣaṇā*," 504-5.
[136] Tokiwa, "The Historical Significance of the *Rāvaṇadhyeṣaṇā*," 504.
[137] Tokiwa, "The Historical Significance of the *Rāvaṇadhyeṣaṇā*," 504.
[138] Tobgyal, "The Sacredness of Sri Lanka and Sri Pada."
[139] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 455.

entering Tibet, Laṅkā functioned as a significant locus of tantric transmission,[140] it is sensible to ground the narrative in this wider frame.

2.2.2.1 Vimalakīrti

In this instance, Dudjom Rinpoche identifies the recipients of this transmission as the five *vidyādharas*: the *deva* Yaśasvī Varapāla, the *nāga* Takṣaka, the *yakṣa* Ulkāmukha, the *rākṣasa* Matyaupāyika and Vimalakīrti of the Licchavi clan. Aside from their names and mythological identities, little is known about the non-human *vidyādharas*. In contrast, Vimalakīrti is a well-known figure in the Mahāyāna tradition. He is best known as the protagonist of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa,* or *The Sūtra of the Teaching of Vimalakīrti.* Although Dudjom Rinpoche identifies him as human, the *sūtra* presents him as a bodhisattva manifesting as a lay Licchavi who hails from Abhirati, the Buddha-field of Akṣobhya.[141] His origins are confirmed towards the end of the *sūtra*, when the Buddha tells Śāriputra, "this holy person came here from the presence of the Tathāgata Akṣobhya in the universe Abhirati."[142] Then, at the Buddha's instruction, Vimalakīrti displays Abhirati to the assembly, miraculously compressing the realm in his right hand and bringing it into this world so that all may behold Akṣobhya and his realm.[143] Although he is revealed as a supernatural being by the end of the *sūtra*, the opening chapters present him as a humble householder, a wealthy patron of the arts, and a man of the people who aids the poor and seeks to benefit beings wherever they are, and whatever they do. For example, he frequents

[140] van der Kuijp, "On the Edge of Myth and History," 120-22; Kellie Marie Powell, "The Archaeology of Buddhism: Fame of Tantric Tradition in Sri Lanka" (Master's thesis, University of California, Berkley, 2018).
[141] Rafael Felbur, "Vimalakīrtinirdeśa," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism Vol. 1: Literature and Language* (Brill, 2015), 274.
[142] Robert A. F. Thurman, trans., "The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra The Teaching of Vimalakīrti," Siddhartha's Intent, The Sūtra of The Teaching of Vimalakīrti, 2017, https://siddharthasintent.org/publications/a-celebrity-falls-sick/, 189.
[143] Thurman, "The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra The Teaching of Vimalakīrti," 189-92.

drinking houses to instruct the intoxicated in mindfulness, and visits brothels to illustrate the perils of desire. All of this, of course, is in addition to his service in local government, his conversion of adepts through artistic patronage, and his instruction of *śrāvakas* in the Mahāyāna.[144] Vimalakīrti symbolizes the shift in Buddhist communities from a preeminence of monastic teachers, to the recognition of lay practitioners as authoritative guides, exemplifying the doctrine of skillful means,[145] whereby a bodhisattva employs whatever methods most effectively benefit beings. His extravagant lifestyle, paired with his high realization, bodhisattva activity, and the flagrant display of magical powers, is reminiscent of Indian *mahāsiddha* milieu, a movement that foregrounds precisely those traits, and produced some of the tantric sphere's most celebrated, if often controversial figures.[146] The narrative of the *mahāsiddha* Virūpa comes to mind. He once stopping at a tavern and drank the house dry. When the hostess demanded payment, he had no coin, so he vowed to "pay with the sun." Drawing his dagger (*phur pa*), he pinned the sun in place. For two and a half days it did not move, while Virūpa continued to drink. Legend says he drank as much as five hundred elephant-loads.[147] Another narrative is that of the *siddha* Ḍeṅgipa. He lived as a slave in a brothel and taught the Dharma to his prostitute companions.[148] Such *mahāsiddhas* are famed for their unconventional lives and became prototypes of tantric adeptship. Their stories vividly exemplify the ritual transgression of purity norms,[149] a central theme of siddha tantric practice.[150] From this perspective, Vimalakīrti reads as a kind of proto-*mahāsiddha*: a symbolic disruptor within the otherwise highly structured sangha

[144] Thurman, "The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra The Teaching of Vimalakīrti," 112-3.
[145] Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 161.
[146] For further information on the *siddha* movement in India See: Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism.*
[147] Keith Dowman, *Masters of Mahamudra: Songs and Histories of the Eighty-Four Buddhist Siddhas* (State University of New York Press, 1985), 43-9.
[148] Dowman, *Masters of Mahamudra*, 186-7.
[149] Buswell & Lopez, "Mahāsiddha," in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*.
[150] Christian K. Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, & Transgression in the Indian Traditions* (Columbia University Press, 2013), 105-7; Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 169-235.

of Śākyamuni. On its face, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* asserts the distinctiveness, and ultimate superiority, of the Mahāyāna path over what it calls the Hīnayāna. This is done by Vimalakīrti's systematic dismantling of the expertise of the Buddha's *śrāvaka* disciples, who represent the Hīnayāna.[151] Nevertheless, Vimalakīrti then surpasses even the eminent bodhisattva disciples, who provide concept-laden replies to the question, "How does a bodhisattva enter the principle of nonduality?" He alone answers correctly by simply resting quietly.[152] The resonance between Vimalakīrti silence and the Atiyoga instructions to rest in the natural state (*gnas lugs*) is hard to miss.[153]

Without delving to far, beyond the scope of this study, into the question of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* as an early proto-tantra, it is easy to see why a figure like Vimalakīrti came to be regarded as the world's first *tāntrika*, and why the Nyingma lineage would seek to anchor its initial transmission in such a figure. His proximity to Śākyamuni, coupled with his resemblance the Indian *mahāsiddhas*, whose stories rose to prominence in Tibet's renaissance,[154] makes him a compelling candidate. It may even be argued that Dudjom Rinpoche's presentation of him as a *vidyādhara* gestures towards a direct link with the medieval Indian *siddha* movement, in which *mahāsiddhas* and *vidyādharas* are closely associated, and the *siddha's* aim is often framed as attaining the *vidyādhara* realm.[155]

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[151] Thurman, "The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra The Teaching of Vimalakīrti," 116-134; Felbur, "Vimalakīrtinirdeśa," in *Brill's Encyclopedia*, 276.
[152] Thurman, "The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra The Teaching of Vimalakīrti," 158-171.
[153] Such an interpretation is plausible, particularly given that translations of this *sūtra* have been shown to vary with the translators' backgrounds and doctrinal commitments. See: Fung Kei Cheng, "An Exploration of Two Sanskrit Issues on Chinese and English Renditions of Buddhist Scriptures: Using 'The Dharma of Emancipation of the Exhaustible and Inexhaustible' in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* as an Example," *2013 International Conference of East Asian Buddhist Thought and Culture*, November 2013; and Dylan Esler, "The Exposition of Atiyoga in gNubs-Chen Sangs-Rgyas Ye-Shes' bSam-Gtan Mig-Sgron*," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 24 (October 2012), 87-88.
[154] Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2005), 10-13.
[155] Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 194-201.

Beyond Vimalakīrti as an individual, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* itself provides an additional anchor. While the scripture may not have been especially particularly influential in early Indian Buddhism,[156] it is cited by Candrakirti (*zla ba grags pa*, ca. 7th c.), Śāntideva (*zhi ba lha*, 685-763), and Kamalaśīla (*ka ma la shi la*, ca. 8th c.),[157] all prominent Indian voices whose works became influential in Tibet. This, in turn, supports the broader strategy of authentication: Vimalakīrti and his *sūtra* are validated through the testimony and usage of these authoritative masters.

2.2.2.2 Conclusion

Read together, the Laṅkā episode installs a human ingress for the tantras and completes the move from cosmographic diffusion to historical availability. By selecting Vimalakīrti, a Mahāyāna authority already legible to Tibet through Candrakīrti, Śāntideva, and Kamalaśīla, and staging the bestowal on Mount Malayagiri, a canonical sacred topos, the narrative grounds the transmission in figures and places with pan-Indian resonance. The presence of the four non-human *vidyādharas* preserves the Indic cosmology, while the identification of Vajrapāṇi as the immediate agent, empowered by Śākyamuni and echoing the disclosure of Vajradhara in Akaniṣṭha, is rendered coherent by *kāya*-equivalence. In this way, the episode both authorizes the tantras as *buddhavacana* and furnishes a first human locus from which they can circulate. The next section follows this logic forward, tracing how that locus is translated into the oral, human-to-human transmission among yogins.

[156] Felbur, "Vimalakīrtinirdeśa," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism Vol. 1,* 275.
[157] Felbur, "Vimalakīrtinirdeśa," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism Vol. 1,* 276.

2.3 Whispered Transmission of the Yogins

2.3.1 The Dissemination of the Tantras in Uḍḍiyāna

Up to this point, the narrative of the tantras' dissemination has been relatively straightforward. This section, however, introduces a new structure by categorizing the tantras according to their conventional classifications, beginning with Mahāyoga, followed by Anuyoga and culminating in Atiyoga. This tripartite arrangement reflects a progression of doctrinal materials that conforms the highest strata of the Nyingma Nive Vehicle doctrinal system, in which these three categories are presented as the highest classes of teachings.[158] As they are presented as distinct paths, each possesses its own unique transmission lineage. Nonetheless, the origin narratives for the Mahāyoga and Anuyoga are virtually identical. In contrast, the Atiyoga tantras are said to arise through a separate and exceptional origin story that diverges entirely from the others. Dudjom Rinpoche begins his account, stating that:

> When the Lord of Secrets turned the doctrinal wheel of the secret mantra for the five noble ones on Malayagiri, King Ja of Sahor, who practiced the outer tantras of the way of secret mantra, had, at the very same time, seven wonderful dreams, as follows:
>
> The signs of the buddhas' body,
> Speech, and mind dissolved [into his own];
> And a bejeweled book descended.
> He engaged in a doctrinal discussion.
> Everyone revered him as a saint.
> He performed a great rite of worship.
> Jewels fell down, as does rain.
> And it was prophesied that he would attain
> To the level of buddhahood…
>
> …while the king was sitting absorbed in the meditative cultivation of the yoga of the lower tantras, a volume containing the great texts of the way of secret mantra, including the *Buddhasamāyoga* and a one-cubit-tall image of the Lord of Secrets

[158] Alak Zenkar Thubten Nyima, "A Brief Presentation of the Nine Vehicles," trans. Adam Parcey, Lotsawa House, accessed September 24, 2025, https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/alak-zenkar/nine-yanas.

> actually fell upon the royal palace, just as in his dream. Then, having performed prayers, he intuitively understood the chapter entitled the "Vision of Vajrasattva" and, relying on that and on the image of Vajrapāṇi, he practiced for seven months. As a result he had a vision of Vajrasattva and received from him the empowerment of pristine cognition. Thus he came to understand the symbolic conventions and meanings of that volume in their entirety…
>
> Then King Ja taught the book to master Uparāja, who was renowned as a great scholar throughout the land of Sahor, but he could not understand their symbolic conventions and meaning. The king then taught them to the master Kukkurāja. He intuitively understood the chapter on the "Vision of Vajrasattva", from the *Tantra of the Magical Net of Vajrasattva*, and practiced it, whereupon Vajrasattva revealed himself and predicted that the Lord of Secrets would reveal the meanings of this *tantra* thereafter. When he had practiced more, the Lord of Secrets actually appeared and granted him the complete empowerment of the authentic teaching and of all vehicles. Then he told him to request the verbal teaching from the Licchavi Vimalakīrti. It is said that, following the transmitted precepts of the Lord of Secrets, master Kukkurāja divided [the Mahāyoga tantras] into the Eighteen Great Tantrapiṭaka (*tantra chen-po sde bco-brgyad*) and taught them to King Ja.
>
> In the king's own composition, the *Array of the Path of the Magical Net*, he says:
>
> In the eastern domain of Indrabhūti,
> At Vajrakūta in India,
> I, the noble Indrabhūti,
> Practised the *Magical Net*,
> Having been taught by the Lord of Secrets himself.
> I actually realised Vajrapāṇi,
> With his retinue of fifty thousand.
> Being empowered in wholesome action,
> By the practice of disciplined conduct,
> I was free from sin, and reached [an exalted] level. [159]

This account details the initial human transmission of the Mahāyoga and Anuyoga tantras.[160] Notably, it is more than a mere tracing of a human lineage, it offers an alternate narrative of the tantras' materialization within the human realm. At the center of this account stands King Ja, who

[159] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 458-60.
[160] Dudjom presents these two as if their lineages were distinct and, in some accounts, they indeed diverge, as will be demonstrated later in the chapter. However, by the conclusion of his account, it becomes clear that according to Dudjom, King Ja received both lineages directly from Vajrapāṇi.

receives the higher tantras directly from Vajrapāṇi. These are bestowed in the form of a book of tantric scriptures and a half-meter statue of Vajrapāṇi. This account took place in the land identified by Dudjom Rinpoche as Sahor, more accurately rendered as Zahor, a place historically linked with the kingdom of Uḍḍiyāna. Although numerous sources offer differing interpretations concerning the location and character of Zahor and Uḍḍiyāna, a prevailing scholarly consensus holds that these two refer either to the same place or that one constituted a region within the other.[161]

Uḍḍiyāna is universally recognized in Tibetan traditions as the place where the tantric transmission originated and first flourished.[162] Although often spoken of as a physical locale, it is more accurately described as a semi-mythological realm that bears both human and a divine dimension. It is human aspect, it is located within the geography of this world and is the purported birthplace of illustrious figures in the tantric lineage, like Indrabhūti, Garab Dorje and Padmasambhava. It is also identified as a locus where early esoteric personalities such as Nāgārjuna (*klu sgrub*, ca. 150-250), Śakyamitra (*shAkya mi tra*, ca.8th-9th c.), Buddhajñānapāda (*sangs rgyas dpal ye shes*, ca.8th-9th c.), and Vilāsavajra (*bi la sa badzra*, ca. 8th c.) are said to have studied the tantras.[163] In its supramundane aspect, however, Uḍḍiyāna is difficult to access and is said to be inhabited by semidivine beings.[164] Thus *The Garland of Sadhanas*[165] presents Uḍḍiyāna as the origin place of deities like Kurukulla and Marīci.[166] The *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* lists Uḍḍiyāna among the twenty-four sacred sites,[167] while the *Hevajra* and *Abhidhānottara*

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[161] van der Kuijp, On the Edge of Myth and History, 124-6; Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 244.
[162] Moronval, "Uddiyana, Cradle of Vajrayāna."
[163] Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, 83/4; Ronald M. Davidson, "Hidden Realms and Pure Abodes: Central Asian Buddhism as Frontier Religion in the Literature of India, Nepal, and Tibet," *Pacific World Journal* 4 (2002), 162.
[164] Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, 83-4.
[165] *Sādhanamālā*
[166] Moronval, "Uddiyana, Cradle of Vajrayāna," 163-5.
[167] Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism,* 206-7. It is found in the category of the four *pīṭhas.*

Tantras include it among the *caturmahāpīṭhas,* "the four great sites."[168] These tantras occupy a prominent position in the New Schools of Tibetan Buddhism and are widely practiced by Newar Buddhists in Nepal.[169] According to Davidson, this metaphysical rendering of Uḍḍiyāna led to its abstraction into the internal topography of a bodily *maṇḍala*: it came to occupy the position of the crown chakra at the head of the *tāntrika*.[170] Taken together, these multiple presentations, geographical, hagiographical, and metaphysical, perform an important hermeneutic and legitimating work. By locating a given tantra in Uḍḍiyāna, authors and lineage holders forge a direct tie to celebrated Indic exemplars and sacred geographies, thereby embedding their texts within a recognized web of antiquity and authority, that serves also, to links the origin of the Nyingma and Sarma tantras. At the same time, the translation of Uḍḍiyāna into an internal *maṇḍala* or component of a yogic sacred anatomy personalizes that authority: the same site that anchors a text historically also becomes an existential locus inside the practitioner's body. Paralleling the self-authorizing framework of Atiyoga discussed in the next section, this opens the way for individual authorization that is not contingent on terrestrial provenance.

2.3.1.1 Padmasambhava

It would be remiss to overlook that, within the Nyingma system, Uḍḍiyāna's preeminent sanctity lies in its identification as the birthplace of Padmasambhava, the tradition's founding master, in Dudjom Rinpoche's account, the adoptive son of Indrabhūti, the narrative's central figure.[171] An enigmatic adept, Padmasambhava is consistently portrayed as a prodigious tantric virtuoso; within the Nyingma his authority is so profound, eclipsing at times even the figure of

[168] Davidson, "Hidden Realms and Pure Abodes," 162.
[169] David B. Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra: The Discourse of Śrī Heruka* (Wisdom Publications, 2019), 3.
[170] Davidson, "Hidden Realms and Pure Abodes," 162.
[171] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 468-9.

Śākyamuni. This exaltation is formalized in the triadic constellation mapped onto the *trikāya* framework, in which Amitābha is presented as the *dharmakāya*, Avalokiteśvara as the *saṃbhogakāya*, and Padmasambhava as their functional *nirmāṇakāya* present in this world.[172] This formulation situates Padmasambhava within the Amitābha–Avalokiteśvara constellation as a dynamic emanation. Hagiographies recount his miraculous conception as a ray from the golden vajra in Amitābha's heart descending into the pistil of a lotus blossoming on an island within a lake,[173] a narrative that deliberately parallels Avalokiteśvara's own origin. It also echoes the tantric logic found in wrathful Vajrapāṇi narratives: an emanational ontology in which the heart-vajra functions as the generative source of enlightened activity, here, the person of Padmasambhava. Accordingly, he occupies the same functional category as Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi within the lineage, and, in Nyingma historiography, stands as the principal conduit of the tantric transmission to Tibet.[174] From the standpoint of authentication, this genealogy performs double work: it anchors revelation in the sacral geography of Uḍḍiyāna while rooting it in a chain of enlightened agency traceable to Amitābha. For Nyingma authors, no authority outranks Padmasambhava; his Uḍḍiyāna provenance, paired with this *trikāya*-inflected emanational framing, secures the textual and ritual legitimacy of the tantras they transmit.

[172] Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, "Vajra Guru Mantra," in *Guru Yoga: According to the Preliminary Practice of Longchen Nyintik* (Snow Lion Publications, 1999), 51–4.
[173] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 468.
[174] Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 83-92.

2.3.1.2 Indrabhūti

The same logic of authentication is rendered in human form through Dudjom Rinpoche's royal protagonist, King Ja, widely identified as King Indrabhūti of Uḍḍiyāna.[175] King Ja is a prominent figure in the *mahāsiddha* movement of medieval India, and one of the renowned eighty-four *mahāsiddhas*.[176] He's lavish lifestyle is reminiscent of Vimalakīrti's: he revels in the privileges of affluent lay life, most notably maintaining an harem of queens as consorts.[177]Although some Tibetan traditions treat Indrabhūti as a singular historical figure, textual and historical evidence suggests that this name may in fact conflate two or even three distinct individuals.[178] Dudjom Rinpoche acknowledges the ambiguity noting that some identify King Ja with Indrabhūti the Great, others make him Indrabhūti's son, and still others posit him as an intermediate Indrabhūti.[179] In his work on the lives of the eighty-four *mahāsiddhas*, Keith Dowman outlines the distinctions between the three Indrabhūtis, providing a helpful framework for navigating this layered figure:

> Indrabhūti the Great, the first Indrabhūti, King of Oḍḍiyāna, sometimes called King Dza or the son of King Dza, is called the first tantrika, and he was the initiator of several important tantric lineages. At his birth the hīnayāna was still dominant in north-west India, and it is quite possible that he was the Indrabhūti that the scrupulous Chinese recorded in the *T'ang Annals* as King of Oḍḍiyāna in AD 642, although a later date is more credible…
>
> Indrabhūti II, the Middle One, also known as King Dza, is associated with Zahor, the principality in the Upper Kangra Valley with Mandi as capital. A rain of

[175] Alternative spellings of the King's name include Dza and Indrabhodi respectively. An alternate spelling to Uddiyana is Oḍḍiyāna. See glossary entries "Indrabhūti" and "Uḍḍiyāna."
[176] He is commonly presented as the 42nd *mahāsiddha* but can be found as the 15th and 57th. See: Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (La Libreria dello Stato, 1949), 227-30.
[177] Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism,* 244-5.
[178] Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls,* 226-232; Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism,* 244; Keith Dowman, "The Mahāsiddha Indrabhūti: The Enlightened Siddha-King," in *Masters of Mahamudra: Songs and Histories of the Eighty-Four Buddhist Siddhas* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1985), 229–34; Torsten Gerloff and Julian Schott, "Towards a Reassessment of Indrabhūti's Jñānasiddhi," *Buddhist Studies Review* 37, no. 2 (March 2021): 241–60.
[179] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 458-9.

> *anuttarayoga-tantra* texts fell upon his palace roof and Kukkuripa explained the texts to him…
>
> King Indrabhūti III, the Younger, of Oḍḍiyāna, is Lakṣmīṅkarā's brother, the Indrabhūti of our legend, who lived in the late ninth century. When Lalitavajra arrived in Oḍḍiyāna with Kambala, it was this Indrabhūti who went to meet them. He had recently gained magical power, and when he sat at the master Lalitavajra's feet to massage them, as custom dictated, he manifested four hands to work on both feet at once. The Guru emanated four legs, the king eight hands, the Guru eight legs, the king sixteen hands, the Guru sixteen legs, but then Indrabhūti could manage no more than the number of hands of the gods, and when the Guru showed him a hundred feet the king's pride was utterly crushed.[180]

Dudjom Rinpoche's account appears to describe events associated with the "middle" Indrabhūti; however, as Dowman notes, the scriptures he received were of the Anuttarayoga class rather than Mahāyoga or Anuyoga. This suggests a role for King Ja within the origin mythos of the New School tantras, to which Anuttarayoga belongs. The connection becomes clearer when he is credited as the source of the *sahaja-siddhi* lineage of yoginī tantras, a genre preserved in Sarma tantras, said to have been discovered in Uḍḍiyāna in the tenth century by master Kambalapāda (*bla ma dge slong*, ca. 10th c.), among others.[181] Taken together, these strands reinforce a linkage between origin narratives found in the Nyingma and Sarma tantras.

Here, then, regardless of how these materials are classified, or which Indrabhūti is in view, the narrative converges on its soteriological core: a revelatory bestowal from Vajrapāṇi that grounds the king's authority. In Dudjom Rinpoche's version, King Ja practiced a section of the *Magical Net of Vajrasattva,*[182] specifically *The Vision of Vajrasattva,*[183] for seven months using the Vajrapāṇi statue as support for the generation stage practice. This may seem counterintuitive, since they are conventionally distinct deities; nevertheless, as previously mentioned, the

[180] Dowman, "The Mahāsiddha Indrabhūti," 229–34.
[181] Davidson, "Hidden Realms and Pure Abodes," 162; Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 245.
[182] *rdo rje sems dpa'i sgyu 'phrul dra ba*, Toh 833.
[183] Probably *rdo rje sems dpa'sgyu 'phrul thams cad kyi me long*.

Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha and the *Guhyagarbha Tantra* explicitly equate them, thus, the identification is unproblematic. As a result of this sustained effort, Vajrasattva appeared before him and bestowed the empowerment of pristine cognition, through which the king attained some level of realization. Following his attainment, the king sought an appropriate vessel to transmit his newly acquired knowledge. His first attempt was with the Sahorī scholar Uparāja,[184] who failed to comprehend the teachings. He then approached the yogin Kukkurāja,[185] who, upon merely hearing the teachings, grasped them intuitively. Kukkurāja also practiced *The Vision of Vajrasattva* and, through this, came to behold Vajrasattva face-to-face, receiving direct empowerments and transmissions from him. Subsequently, Vajrasattva prophesied that Kukkurāja would receive the complete transmission of the Mahāyoga tantras directly from Vajrapāṇi, which he later did. During this transmission, Vajrapāṇi instructed Kukkurāja to seek out the oral transmission from Vimalakīrti. After receiving this oral transmission, Kukkurāja compiled and categorized the tantras into the eighteen subdivisions of what came to be known as the *Tantrapiṭaka*,[186] which he then transmitted back to King Ja. This progression delineates a layered apparatus of authentication. First, it roots the corpus in the authoritative metaphysical origins of Vajrasattva and Vajrapāṇi, thereby neutralizing any controversy over which deity constitutes the primary source: under the equivalence argued earlier, either functions as the ultimate authority. Second, mirroring Vimalakīrti's transmission, these deities inaugurate the empowerment lineage, securing the ritual precedence of the tantras in a supernatural, ultimate source. Third, the narrative introduces Kukkurāja as the principal human transmitter, both the operative conduit of the human tantric lineage and an accompanying partner to Indrabhūti, which

[184] Not to be confused with King Uparāja, Garab Dorje's father.
[185] Also identified as Kukkuripa and Kuṭarāja. See glossary entry "Kukkurāja."
[186] Collection of Tantras (lit. basket of tantras). See glossary entry "Tantrapiṭaka."

grounds the revelation in historical-human agency. Fourth, by integrating Vimalakīrti into this chain, the account conflates the two transmission streams into a single lineage, dissolving any residual preference between them. Taken together, Dudjom Rinpoche's architecture yields a coherent authenticating scaffold; yet, because variant recensions of the narrative persist, the sufficiency of this version remains open to scrutiny and warrants examination in what follows.

2.3.1.3 Kukkurāja

Jñanamitra offers a variant of this story in his commentary to the *Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred and Fifty Lines.*[187] In this version, King Indrabhūti receives the *tantras* and statue as already described. However, in an unexpected twist, he is unable to understand a single word. Urged to find someone who could teach him these tantras, he summons Ācārya Kukkurāja, the so-called King of Dogs, a yogin from the country of Mālava. Kukkurāja is portrayed as an eccentric and unconventional yogin, accompanied by a thousand dogs. He not only kept this unusual retinue but also taught them the Dharma, and they all engaged in ritual practices together.[188] Using his supernatural insight, King Indrabhūti had foreseen that this extraordinary yogin would be able to decipher the scriptures. Yet even Kukkurāja initially failed to grasp their meaning. In desperation, he fervently prayed to the buddhas for assistance. Vajrasattva responded to his plea and appeared before him. Kukkurāja then implored Vajrasattva to bless him with the ability to understand the *tantras* by sight alone. Granting his request, Vajrasattva empowered Kukkurāja to perceive the meaning of the *tantra* known as *The Practice of the Unity of All the Buddhas* directly upon reading it. [189]

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[187] *Prajñāpāramitā-Nayaśatapañcāśatikā.*
[188] Ritual practice. See glossary entry "*pūjā.*"
[189] Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism,* 242-3. This is referring to the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga*.

Kukkurāja, like King Ja, is counted among the eighty-four *mahāsiddhas*.[190] Similar to Indrabhūti, he appears to be a composite figure, likely representing a synthesis of several historical masters. In the account presented by Dudjom Rinpoche, Kukkurāja must be the one associated with the transmission of the *Sūtra Which Gathers All Intentions*, one of the Four Root *Tantras* of the Anuyoga tradition.[191] According to Dowman, Kukkurāja received the scripture from Indrabhūti and later transmitted it to Garab Dorje.[192] This version of Kukkurāja is therefore presumed to have lived during the seventh or eighth centuries, the period typically linked to both Indrabhuti and Garab Dorje.[193] Another well-known figure with the same name, more commonly referred to as Kukkuripa, "the Dog Lover," appears in the Mahāmudrā lineage. He is remembered as the teacher of Marpa Chökyi Lodrö (*mar pa chos kyi blo gros,* 1012-1097) to whom he transmitted the Mother *Tantras*, placing him in the eleventh century.[194] Despite their shared name and identification as the same individual in some accounts, their stories diverge significantly. Kukkuripa, in this latter context, is described as a renunciate *brāhmaṇa* from Kapilavastu. On his way to Lumbinī, he adopts a female dog and lives with her in a cave for twelve years while undertaking intense practice of the secret mantra path. Through this disciplined effort, he attains special *siddhis*, or magical powers, which attract the attention of the gods in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. Invited to their realm, a place of great pleasure and sensual delight, Kukkuripa partakes in the enjoyments offered. Yet, he cannot forget his dog

[190] Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, 227-30. He is commonly presented as the 34th but also found as the 12th and 49th.
[191] These are known as the "Four Root *Sūtras* of the Anuyoga" and are: *Gathering of Intentions, Gathering of All Knowledge, Play of the Charnel Ground Cockoo, and Majestic Wisdom's Wheel of Lightning.* See: Jacob P. Dalton, "Appendix: The Four Root Tantras of Anuyoga," in *The Gathering of Intentions: A History of a Tibetan Tantra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 133–48.
[192] Keith Dowman, "The Mahāsiddha Kukkuripa: The Dog-Lover," in *Masters of Mahamudra: Songs and Histories of the Eighty-Four Buddhist Siddhas* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1985), 199–203.
[193] Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, 213-4; A. W. Hanson-Barber, "The Identification of dGa' Rab Rdo Rje," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 9, no. 2 (1986): 58–60.
[194] Cécile Ducher, *Building a Tradition: The Lives of Mar-Pa the Translator*, Collectanae Himalayica, vol. 5 (München: Indus Verlag, 2017), 301-6.

companion. Eventually, he relinquishes the heavenly pleasures and returns to his cave. Upon his arrival, the dog transforms into a *ḍākinī*, who, delighted with his loyalty and compassion, reveals to him the symbolic union of skillful means and wisdom. [195] Through this, Kukkuripa attains supreme realization. These two figures, Kukkurāja of Anuyoga and Kukkuripa of Mahāmudrā, seem to be distinct masters, joined primarily by a shared name and a motif of canine devotion. It remains possible, however, that they represent different incarnations of the same master. In the Atiyoga lineage, two figures bearing the name Kukkurāja are distinguished as Kukkurāja the Elder and Kukkurāja the Younger. This distinction is reflected in the enumeration of the Twenty-One Indian Paṇḍitas[196] associated with this tradition. In some interpretations, the two are portrayed as father and son, with Kukkurāja the Dog King being the son of Kukkurāja the elder.[197] This of course contrast with the previous assessment.

Kukkurāja's figure epitomizes the layered strategies of authentication at work in these transmission narratives. Counted among the eighty-four *mahāsiddhas*, he further embeds the Ancient Tantras within the *siddha* movement, while his association with Indrabhūti positions him as both companion and conduit in the passage of revelation from divine to human domains. His ties to Vimalakīrti merge symbolic and historical streams, linking him to the living lineage of Śākyamuni. Most significantly, his visionary empowerment by Vajrasattva situates him within the same matrix of supernatural authorization that structures Indrabhūti's encounters with Vajrapāṇi, thereby ensuring that the human inability to comprehend the tantras is overcome by divine intervention, and introducing a personalized, devotion-driven vector of transmission. In

[195] Dowman interprets this symbolic union as a reference to karmamudrā, the yogic practice of sexual union. See: Dowman, "The Mahāsiddha Kukkuripa," 199–203.
[196] *rgya gar gyi mkhas pa nyi shu rtsa gcig.*
[197] Erik Pema Kunsang, trans., *Wellsprings of the Great Perfection: The Lives and Insights of the Early Masters of the Dzogchen Lineage* (Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 2006), 104.

this sense, Kukkurāja functions not simply as a transmitter but as a hinge figure: bridging the celestial origins of the tantras with their historical rooting in India and Tibet.

The discrepancies between the accounts of Dudjom Rinpoche and Jñānamitra are striking. In Dudjom's version, one of the most recent sources on the matter, the central figure and upholder of wisdom is King Ja. By contrast, in the account attributed to Jñānamitra, which is considered the earliest extant narrative describing Indrabhūti's reception of the tantras,[198] the wisdom upholder is the eccentric King of Dogs, Kukkurāja. In this earlier version, King Ja appears only as a bystander: while he is said to possess a form of supramundane cognitive capacity, he lacks the wisdom necessary to interpret the tantras independently. The shift in the identity of the principal figure across these accounts is not easily reconciled. In the Laṅkā narrative, the protagonist is Vimalakīrti; in Jñānamitra's account, it is Kukkurāja; and in Dudjom's rendering, it is unambiguously King Ja. Dudjom even goes so far as to assert that the involvement of Kukkurāja and Vimalakīrti was purely performative. He writes:

> Just so, although the king himself had attained realization, he demonstrated the way of realization by relying upon Kukkurāja. This was in order to prevent charlatans from entering this path at will.[199]

Then a few pages after this statement, in the introduction to the Anuyoga section, he states:

> Although King Ja, or Vyākaraṇavajra, had been empowered by the Lord of Secrets and had grasped the meaning of the entire teaching, even so, to prevent meddlesome onlookers from thinking he had entered the way of secret mantra at his pleasure, he relied on the human awareness-holder and layman, Vimalakīrti the Licchavi, from whom he received all the empowerments and verbal teachings [NGB Vols. 11-13].[200]

[198] Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 242.
[199] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 460.
[200] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 485.

The inconsistencies within these narratives, along with the symbolic insertion of Vimalakīrti, illustrate the fluid interweaving of traditions across time. Vimalakīrti's inclusion appears to serve a functional purpose, linking Indrabhūti and the tantras to the authority of Śākyamuni. Moreover, the shifting prominence of these figures reflects their adaptability within evolving doctrinal contexts, allowing them to assume primary roles as needed. It is therefore plausible that, as Indrabhūti's stature grew within the Nyingma tradition, his position was progressively elevated, ultimately transforming him into the realized *mahāsiddha*-king from whom the tantras are said to have originated in the human realm.

2.3.1.4 A Note on Multiplicity

At this point, it is pertinent to foreground the motif of multiplicity, the recurrence of parallel accounts and of figures with identical or near-identical names that are variously conflated or split. In his work *Dreaming the Great Brahmin: Tibetan Traditions of the Buddhist Poet-Saint Saraha*, Kurtis Schaeffer discusses the Tibetan tradition's fluidity in the construction of the narratives of their masters. In the case of Saraha, he notes, he seems to have come to live in a continuous act of creation and recreation by writers, scholars, artists and poets who, as Schaeffer poetically frames "were involved in dreaming the Great Brahmin into Existence."[201] Rather than undermining authenticity, this variability serves as its very ground, producing flexible figures that can meet different sectarian, ritual, or doctrinal needs. The cases of Indrabhūti and Kukkurāja exemplify this dynamic. This is why they can be identified with different deities like Vajrasattva or Vajrapāṇi, and with different scriptural corpuses as those found in the Nyingma or

[201] Kurtis R. Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin: Tibetan Traditions of the Buddhist Poet-Saint Saraha* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 10.

Sarma tantras. The very multiplicity functions as an authenticating strategy that varies dependent on what needs to be authenticated. Each version anchors transmission in authoritative origins, whether through visionary bestowals, like those of Vajrapāṇi or Vajrasattva, or through carefully situated human conduits like Vimalakīrti. In this way, as with Saraha, multiplicity itself becomes a mechanism of legitimation: a means by which diverse narratives reinforce, rather than dilute, the authority of the tantric lineage.[202]

2.3.1.5 Conclusion

As a whole, these accounts present a layered apparatus of authentication: Uḍḍiyāna functions simultaneously as sacred geography and internal yogic locus; Indrabhūti/King Ja's visionary bestowals ground authority at a supernatural source while his practice and ensuing realization anchor it in human agency; Kukkurāja operates as the principal human conduit who systematizes and returns the transmission, bridging divine origin and historical rooting; and the integration of Vimalakīrti folds parallel streams into a single lineage. The result is a coherent scaffold in which the equivalence of Vajrasattva and Vajrapāṇi, the organization of the tantras, and the linkage between Nyingma and Sarma traditions reinforce legitimacy. Finally, the acknowledged multiplicity of figures and narratives, across Indrabhūti and Kukkurāja alike, functions not as a flaw but as a calibrated strategy through which differing needs of authentication are met without diluting lineage authority.

[202] For a nuanced, comprehensive treatment of this theme of multiplicity, see Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*.

2.3.2 The dissemination of the Atiyoga tantras to Garab Dorje

The final account of the Atiyoga transmission likewise unfolds in both Laṅkā and Uḍḍiyāna. This time, the recipient is the master from Uḍḍiyāna known as Garab Dorje. This narrative stands apart from the previous two. Whereas the Laṅkā and Zahor accounts are relatively brief and straightforward the account of Garab Dorje is striking for its narrative complexity, stylistic distinctiveness, and wealth of detail. Dudjom Rinpoche recounts:

> When the Transcendent Lord of Secrets, Vajrapāṇi, was teaching the doctrine of the secret mantra to a host of ḍākas, ḍākinīs, accomplished masters and awareness-holders in the Blazing Fire Mountain charnel ground, to the north of Mount Sumeru, the island of Dhanakośa, in Oḍḍiyāna in West India, was inhabited solely by creatures called koṣa, who had bodies like those of men, the faces of bears, and claws all of iron. The island was encircled by many sublime types of tree, including sandalwood. This is why it was called Dhanakośa (Treasury of Wealth), or so it is said. In that country there was a great temple called Śaṅkarakūṭa, which was surrounded by six thousand and eight hundred small temples. It was a place perfectly endowed with splendour and wealth.
>
> There, there was a king, Uparāja, and his queen, Ālokabhāsvatī. They had a daughter called Sudharmā. She was ordained as a novice and, shortly thereafter, as a nun. About one yojana from Dhanakośa, on an island covered with golden sand, in a tiny thatched cottage, she practised yoga and meditation with her servant Sukhasāravatī. One night the nun had a dream in which an immaculate white man thrice placed a crystal vase sealed with the syllables OṂ ĀH HŪṂ SVĀHĀ upon the crown of her head. The light radiating from the vase was such that she could clearly see the three world realms. Not long afterwards, the nun gave birth to a child, who was none other than the son of the Conqueror, Adhicitta (*sems-lhag-can*), the divine emanation of Vajrasattva who had propagated the Great Perfection in heaven. But the nun was ashamed, and saw [his birth] as a great impropriety…
>
> … the nun cast the child into an ash pit, and at once sounds, lights, and other phenomena arose. Then, after three days had passed, she saw that the child was unharmed; so she knew him to be an emanation. When, with great respect, she brought him forth from the pit, celestial deities assembled and exclaimed:
>
> O Master! O Teacher! Transcendent Lord!
> O lord of the world, revealing true nature!
> Protect us, Celestial Vajra! We pray thus this day.

Then ḍākas, ḍākinis, gods, nāgas, yakṣas and other mundane protectors also honoured him with the many provisions of worship.
When seven years had passed the boy said to his mother, "Mother, I would like to converse with scholars on the doctrine…

… The boy then went to Dhanakośa and sought an audience with the king, to whom he repeated his request. But the king thought, "The lad is but a child, so it will be too difficult for him to discuss the doctrine with scholars. And yet, there are many marks of a great individual upon his body. Perhaps he is an emanation…"

… After lengthy discussions and critical dialogues he overwhelmed their brilliance, whereupon they bowed their heads at his feet. The scholars honoured him with great respect and gave him the name Prajñābhava (Source of Discriminative Awareness). The king, too, was astonished and delighted, owing to which he conferred on the child the title "Great Master" and the name Garap Dorje (Vajra of Highest Delight)…

… Then, in the northern direction, on the precipice called Sūryaprakāśa, which was most fearsome, and where tormented spirits could actually be seen roaming about, Garap Dorje lived for thirty-two years in a thatched cottage, absorbed in contemplation all the while. At that time, the earth shook seven times and a voice came from the sky, heralding the decline of extremist teachings. Hearing it, an extremist king sent an assassin to murder the master; but when they saw Garap Dorje fly off through the sky, the king and his retainers acquired supreme faith and were initiated into the Buddhist teaching.

Now, Garap Dorje's memory contained all the scriptures of the outer and inner vehicles, and, in particular, the six million four hundred thousand verses of the natural Great Perfection [NGB Vols. 1-10]. So when Vajrasattva actually appeared to him and showed him how to realize the pristine cognition of [the path of] no-more-learning, having conferred on him the vase empowerment of awareness, he also ordered him to write down the verbal tantras. Then, on the summit of Mount Malaya, which abounds in precious gems, the master, together with the Vajradhātu ḍākinī (the Ḍākinī of the Indestructible Expanse), who relishes mundane bliss, as well as with the Pītaśaṅkarā ḍākinī (the Yellow Bliss-giving Ḍākinī) and the Anantaguṇā ḍākinī (the Ḍākinī of Limitless Virtues), spent three years recording these precepts in writing. They also correctly arranged them, without any error, along with the emanational writings, which were self-originated and naturally established. All of these they placed in a cave called the "Real Origin of the Ḍākinīs" (*mkha'-'gro-ma mngon-par-'byung-ba'i phug*).[203]

[203] Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School*, 490-3.

This narrative diverges significantly from the previous accounts, revealing a distinctive doctrinal frame. Most notably, the origin story of the Atiyoga lineage is inseparable from the origin story of Garab Dorje. This identification is consistent with the distinctive ontological view of Atiyoga, which sets it apart from other tantric perspectives. In this system, the practitioner begins their path not by seeking awakening as something to be attained, but by recognizing that their natural state is already awakened.[204] The first step is to directly recognize the primordial ground, and through that recognition, awakening is said to become self-evident.[205] Merely recognizing one's nature does not immediately equate to full awakening; at the same time, such recognition is itself a direct glimpse of the awakened state.[206] This perspective is central to Atiyoga and is why this recognition is sometimes symbolically referred to as the Ādibuddha, because for all means and purposes, the primordial basis being observed is the Primordial Buddha itself. This ground, or primordial basis, is described as possessing three inseparable aspects: Its state is immaculate and can have a physical form. Its nature is spontaneous and is luminous. Its self-being is all-pervasive primordial awareness. This state is to be understood as being identical to the Primordial Buddha, Samantabhadra.[207] Accordingly, in the Atiyoga system the natural state, which is the primordial basis, is equated with the *dharmakāya*, while its qualities are said to be the *saṃbhogakāya*.[208] From this standpoint, whatever arises from the ground is an expression of awakening. Thus, when a realized master speaks or acts, their gestures and words are seen not merely as human expression, but as awakened activity. In this light, their speech may be regarded

[204] Tulku Urgyen, "The Unity of Development & Completion," in *Dzogchen Essentials*, trans. Erik Pema Kunsang (Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 2004), 184-5.
[205] Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, *Dzogchen Teachings: Oral Commentary on the Longsal Terma The Opening of the Gate to the State of Ati* (Shang Shung Edizioni, 2006), 9-12.
[206] Esler, "The Exposition of Atiyoga," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, 119-122.
[207] Samten G. Karmay, "Chapter Seven: rDzog Chen Theories and Their Origins," in *rDzog Chen: A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. II (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 175–200.
[208] Erik Pema Kunsang, trans., *Dzogchen Essentials: The Path That Clarifies Confusion* (Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 2004), 184-5.

as *buddhavacana*, because its source is the Primordial Buddha manifesting through a human form.[209] That said, while this conception of *buddhavacana* may hold for Nyingma practitioners, an external observer will likely require additional authenticating criteria beyond the master's own realization. Accordingly, Dudjom Rinpoche situates this transmission within a broader *trikāya* narrative framework. Samantabhadra as *dharmakāya*, is implicit in the overarching arc of the three transmissions, but his specific function is not articulated here. The *saṃbhogakāya* role is taken by Vajrasattva, who manifested as the *deva* Adhicitta,[210] appears to Garab Dorje's mother in a dream and effects his conception. Since Adhicitta is a celestial emanation of Vajrasattva, Garab Dorje is, in a literal sense, Vajrasattva's son. This admits both a literal and a figurative reading, as in Garab Dorje being an emanation of Vajrasattva, i.e., his *nirmāṇakāya.* This parallels the Indian presentations of the cosmic families of Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi and situates the account within the Indic cosmological arrangement. Although Vajrasattva is cast here as a *saṃbhogakāya*, Indian sources sometimes acknowledge him as the sixth Dhyāni Buddha closely affiliated to Vairocana;[211] elsewhere, as in the *Guhyagarbha*, he is styled as the "Lord of all Buddha Families."[212] In still other contexts, when presented as an Ādibuddha, he becomes indistinguishable from Vajradhara.[213] Read in this light, the present system repositions Vajradhara with Vajrasattva, articulating a *trikāya* triad of *dharmakāya* Samantabhadra, *saṃbhogakāya* Vajrasattva, and *nirmāṇakāya* Garab Dorje.[214]

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[209] John M. Reynolds, *The Golden Letters* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 24-31.
[210] Getse Mahāpaṇḍita, *Precise Discernment of Dharmas: A Catalogue of the Complete Collected Works of the Omniscient King of Dharma, Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa* (Lotsawa House, 2025), https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/getse-mahapandita/jigme-lingpa-collected-works-catalogue, 2.
[211] Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography,* 47-8; 74-5.
[212] Rabjam, *The Guhyagarbha Tantra*,183.
[213] Buswell & Lopez, "Vajrasattva," in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*.
[214] Dorje, *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems,* 31-38.

In the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha* and the *Guhyagarbha,* as mentioned in the previous chapter, he is identical to Vajrapāṇi,[215] a theme conveyed in Vairocana's biography, preserved in *The Collected Tantras of Vairocana,*[216] assigns this role to Vajrapāṇi rather than Vajrasattva. In a folkloric rendering, Garab Dorje's mother, here identified as Princess Bhāraṇī, encounters a golden duck while walking along the shore of a lake. The golden duck, in fact Vajrapāṇi in disguise, pecks her on the breast, resulting in the conception of Garab Dorje. In this version, Vajrapāṇi is not only the father of Garab Dorje but also his spiritual mentor. He appears to Garab Dorje and bestows upon him the Atiyoga teachings along with other tantras.[217]

Both accounts clearly seek to situate the Atiyoga transmission within a *trikāya* functional framework. However, Dudjom Rinpoche does not state this explicitly, and a close reading leaves Vajrasattva's precise role open to question. By the time Vajrasattva appears to empower and instruct Garab Dorje, the latter is already advanced in self-guided practice and has memorized the 6,400,000 verses of the Natural Great Perfection without indicating their source. This raises a problem of textual provenance: while Vajrasattva is plainly the agent of empowerment, Dudjom Rinpoche does not present him as the author of the scriptures. If the foregoing account of Atiyoga's innerworkings is applied, realization as direct access to the primordial ground, the *trikāya* scheme is not strictly necessary: as a functional *nirmāṇakāya*, Garab Dorje can access Samantabhadra, the *dharmakāya*, whenever he rests in the basic state. Of course one could also argued that the *trikāya* scheme plays no operative role in this transmission: Garab Dorje appears as a self-taught, self-realized master, and his encounter with Vajrasattva may function merely as a mnemonic device to authenticate the linage by anchoring it in a well-known tantric figure, much

[215] See section 2.2.1 & 2.3.1.
[216] *bai ro'i rgyud 'bum*
[217] Karmay, *rDzogs Chen,* 16-21.

like King Ja's staged simulation of receiving oral transmission from Vimalakīrti through Kukkurāja, who required it for the sake of public legitimacy. This framing surfaces in other versions of the account, including the one in *The Great History,*[218] authored by Zhangton Tashi Dorje (*zhang ston bkra shis rdo rje*, 1097-1167) who writes:

> Now, some thirty-two years having elapsed, all of the precious Pitakas, which had been expounded by the completely perfect Buddhas of the past, and in particular the sixty-four hundred thousand verses of the natural Great Perfection (*rang-bzhin razogs-pa chen-po*), came to be preserved in his heart. On the mountain peak of this extensive teaching activity, a mound of precious jewels located on the Malaya mountain, there resided a Dakini of the Vajradhatu known as Lokasukharasavati (rDo-rje dbyings kyi mkha'-gro-ma, Jig-rten bde-ba'i ro dang ldan-ma). She had three faces and was attired in the skins of a tiger. Her four hands held parasols of peacock feathers, and she was actively mounted upon a tiger and a lion. And here also there resided the Dakini of limitless virtuous qualities called Pitashankara (bDe-byed ser-mo yon-tan mtha' -yas-pa'i mkha'–'gro-ma). She was mounted on a dragon and wore a bandolier of lightning bolts. She was exceedingly wrathful in appearance, but blissful in her mind. For three years they compiled the indices (*dkar-chag*) of the letters and the words (of the Dzogchen Tantras). Together with all the Nirmanakaya letters, which were self-originated and self-occurring, these were well arranged unerringly in letters (in many volumes of books). And having arranged them in that way, these two Dakinis became manifest (and visible to him) in a rock cave located there, and to those Dakinis, who possessed keen intelligence, he proposed, "Let us perform puja!" And having been given their consent, he prayed that they remain there with him (as custodians of the Teachings). Thereupon, by means of the actual arising of Nirmitas as visible manifestations, they caused the Teachings to become established. This shorter lineage of transmission, which caused the Teachings to remain (in our world) for a long time, has been amply recounted here.[219]

This early account underscores the innate simplicity of the Atiyoga system from its very inception. Here, the Atiyoga teachings arise spontaneously in the form of "*nirmāṇakāya* letters," described as self-originated. This self-arisen script manifests to the single mindstream, Garab Dorje's, that was capable of perceiving, understanding, internalizing, and ultimately transcribing

[218] *lo rgyus chen mo.*
[219] Reynolds, *The Golden Letters*, 184.

it. This version supports the interpretation that Garab Dorje and Atiyoga are fundamentally identical. It also leaves room to question the precise roles of Samantabhadra and Vajrasattva. Nevertheless, because this framing of Atiyoga's origin is even more abstract than Dudjom Rinpoche's, it poses an even greater challenge for authentication. Perhaps for this reason the narrative appears to have been retrofitted to the *trikāya* framework, and placed amidst the triple transmission scheme, an imperfect solution, yet one that is explicitly present in Dudjom Rinpoche's account. At its core, this version emphasizes an alternative framework to the *trikaya* transmission. Here, Garab Dorje effectively "bestows" transmission upon himself, enacting the logic of the Mind Transmission: his own basic nature, identified in the Atiyoga system as Samantabhadra, functions as the *dharmakāya* source of transmission. In other words, Garab Dorje's *dharmakāya* nature confers transmission to his manifest person, expressing Atiyoga's claim that realization arises from the innate ground rather than from an external mediator. This scheme also opens the possibility for the ongoing creation of scripture, insofar as a teacher's authority to articulate new teachings depends on being perceived as operating from within his *dharmakāya* nature. In this sense, revelation remains a continuous activity of enlightened awareness rather than a bounded historical event. It thereby establishes a functional gateway to the realm of timeless time, wherein the dharmakāya itself authenticates scripture independent of chronological continuity. This same collapse of temporal sequence underlies the *terma* tradition, in which, at the moment of revelation, the *terton* transcends ordinary temporality to engage directly with the timeless dimension of the dharmakāya.[220]

[220] Oriane Lavolé, "Gter Ma as Timely Tradition: The Collapse of Time and Centrality of Timeliness in Gter Ston Mchog Gyur Gling Pa's Literary Self-Portrayal" (Ph.D. diss, Kathmandu University, 2018), 6-12.

2.3.2.1 Conclusion

The link of the Atiyoga transmission narrative with the broader tantric framework of transmission also seems to be working toward the goal of authentication. With the merging of the sacred locales of Laṅkā and Uḍḍiyāna, and the symbolic motifs explored in the previous sections, the theme of authentication is consistently reinforced. At the same time, the Atiyoga account distinguishes itself by identifying the origin of the lineage with Garab Dorje himself, whose realization is presented as arising directly from the primordial ground. This framing highlights both the adaptability of the *trikāya* scheme to authorize Atiyoga and the possibility of an alternative self-validating model, in which transmission is bestowed by one's own *dharmakāya* nature. Together, these elements underscore how Atiyoga's narrative balances continuity with the earlier tantric frameworks while simultaneously asserting a distinctive mode of legitimacy.

3.1 Concluding Remarks

This study has treated the transmission narratives as doctrinal apparatuses of authentication, not as modern critical history. The sources themselves signal that much material, as we have it, was systematized in Tibet; dates and personae are often composite. What follows summarizes, in the order presented in the thesis, the conclusions drawn transmission-by-transmission.

3.1.1 Mind Transmission (Akaniṣṭha).

The Mind Transmission authenticates the corpus at the level of *dharmakāya*: Akaniṣṭha functions as a sacred locus; Samantabhadra/Vajradhara operates as the primordial source; and "mind-to-mind" conferral provides a self-authorizing ground. *Trikāya* attributions are interpretive frames, not competing origins.

3.1.2 Symbolic Transmission (Laṅkā).

The Symbolic Transmission anchors revelation to Laṅkā and channels it through bodhisattva mediators, especially Vajrapāṇi, and through the *vidyādhara* Vimalakīrti, who bridges cosmic authority with the human sphere. This strand also links the lineage to Śākyamuni's living tradition via Vimalakīrti's role, while accommodating, as needed, a functional equivalence between Samantabhadra and Śākyamuni with respect to Vajrapāṇi.

3.1.3 Whispered Transmission (Uḍḍiyāna).

In Uḍḍiyāna, Indrabhūti/King Ja receives visionary bestowals of book and image, and realization from Vajrapāṇi/Vajrasattva, establishing a supernatural warrant that is then grounded by human agency. Kukkurāja emerges as the principal human conduit, receives empowerments, seeks Vimalakīrti's oral instructions, and organizes the corpus into the Eighteen Tantrapiṭaka, returning it to the king. This architecture links Mahāyoga/Anuyoga**,** Nyingma and Sarma tantras, and confirms Uḍḍiyāna as both sacred geography and internal yogic locus. The multiplicity of figures and versions (Indrabhūtis/Kukkurājas) functions positively as a calibrated strategy of legitimation rather than a flaw.

This overview distills the study's themes, showing how the Nyingma apparatus of legitimation operates through sacred geography, visionary bestowal, *mahāsiddha* mediation, and the trikāya framework.

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Glossary

Ādibuddha (Primordial Buddha)
Tibetan:དང་པོའི་སངས་རྒྱས་
Wylie: *dang po'i sangs rgyas*
The Ādibuddha is the original or primordial Buddha from whom all other Buddhas emanate. In Nyingma and some New Schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Ādibuddha is identified with Samantabhadra (*kun tu bzang po*), representing the Dharmakāya, or formless truth body of Buddhahood. He symbolizes the innate purity of mind and the timeless source of all awakened manifestations. Unlike historical Buddhas, the Ādibuddha is not bound by time, form, or causality. His iconography typically features a deep blue body in meditation posture, radiating limitless awareness and compassion.

Āgama (Transmission or Scripture)
Tibetan: ལུང་
Wylie: *lung*
Āgama refers to a collection of early Buddhist scriptures transmitted orally before being written down. These texts form the foundational teachings of the Buddha and correspond to the Nikāyas in the Pāli Canon. In Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna contexts, the term also applies to the scriptural transmissions forming the doctrinal base of schools such as Nyingma. In the Nyingma tradition, the term kama (*bka' ma*) is often used for orally transmitted scriptures, whereas *terma* refers to treasure texts. The Āgamas are key to understanding the early doctrinal development of Buddhism.

Akaniṣṭha (Not Below Others)
Tibetan: འོག་མིན་
Wylie: *'og min*
Akaniṣṭha is regarded as the highest of the pure abodes in Buddhist cosmology, particularly in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna systems. It is often described as the summit of the Form Realm (*rūpadhātu*) and the realm closest to enlightenment. Beings born here have cultivated immense merit and wisdom and are typically Bodhisattvas on the verge of Buddhahood. In some Nyingma teachings, Akaniṣṭha is considered synonymous with the Buddha field of the Dharmakāya, where the primordial Buddha resides in his formless essence.

Anuyoga (Subsequent Yoga)
Tibetan:རྗེས་སུ་རྣལ་འབྱོར་
Wylie: *rjes su rnal 'byor*
Anuyoga is the second of the three Inner Tantras in the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, following Mahāyoga and preceding Atiyoga. It emphasizes the perfection stage (*rdzogs rim*) practices and the subtle body's channels (*nāḍī*), winds (*prāṇa*), and essences (*bindu*). Anuyoga

aims for direct realization through inner yogic methods, often bypassing elaborate visualizations in favor of working with the natural energy of the body and mind.

Añjalimudrā (Gesture of Reverence)
Tibetan: ཐལ་མོ་སྦྱར་བ་
Wylie: *thal mo sbyar ba*
Añjalimudrā is a symbolic hand gesture in which the palms are pressed together in front of the chest. It signifies respect, devotion, and the unity of dualities, such as wisdom and compassion. Used widely in Buddhist ritual and iconography, this *mudrā* is performed when greeting others, during prayer, and in devotional acts before the Buddha. It expresses humility and the recognition of the sacred in all beings.

Atiyoga (Ultimate Yoga)
Tibetan: རྫོགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ་ཤིན་ཏུ་རྣལ་
Wylie: *rdzog pa chen po shin tu rnal*
Atiyoga, also known as Dzogchen or "Great Perfection," is the highest of the three Inner Tantras in the Nyingma tradition. It transcends the dualistic frameworks of both Mahāyoga and Anuyoga by emphasizing the direct recognition of the mind's intrinsic nature. Atiyoga teachings focus on the spontaneous presence and primordial purity of awareness (*rigpa*). Practitioners engage in direct introduction to the nature of mind and stabilize recognition through non-conceptual meditation. Atiyoga is regarded as the swiftest path to enlightenment, requiring no elaborate visualization or ritual once the nature of mind is realized.

Avalokiteśvara (Lord Who Looks Down)
Tibetan: སྤྱན་ར་གཟིགས་
Wylie: *spyan ras gzigs*
Avalokiteśvara is a bodhisattva embodying the compassion of all Buddhas. Revered across Mahāyāna traditions, he is particularly venerated in Tibet, where he is linked to the Dalai Lamas as incarnations of his compassion. Depicted with multiple arms and heads, Avalokiteśvara manifests in various forms, including the popular four-armed Chenrezig. The mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum" is his core expression of altruism. In iconography and *sādhanas*, he is visualized as radiating beneficence toward all beings trapped in cyclic existence.

Bodhisattva (Awakened Hero)

Tibetan: བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་
Wylie: *byang chub sems dpa'*
A bodhisattva is an enlightened being who vows to attain full Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Distinct from the arhat ideal of personal liberation, the bodhisattva ideal embodies selfless compassion and wisdom. The path involves cultivating the six perfections (*pāramitās*) and engaging in altruistic activity. In Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Vajrapāṇi play pivotal roles. The bodhisattva path is not only

ethical but ontological, revealing the inseparability of emptiness and compassion in awakened activity.

Buddhaśakti (Buddha Power or Energy)
Tibetan: སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་ཤཱ་ཀ་ནུས་པ་
Wylie: *sangs rgyas kyi shA ka nus pa*
Buddhaśakti refers to the dynamic, transformational power or energy of enlightenment. In tantric Buddhism, it often denotes the active aspect of the Buddha principle, particularly as it manifests in female deities such as Prajñāpāramitā or Tārā. These figures are not merely symbolic but are understood as actual energetic manifestations of wisdom and emptiness. The term also reflects the inseparability of the Buddha's compassionate activity and his realization. Buddhaśakti is instrumental in visualizations, rituals, and the realization of non-duality through union with the enlightened feminine principle.

Buddhavacana (Word of the Buddha)
Tibetan: སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་གསུང་
Wylie: *sangs rgyas kyi gsung*
Buddhavacana denotes the authentic words or teachings of the Buddha, as recorded in canonical texts. These words are considered the ultimate authority and foundation for all Buddhist doctrines and practices. The term applies not only to the teachings spoken directly by Śākyamuni Buddha but also to those deemed to be spoken through divine or visionary means, such as in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna scriptures. In Tibetan traditions, Buddhavacana is formally transmitted via oral empowerment (*lung*), ensuring that the lineage and blessing of the teachings are preserved intact.

Ḍākinī (Sky Dancer)
Tibetan: མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་
Wylie: *mkha' 'gro ma*
A *ḍākinī* is a female tantric deity or spiritual being symbolizing wisdom, activity, and the energetic power of awakening. She appears in many forms, from wrathful and semi-wrathful to peaceful, and may be enlightened or worldly. In Vajrayāna Buddhism, *ḍākinīs* serve as protectors, teachers, and embodiments of transcendent wisdom (*prajñā*). They play central roles in tantric rituals, and visionary experiences.

Dhyāni Buddha (Meditation Buddha)
Dhyāni Buddhas are five transcendent Buddhas who personify different aspects of enlightened consciousness. Though not found in early canonical texts, they are central to tantric systems, where they represent purified aggregates and cognitive functions. The five are Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi. They appear in *maṇḍalas* and meditative visualizations, guiding practitioners toward the realization of the five wisdoms. Each is associated with a specific color, direction, element, and symbolic attribute, forming an integrated psychospiritual system for transformation.

Deva (god)
Tibetan: ལྷ་
Wylie: *lha*
Devas are celestial beings who inhabit the higher realms of the *saṃsāric* cycle, particularly the desire, form, and formless realms. While they enjoy long lives and great pleasures, they are not liberated and remain subject to karma. In Buddhist cosmology, Devas such as those in Trāyastriṃśa or Tuṣita heavens are often witnesses or protectors of the Dharma. In Vajrayāna contexts, devas can also be invoked as protectors or integrated into maṇḍalas. Despite their power and beauty, rebirth as a deva is viewed as spiritually precarious due to the lack of urgency for liberation.

Devaloka (Realm of the Gods)
Tibetan: ལྷའི་འཇིག་རྟེན་
Wylie: *lha'i 'jig rten*
Devaloka refers to the heavenly realms in Buddhist cosmology inhabited by devas. These realms exist within the desire and form spheres and include celestial abodes such as Trāyastriṃśa and Tuṣita. Though beings here enjoy sensory pleasures and extended lifespans, they are still bound by impermanence and karma. Devaloka is not a final goal but a potential rebirth contingent on merit. It contrasts with *nirvāṇa*, which is beyond *saṃsāra*. In Mahāyāna texts, Buddhas and bodhisattvas may also appear in these realms to guide beings toward liberation.

Dharmakāya (Dharma Body)
Tibetan: ཆོས་སྐུ་
Wylie: *chos sku*
Dharmakāya is one of the three bodies (*trikāya*) of a Buddha, representing the ultimate, formless reality or truth of enlightenment. It is beyond conceptual elaboration and dualistic perception, being the source from which all enlightened manifestations arise. In Vajrayāna Buddhism, it is the embodiment of perfect wisdom and is often associated with emptiness (*śūnyatā*). The Dharmakāya is inaccessible to ordinary perception and is realized through profound meditative insight.

Eight Charnel Ground Ornaments
Tibetan: དུར་ཁྲོད་ཆས་བརྒྱད་
Wylie: *dur khod chos brgyad*
These ornaments are symbolic adornments worn by wrathful deities and yogic practitioners in Vajrayāna iconography. They typically include: (1) elephant, (2) human, and (3) tiger skins. (4) human skulls and (5) snakes. (6) ashes, (7) blood, and (8) grease. These elements represent the transformation of fear, ego, and dualistic perception into enlightened awareness.

Garab Dorje (Vajra of Supreme Joy) Sanskrit: Prahevajra
Tibetan: དགའ་རབ་རྡོ་རྗེ་
Wylie: *dga' rab rdo rje*
Garab Dorje is considered the first human teacher of the Dzogchen teachings. Said to be born in Uḍḍiyāna and conceived supernaturally, he received direct transmission from Vajrasattva or Samantabhadra. His legacy is encapsulated in the "Three Words that Strike the Vital Point," a concise instruction summarizing the essence of Dzogchen. Alternate names include Source of Wisdom (Prajñābhava) and Ash-Colored Zombie (Vetalabhasmavarna), highlighting his mythic and esoteric origins. He transmitted the Dzogchen teachings to Mañjuśrīmitra, thus initiating the lineage of Great Perfection.

Hīnayāna (Lesser Vehicle)
Tibetan: ཐེག་དམན་
Wylie: theg dman
Hīnayāna refers to the early schools of Buddhism focused primarily on individual liberation (*nirvāṇa*) rather than the universal liberation emphasized in Mahāyāna. The term is often used pejoratively by Mahāyāna authors, though modern usage prefers the specific identification of the Theravāda tradition. Hīnayāna emphasizes ethical discipline, renunciation, meditation, and insight into impermanence, suffering, and non-self. It preserves the earliest strata of Buddhist doctrine and practice.

Indrabhūti (Indrabodhi, King Ja)
Tibetan: ཨིན་དྲ་བྷུ་ཏི་
Wylie: *in dra bhu ti*
Indrabhūti, also called King Ja or Indrabodhi, is traditionally identified as a key lay patron and transmitter of tantric teachings in the early Vajrayāna tradition. His kingdom, often placed in Uḍḍiyāna, is said to be one of the main early settings for the revelation and propagation of tantras. In Nyingma accounts, he receives teachings from Vajrapāṇi or other celestial figures and is linked to the origins of Mahāyoga and Anuyoga tantras. His figure often serves to establish the legitimacy of scriptural transmission from divine to human realms.

Kālpa (Eon)
Tibetan: བསྐལ་པ་
Wylie: *bskal pa*
A kalpa is a vast cosmic eon or age, used as a unit of time in Buddhist cosmology. Kalpas describe cycles of universal formation, duration, destruction, and emptiness. There are various types, including small, intermediate, and great kalpas (*mahākalpas*), each consisting of countless smaller units. Buddhist texts use kalpas to underscore the magnitude of *saṃsāric* time and the rarity of encountering the Dharma.

Kama (Oral Lineago of the Nyingma School)
Tibetan: བཀའ་མ་
Wylie: *bka' ma*
Kama refers to the canonical teachings of the Nyingma tradition passed down through unbroken oral transmission from teacher to disciple. Unlike the Terma (*gter ma*) or 'treasure' teachings revealed through visionary experience, *kama* scriptures are those preserved and transmitted from ancient times. These include the root tantras, commentaries, and practical instructions of the Early Translation School (*nyingma*).

Kukkurāja (King of Dogs)
Sanskrit: Kukkurāja (also: Kukkuripa, Kuṭarāja)
Tibetan: ཀུ་ཀུ་རྟ་ཛ་; ཁྱིའི་རྒྱལ་པོ་
Wylie: *ku ku rA dza; khyi'i rgyal po*
Kukkurāja is portrayed in Nyingma sources as a tantric adept who receives the oral transmission of Dzogchen teachings directly from Vimalakīrti or Vajrapāṇi, depending on the account. His figure helps to bridge the mythic and historical narratives in the dissemination of the higher tantras. He is sometimes identified with Kukkuripa, one of the 84 Mahāsiddhas. His role is especially emphasized in texts that trace the Dzogchen lineage.

Kapilavastu (City of the Śākyas)
Tibetan: སེར་སྐྱའི་གཞི་
Wylie: *ser skya' gzhi*

Kapilavastu was the capital city of the ancient Śākya clan and the reputed early home of Prince Siddhārtha Gautama, who would later become the Buddha. Located in the region of present-day southern Nepal or northern India, Kapilavastu holds historical and symbolic significance in the Buddhist tradition as the starting point of the Buddha's spiritual journey. It was here that Siddhārtha was raised in royal luxury before renouncing worldly life after witnessing the "four sights" of old age, sickness, death, and a renunciant. Though the exact archaeological site of ancient Kapilavastu is debated, candidates include Tilaurakot in Nepal and Piprahwa in India, the city's role in Buddhist narratives is well established. Kapilavastu represents the transition from princely life to renunciation, making it a pivotal locale in the life story of the historical Buddha.

Mahāsiddha (Great Accomplished One)
Tibetan: གྲུབ་ཐོབ་ཆེན་པོ་
Wylie: *grub thab chen po*
Mahāsiddhas are great tantric adepts who attained extraordinary powers (*siddhis*) and realization through Vajrayāna practice. Often outside monastic institutions, they exemplify the synthesis of worldly and spiritual paths. They are key figures in the transmission of tantric teachings and the subject of many legendary biographies. The 84 Mahāsiddhas form a traditional doxography illustrating diverse yogic methods and unconventional behavior in pursuit of awakening.

Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle)
Tibetan: ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ་
Wylie: *theg pa chen po*
Mahāyāna is one of the major traditions of Buddhism characterized by the bodhisattva ideal, the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. It emphasizes the cultivation of compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*prajñā*), and includes such key teachings as emptiness (*śūnyatā*), Buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*), and the perfection of insight (*prajñāpāramitā*).

Mahāyoga (Great Yoga)
Sanskrit: Mahāyoga
Tibetan: རྣལ་འབྱོར་ཆེན་པོ་
Wylie: *rnal 'byor chen po*
Mahāyoga is the first of the three Inner Tantras in the Nyingma tradition. It centers on the generation stage (*bskyed rim*), where the practitioner visualizes themselves as a deity to purify perception and realize the emptiness of phenomena. Mahāyoga emphasizes the view of all appearances as divine and integrates profound ritual and symbolic practice to transform ordinary experience.

Maṇḍala (Sacred Circle)
Tibetan: དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་
Wylie: *dkyil 'khor*
A maṇḍala is a symbolic representation of the universe and the enlightened mind, often depicted as a geometric diagram used in meditation and ritual. In tantric practice, it serves as the sacred space within which deities dwell and rituals are performed. Maṇḍalas represent the integration of cosmic order and are key to visualizations in the generation stage of tantra.

Mañjuśrī (Gentle Glory)
Tibetan: འཇམ་དཔལ་
Wylie: *'jam dpal*
Mañjuśrī is the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, often depicted with a sword in one hand to cut through ignorance and a book, the *Prajñāpāramitā* in the other. He is considered the embodiment of transcendent wisdom and plays a key role in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism. In Tibetan Buddhism, Mañjuśrī is seen as the patron of scholars and a source of eloquence, memory, and intelligence. His mantra, "Oṃ A Ra Pa Ca Na Dhīḥ," is widely used for the cultivation of wisdom.

Nāga (Serpent Spirit)
Tibetan: ཀླུ་
Wylie: *klu*
Nāgas are serpent-like beings in Buddhist cosmology who dwell in bodies of water or subterranean realms. They are guardians of treasures, particularly Dharma treasures (*terma*), and

often associated with rain, fertility, and esoteric teachings. In Tibetan Buddhism, *nāgas* are considered capable of both benevolence and wrath, and specific rituals are performed to appease them and avoid illness or misfortune caused by offending them.

Nāgaloka (Realm of the Nāgas)
Tibetan: ཀླུའི་འཇིག་རྟེན་
Wylie: *klu'i 'jig rten*
Nāgaloka refers to the domain or realm where *nāgas* reside. Often envisioned as a lush, subterranean paradise filled with jeweled palaces, it is a liminal space between the human and divine worlds. *Nāgaloka* plays a prominent role in tantric legends and *terma* lore, where practitioners may receive transmissions or treasure teachings from *nāga* beings.

Nirmāṇakāya (Emanation Body)
Tibetan: སྤྲུལ་སྐུ་
Wylie: *sprul sku*
Nirmāṇakāya is one of the three bodies (*trikāya*) of a Buddha and refers to the physical or emanational form that appears in the world to benefit sentient beings. The historical Buddha Śākyamuni is considered an example of a *nirmāṇakāya*. This form is accessible to ordinary beings and arises from the compassionate activity of the *sambhogakāya* and *dharmakāya* aspects.

Nyngma (The Ancient Ones)
Tibetan: རྙིང་མ་
Wylie: *rnying ma*
The Nyingma school is the oldest of the four major traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, tracing its origins to the first dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet during the 8th century. It emphasizes the teachings of Padmasambhava and the Great Perfection (Dzogchen or Atiyoga). Nyingma divides tantric texts into *kama* (oral transmission) and *terma* (revealed treasures) and includes a unique classification of the nine vehicles (*theg pa dgu*).

Nyingma Gyubum (Collected Tantras of the Nyingma School)
Tibetan: རྙིང་མ་རྒྱུད་འབུམ་
Wylie: *rnying ma rgyud 'bum*
The **Nyingma Gyubum** (lit. Hundred Thousand Tantras of the Nyingma) is the principal canonical collection of tantric scriptures unique to the Nyingma or "Ancient" school of Tibetan Buddhism. Compiled between the 8th and 14th centuries, it preserves the scriptures of the early translation period (*snga 'gyur*), including the three Inner Tantras**:** Mahāyoga**,** Anuyoga, and Atiyoga (Dzogchen). Unlike the Kangyur and Tengyur**,** which include mostly Indian Buddhist sutras and commentaries translated into Tibetan, the Nyingma Gyubum represents a distinctly Nyingma perspective on the transmission of tantric teachings. Many of the texts in this corpus do not appear in the Kangyur, and their Indian provenance is often debated. The compilation of the Nyingma Gyubum was initiated by Ratna Lingpa*,* Jigme Lingpa, and other masters. It serves as

the textual foundation for many practice lineages in the Nyingma tradition. Today, several editions of the Nyingma Gyubum exist, including the Dege; the Bhutanese editions of Tshamdrag, Gangteng A and B, and Drametse; and the South Central Tibetan versions of Rigdzin, Tingkye, Kathmandu, and Nubri. Each with slight variations in content and organization.

Paṇḍita (Learned Scholar)
Tibetan: པཎ་ཏི་ཏ་
Wylie: *paNDita*
A paṇḍita is a highly learned scholar, often one trained in the classical disciplines of Buddhist philosophy, grammar, logic, and scriptural exegesis. In Tibetan history, the term typically refers to the Indian scholars who translated Buddhist texts into Tibetan during the early and later dissemination of Buddhism. Paṇḍitas were instrumental in the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet.

Pañcatathāgata (Five Tathāgatas)
Tibetan: རྒྱ་བའི་སངས་རྒྱས་ལྔ་
Wylie: *de bzhin gshegs pa lnga*
The Five Tathāgatas, or Five Wisdom Buddhas, are emanations of various aspects of enlightened mind. They include Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi. Each represents a direction, color, element, and aspect of wisdom that counteracts specific defilements. They are central to many tantric mandalas and visualizations in Vajrayāna practice.

Pūjā (Ritual Offering)
Tibetan: མཆོད་པ་
Wylie: *mchod pa*
Pūjā refers to a ritual act of offering and veneration toward enlightened beings. These rituals range from simple offerings of light and incense to elaborate ceremonies invoking specific deities. In Tibetan Buddhism, *pūjās* often include chanting, *mudrās*, visualization, and symbolic offerings to accumulate merit and purify obscurations.

Rūpadhātu (Realm of Form)
Tibetan: གཟུགས་ཁམས་
Wylie: *gzugs khams*
Rūpadhātu refers to the intermediate level of existence in Buddhist cosmology, the Realm of Form, which lies above the Desire Realm (*kāmadhātu*) and below the Formless Realm (*ārūpyadhātu*). Inhabited by higher gods, this realm is characterized by subtle material form and is associated with meditative absorptions (*dhyānas*). Practitioners who achieve advanced concentration may be reborn here.

Saṃbhogakāya (Enjoyment Body)
Tibetan: ལོངས་སྐུ་
Wylie: *longs sku*
Saṃbhogakāya is one of the three bodies (*trikāya*) of a Buddha. It is the subtle form body enjoyed by advanced bodhisattvas in pure lands such as Akaniṣṭha. This body arises from the accumulation of merit and wisdom, and is adorned with the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of a great being. *Saṃbhogakāya* communicates the Dharma through visionary encounters.

Sambhogakāya Attire (Enjoyment Body Ornaments)
Sanskrit: Sambhogakāya Vastra
Tibetan: ལོངས་སྤྱོད་རྫོགས་པའི་ཆས་
Wylie: *longs spyod rdzogs pa'i chas*
The attire of the *sambhogakāya* form of a Buddha includes the elaborate five silken garments; the eight jeweled ornaments; a crown; earrings; a short, middle-length and long necklaces; armlets, bracelets, and anklets; blue, white, red, green and yellow colored crown-ribbons; short green blouse, dark maroon skirt with golden pattern or rainbow colors; and silken belt. These symbolize the accumulation of merit and the glory of enlightened qualities. The *sambhogakāya* is accessible to advanced bodhisattvas in pure lands and is depicted as radiant and regal, expressing the perfection of form and bliss.

Sādhana (Means of Accomplishment)
Tibetan: སྒྲུབ་ཐབས་
Wylie: *sgrub thabs*
Sādhana is a structured tantric liturgy used in the practice of deity yoga. It includes visualization, mantra recitation, and ritual procedures to identify with a specific deity's enlightened qualities. *Sādhanas* are transmitted through empowerments and oral instructions, and play a central role in Vajrayāna.

Siddhi (Accomplishment or Attainment)
Tibetan: དངོས་གྲུབ་
Wylie: *dngos grub*
Siddhi refers to spiritual accomplishments achieved through tantric practice. These may be mundane (e.g., clairvoyance, flight, invisibility) or supreme (liberation and full Buddhahood). The pursuit of *siddhis* is common in Vajrayāna where it symbolizes mastery of the path.

Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Lines)
Tibetan: ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ་སྟོང་ཕྲག་བརྒྱ་པ་
Wylie: *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa stong phrag brgya pa*
One of the longest versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, this extensive text elaborates on the perfection of wisdom in a vast array of teachings and metaphors. It is revered in both Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna as a foundational source of the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

Tantra (Continuum or Scripture)
Tibetan: རྒྱུད་
Wylie: *rgyud*
Tantra literally means "thread," "weave," or "continuum," and in the Buddhist context, it refers to esoteric scriptures that transmit the teachings and practices of Vajrayāna Buddhism. Tantras represent a class of scriptures that describe the methods for swiftly attaining enlightenment through deity yoga, mantra recitation, ritual, symbolic imagery, and the direct transformation of ordinary experience. These texts are structured as dialogues between the Buddha and various enlightened figures, such as Vajradhara or Vajrasattva, and often appear as revealed texts rather than historical sermons. In the Nyingma tradition, tantras are categorized as part of the Nine Yānas**,** with the Three Inner Tantras, Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga, being the most profound. Tantras typically convey a view of reality as inherently pure, with enlightened qualities already present in the practitioner, to be unveiled through specific practices.

Tantrapiṭaka (Basket of Tantras)
Tibetan: རྒྱུད་སྡེ་
Wylie: *rgyud kyi sde*
The Tantrapiṭaka refers to the "Basket of Tantras," one of the traditional divisions of Buddhist scripture (alongside the Sūtra and *vinaya* Piṭakas) in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions. It includes esoteric texts that present the tantric methods of practice, cosmology, metaphysics, and ritual. While the *sūtrapiṭaka* contains discourses and the *vinayapiṭaka* contains monastic regulations, the Tantrapiṭaka contains the esoteric instructions intended for initiated practitioners under the guidance of a qualified master.

In the Tibetan tradition, particularly in the Nyingma school, the Tantrapiṭaka is often associated with:

- The Nyingma Gyubum (རྙིང་མ་རྒྱུད་འབུམ་), the collected tantras of the Early Translation School
- The Seventeen Tantras of Dzogchen**,** as well as the root tantras of Mahāyoga and Anuyoga
- Canonical tantras found in the Kangyur and Tengyur (e.g., Guhyasamāja, Hevajra, Kālacakra, etc.)

The Tantrapiṭaka is considered the revelatory corpus of the Vajrayāna path and is typically transmitted only to those who have received empowerment (*abhiṣeka*).

Tantrayāna (Tantric Vehicle)
Sanskrit: Tantrayāna
Tibetan: རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པ་
Wylie: *rgyud kyi theg pa*
The Tantric Vehicle is a path of Mahāyāna Buddhism that uses tantric scriptures, rituals, and

deity yoga as swift means to attain enlightenment. It is characterized by the use of initiation (*abhisheka*), esoteric practices, and the transformation of desire and defilements into wisdom.

Tathāgatagarbha (Buddha-Nature)
Sanskrit: Tathāgatagarbha
Tibetan: དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པའི་སྙིང་པོ་
Wylie: *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po*
Tathāgatagarbha literally means "womb" or "embryo of the Thus-Gone One (Tathāgata)," referring to the innate potential for Buddhahood within all sentient beings. It is a foundational doctrine in several Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions, expressing the idea that enlightenment is not something to be newly acquired but rather realized as already present, though obscured by adventitious defilements. This concept appears in a number of key scriptures such as the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, *Śrīmālādevī Siṃhanāda Sūtra*, and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, and is further elaborated in Indian and Tibetan commentarial traditions. It functions as a bridge between the emptiness doctrine (*śūnyatā*) and the affirmation of luminous awareness (*prabhāsvaracitta*), especially within Yogācāra and certain Madhyamaka frameworks. In the Nyingma school and Dzogchen teachings, *tathāgatagarbha* is often equated with the primordial, unconditioned nature of mind (*rigpa*) — the ground of all experience and the source of spontaneous presence and compassion.

Terma (Treasure Teaching)
Tibetan: གཏེར་མ་
Wylie: *gter ma*
Terma are hidden spiritual teachings concealed by Padmasambhava and other masters to be revealed at appropriate times by *tertöns* (treasure revealers). They include texts, relics, and symbols recovered through visions or excavations, serving as living transmissions of the Dharma in the Nyingma tradition.

Tertön (Treasure Revealer)
Tibetan: གཏེར་སྟོན་
Wylie: *gter ston*
Tertöns are individuals prophesied to discover *terma*. Regarded as emanations of Padmasambhava or his close disciples, they appear throughout Tibetan history to revitalize the Dharma. Their discoveries often shape entire lineages or schools within Tibetan Buddhism.

Tīrthika (Outsider or Heretic)
Sanskrit: Tīrthika
Tibetan: མུ་སྟེགས་པ་
Wylie: *mu stegs pa*
Tīrthika refers to non-Buddhist religious adherents or spiritual seekers. In Buddhist texts, this term is often used for those following external or heterodox paths. *Tīrthikas* may include Brahmins, Jain ascetics, or other *sramanas* with differing doctrines and goals. Despite their

opposing views, they often play pivotal roles in Buddhist dialogues, sharpening doctrinal clarity through debate and contrast.

Trāyastriṃśa (Heaven of the Thirty-Three)
Tibetan: སུམ་ཅུ་རྩ་གསུམ་པ་
Wylie: *sum cu rtsa gsum pa*
This is the second heaven in the Desire Realm (*kāmadhātu*), situated atop Mount Meru and ruled by the god Śakra (Indra). The name means "Heaven of the Thirty-Three" referring to Śakra and his thirty-two divine companions. It is a place of pleasure and virtue, yet still within *saṃsāra*. In Buddhist cosmology, this heaven is significant for being the site of many events in the Buddha's life, such as his descent after teaching the Abhidharma to his mother.

Trikāya (Three Bodies of a Buddha)
Tibetan: སྐུ་གསུམ་
Wylie: *sku gsum*
The *trikāya* doctrine refers to the threefold manifestation of a Buddha: *dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*, This model articulates the Buddha's transcendental, celestial, and worldly modes of activity, enabling a comprehensive view of how enlightened activity operates across different levels of perception and reality.

Uḍḍiyāna
Tibetan: ཨུ་རྒྱན་
Wylie: *u rgyan*

Uḍḍiyāna is a legendary region considered one of the primary sources of tantric Buddhism, particularly associated with the origin of the Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga tantras in the Nyingma tradition. Often identified with the Swat Valley in present-day Pakistan, Uḍḍiyāna is venerated as the "land of the ḍākinīs" (*kha 'gro'i yul*), where many esoteric teachings were revealed and where advanced practitioners, including Padmasambhava and other *siddhas*, are said to have trained or attained realization. In Tibetan texts, Uḍḍiyāna is portrayed both as a historical and mythic-geographical realm, often described as lush, prosperous, and spiritually potent. The symbolic and actual significance of Uḍḍiyāna underscores its role as a liminal space between the human and transcendental worlds, making it a central site in Tibetan Buddhist narratives of lineage, revelation, and transformation.

Vajra (Thunderbolt or Diamond)
Tibetan: རྡོ་རྗེ་
Wylie: *rdo rje*
A potent symbol in Vajrayāna Buddhism, the vajra represents indestructibility, power, and the immutable nature of awakened mind. It is both a ritual implement and an emblem of ultimate truth. The *vajra's* symbolism is rooted in Indian mythology and adapted into tantric liturgies, where it is often paired with a bell to signify method and wisdom.

Vajrapāṇi (Holder of the Vajra)
Tibetan: ཕྱག་ན་རྡོ་རྗེ་
Wylie: *phyag na rdo rje*
Vajrapāṇi is a wrathful bodhisattva who represents the power of all Buddhas. Depicted wielding a *vajra*, he protects the Dharma and subjugates obstacles. As one of the earliest bodhisattvas to appear in Mahāyāna literature, he often appears alongside Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara as part of a symbolic triad of wisdom, compassion, and power.

Vajrayāna (Vajra Vehicle)
Tibetan: རྡོ་རྗེ་ཐེག་པ་
Wylie: *rdo rje theg pa*
Vajrayāna is the tantric path of Buddhism, considered a swift and powerful means to enlightenment. It incorporates deity yoga, mantra, *mudrā*, and advanced visualization techniques. Vajrayāna practitioners receive empowerment (*abhisheka*) from qualified teachers and follow detailed *sādhanas*. Though grounded in Mahāyāna, it introduces esoteric methods for transforming ordinary perception into awakened experience.

Vidyādhara (Knowledge Holder)
Tibetan: རིག་འཛིན་
Wylie: *rig 'dzin*
A vidyādhara is one who has mastered spiritual knowledge, particularly the esoteric teachings of the tantras. In Tibetan Buddhism, this title is used for realized masters who embody the unbroken lineage of Vajrayāna realization. They are holders of inner wisdom and magical powers and play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting sacred teachings.

Yakṣa (Nature Spirit or Guardian Deity)
Tibetan: གནོད་སྦྱིན་
Wylie: *gnod sbyin*
Yakṣas are semi-divine beings found in Indian mythology and Buddhist cosmology. Often associated with forests, treasure, and protection, they are typically depicted as robust and fierce. While some yakṣas are seen as malevolent, others serve as protectors of the Dharma. Vajrapāṇi is considered to have originated from a *yakṣa* form.

Yakṣaloka (Realm of the Yakṣas)
Tibetan: གནོད་སྦྱིན་གྱི་འཇིག་རྟེན་
Wylie: *gnod sbyin kyi 'jig rten*
Yakṣaloka is the domain inhabited by *yakṣas*. Positioned in the lower realms of the Desire Realm, this world features prominently in cosmological charts and narratives. Though spiritually ambivalent, *yakṣaloka* beings can act as guardians or antagonists depending on karmic alignment.

Appendix I

rnying ma rgyud 'bum zhes pa ni snga 'gyur rnying ma'i nang rgyud sde gsum gyi rgyud sde mang po phyogs gcig tu bsgrigs pa la zer/_yang na gsar ma dang rnying ma'i rgyud rnams shan 'byed pa'i phyir rnying ma rgyud 'bum zhes btags/_de yang rgyud 'bum gyi 'byung tshul ni [«]dkar chag dkar chag 'phang thang ma [»]las [“]sngags nang pa'i 'gyur byang gzhan na bzhugs [”]zhes gsungs pa ltar shin tu gsang ba'i sngags nang pa'i rgyud rnams so sor bsgrigs pa'i sa bon tsam ni rgyal po khri srong lde btsan gyi dus nas yod par sems/_1)_zur gyi rgyud phyogs bsgrigs/_zur chen shAkya 'byung gnas [(1002–1062; P2889)]kyis bsam yas mchims phur bzhugs pa'i sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor sogs rgyud gdan 'dren zhus te phyogs gcig tu bsgrigs zhes 'byung yang de dus rgyud 'bum zhes pa'i mtshan yod med gsal por ma rnyed/_2)_'gro mgon dpal gyi rgyud 'bum/_yab mnga' bdag nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer [(1124–1192; P364)]gyi gshegs rdzongs su mnga' bdag 'gro ba'i mgon pos [(1164–1221; P365)]bzhengs pa'i gser gyi rgyud 'bum yin/_3)_zur bzang po dpal gyi rgyud 'bum ni/_zur bzang po dpal [(b. 13th cent.?)]gyis rgya nag tu phebs pa'i yon gyis bstan pa la dgongs te bzhengs pa'i rgyud 'bum yin/_4)_rat+na gling pa'i rgyud 'bum ni/_gter chen rat+na gling pas [(1403–1479; P470)]sngon gyi rgyud 'bum nang bzhugs pa'i chos tshan rnams dang /_bka' 'gyur bsgrigs pa'i skabs ma chud pa'i sa phyogs nges med du yod pa'i rnying ma'i rgyud rnams ma nyams yun du gnas pa'i phyir rtsol ba chen po'i sgo nas dpe rnams btsal zhing lung yang gsan te gru shul lhun grub pho brang du sngon du snag bris dang phyis su gser bris kyi bzhengs pa'i rgyud 'bum pod [40]yin/_5)_gong ra lo chen gyi rgyud 'bum/_gong ra lo chen gzhan phan rdo rjes [(1594–1654; P1689)]bzhengs pa'i rgyud 'bum gsum las gnyis khams dang kong po'i yul du phul/_gcig rang dgon du bzhag pa'o/_/_6)_smin gling rgyud 'bum/_gter chen 'gyur med rdo rjes [(1646–1714; P7)]rgyud 'bum gyi dpe rnams ma dag pa mang po dang /_rim pa yang 'dra min 'byung bas 'ug bya lung sogs na yod pa'i ma dpe rnams la dper mdzad de/_rgyud sde dang sgrub sde/_rgyud lung man ngag sogs kyi rim pa legs par bsgrigs pa'i rgyud 'bum pod [23]yin/_7)_tA la'i hu thog gi rgyud 'bum/_tA la'i hu thog ngag dbang bshad sgrub rgya mtshos [(d. 1748?; P10302)]smin gling rgyud 'bum la dper byas te bzhengs pa'i rgyud 'bum pod [30]yin/_8)_stag bu brag dmar gyi rgyud 'bum/_gong ra nges gsang rdo rje'i gling na bzhugs pa'i rgyud 'bum dang smin gling rgyud 'bum gnyis la dper byas te stag bu brag dmar dgon du [(ca. 18th cent.)]bzhengs pa'o/_/_9)_'jigs med gling pa'i rgyud 'bum/_rig 'dzin 'jigs med gling pas [(1729/1730–1798; P314)]rat+na gling pa'i rgyud 'bum sogs ma phyi mang po la dper mdzad de bzhengs pa'i pod [26]yin/_deng mjal rgyu yod pa'i rgyud 'bum rnams ni/_1)_sde dge rgyud 'bum [(W21939)]ni sde dge btsun mo tshe dbang lha mos [(d. 1812; P10MS14671)]sbyin bdag mdzad de [1794–1798]lor bzhengs pa'i shing par pod [26]bod dbus dang shar phyogs su bzhugs pa'o/_/_2)_gzhi chen rgyud 'bum [(W2PD17382)]ni kaHthog gzhi chen dgon du bzhugs pa'i dbu med bris ma pod [39]bod shar phyogs su bzhugs pa yin/_rgyud 'bum 'di ni kun bzang khyab gdal lhun grub [(b. 17th cent.; P6988)]kyis bka' dgongs bzhin brag dmar dgon du bzhengs pa'o/_/_3)_gdong dkar la'i rgyud 'bum ni/_spa gro chos rje chos dbang lhun grub [(b. 17th cent.; P2718)]kyi bka' dgongs bzhin kha ling gi rgyal

po de ba dang btsun mo sogs kyis sbyin bdag gnang ste [1647]lor bzhengs pa'i pod [28]'brug nub phyogs su bzhugs pa yin/_'di ni dus yun zla ba gnyis dang zhag grangs lnga'i nang bzhengs par grags/_4)_sgang steng rgyud 'bum dang po ni/_pad gling gsum pa tshul khrims rdo rjes [(1598–1669; P1692)]rang gi bla ma sgang steng sprul sku dang po rgyal sras pad+ma 'phrin las [(1565–1642; P2659)]kyi dgongs rdzogs su [1642]tsam la bzhengs pa'o/_/_5)_sgang steng rgyud 'bum gnyis pa ni/_sgang steng sprul sku gnyis pa bstan 'dzin legs pa'i don grub [(1645–1726; P514)]kyi dgongs rdzogs su sprul sku mi pham dbang pos [(1709–1738; P531)]'go 'dren 'og [1726/1727]tsam la bzhengs pa'o/_/_6)_mtshams brag rgyud 'bum [(W21521)]ni/_mtshams brag sprul sku dang po ngag dbang 'brug pas [(1682–1748; P526)]sgang steng rgyud 'bum dang po la gzhi mdzad de/_phal cher [1726–1728]nang grub pa'o/_/_7)_dgra med rtse'i rgyud 'bum [(W3CN6760/W2PD19897)]ni/_'brug shar phyogs mong sgar rdzong kha'i nang khul dgra med rtse dgon par bzhugs pa'i bris ma phal cher [18th cent.]nang bzhengs pa'o/_/_8)_spa sgar rgyud 'bum ni/_'brug thim phug spa sgar dgon du bzhugs pa'i bris ma phal cher [18th cent.]nang bzhengs pa'o/_/_9)_sangs rgyas gling gi rgyud 'bum [(W1KG16449)]ni/_rgya gar rta dbang gi nang sangs rgyas gling zhes pa'i dgon par bzhugs pa'o/_/rgyud 'bum drug po de ni 'brug dbus phyogs nas brgyud pa'i brgyud pa gcig pas pod grangs yang mtshungs par [46]yod/_9)_tshe nor rgyud 'bum [(W2PD19896)]ni/_kaHthog rig 'dzin tshe dbang nor bu'i [(1698–1755; P676)]dgongs rdzogs su [18th cent.]smad tsam du bzhengs pa'i rgyud 'bum pod grangs [33]yin/_10)_gting skyes rgyud 'bum [(W21518)]ni/_dil mgo mkhyen brtse rin po che'i [(1910–1991; P625)]bka' dgongs bzhin 'brug rgyal yum phun tshogs chos sgron sogs kyis sbyin bdag gnang ste thim phug tu [1973–1975]par bskrun pa'i dkar chag pod gsum bcas rgyud 'bum pod [36]yin/_de'i dpe dngos ni phal cher rig 'dzin pad+ma chos 'phel [(1772/1773–1836; P2DB20793)]gyis gting skyes dgon par bzhengs pa di nyid yin par sems/_rgyud 'bum de gnyis ni bod lho dang nub phyogs kyi brgyud pa yin/_11)_nub ri rgyud 'bum ni/_brag dkar rta so sprul sku chos kyi dbang phyug [1775–1837; P5630]gi bka' dgongs bzhin brag dkar rta sor [1813–1814]lor bzhengs pa'i bris ma pod grangs [37]da lta bal yul nub rir bzhugs pa 'di nyid yin/_12)_kATha maN Du rgyud 'bum ni/_bal yul shar phyogs so lu khum bur phal cher [19th cent.]stod du bzhengs pa'i bris ma pod grangs [37]da lta bal yul rgyal yongs yig mdzod [(National Archives)]kATha maN Dur bzhag yod/_rgyud 'bum de gnyis ni bal bod gnyis kyi sa mtshams kyi brgyud pa yin/_gzhan yang /_13)_bai ro'i rgyud 'bum [(W21519)]ni/_dus rabs brgyad par bai ro tsa nas gtsos lo tsA ba rnams kyis bsgyur ba'i shin tu dkon pa'i rnying ma'i rgyud 'ga' zhig tog ldan rin po ches [(1938–2023)]phyogs bsgrigs gnang ba'i pod [8]'di nyid bkra shis sgang pas [1971]lor par skrun byas pa'o/_/_14)_gad dkar rnying ma rgyud 'bum [(W1BL6)]ni/_bal yul nub phyogs dol po smad rta rab kyi nang khul gad dkar zhes pa'i grong gseb kyi brag dmar dgon pa nas rnyed pa'i rgyud 'bum pod grangs [25]can yin/_pod gcig ma gtogs dbu med bris ma yin/_15)_dpal brtsegs rgyud 'bum [(W1KG14783)]ni/_dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang gis phyogs bsgrigs gnang ba'i 'phrul par dpe gzugs pod grangs [58]mi rigs dpe skrun khang du [2009]lor par skrun byas pa'o/_/_16)_krung go'i bod rig pa'i rgyud 'bum [(W3CN3207)]ni/_krung go'i bod rig pa zhib 'jug lte gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang gi legs sgrig zhus pa'i 'phrul

par deb gzugs pod grangs [49]krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang du [2015]lor par skrun byas pa'o/_/rgyud 'bum gyi lo rgyus rgyas pa gu ru bkra shis/_'jigs med gling pa/_dge rtse paN chen 'gyur med tshe dbang mchog grub/_dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang /_bstan 'dzin chos rgyal/_thub bstan chos dar/[Orna Almogi]sna tshogs gzugs can/_dol po sprul sku o rgyan chos dbyings ye shes kyi yig cha rnams las 'byung /_zhe chen zhib 'jug sde tshan gyi nyams zhib pa slob dpon rupa tsan+d+ra nas/[221]

Inventory of Phangthang

Over the centuries, multiple editions and lineages of the *Nyingma Gyubum* emerged:

1. **The Zur Tradition Compilation** – Zurchen Shakya Jungne (1002–1062; P2889) is said to have gathered tantras such as the *Sangye Nyamjor*, preserved at Samye Chimphu, into a single collection. It is unclear, however, whether it was yet called the *Gyubum*.
2. **The Gyubum of Dro Gon Pal** – A golden edition created by Ngadak Drowai Gonpo (1164–1221; P365) as a memorial offering for his father, Ngadak Nyangrel Nyima Özer (1124–1192; P364).
3. **The Gyubum of Zur Zangpo Pal** – Produced with wealth acquired during his travels to China, dedicated to the benefit of the teachings.
4. **The Gyubum of Ratna Lingpa** – Terchen Ratna Lingpa (1403–1479; P470) searched widely for texts and oral transmissions to preserve Nyingma tantras excluded from the *Kangyur* or found in uncertain locations, as well as dharma sections from earlier *Gyubums*. He had them copied first in ink and later in gold at Drushul Lhundrub Podrang. This edition contained 40 volumes.
5. **The Collected Tantras of Gongra Lochen** – Of three such collections compiled by Gongra Lochen Gönpang Dorjé (1594–1654; P1689), two were offered in Kham and Kongpo, and one retained at his own monastery.
6. **The Mindröling Gyubum** – Tertön Gyurmé Dorjé (1646–1714; P7) standardized the collection into 23 volumes, correcting textual errors and inconsistencies in order and including well-arranged tantras, practice sections, and instructions.
7. **The Dalai Hutuktu Gyubum** – A 30-volume edition by Dalai Hutuktu Ngawang Shedrup Gyatso (d. ca. 1748; P10302), based on the Mindröling version.
8. **The Takpu Drakmar Gyubum** – Compiled at Takpu Drakmar Monastery in the 18th century from the Gongra Ngétsang Dorjé Ling and Mindröling collections.

[221] Guru Tashi et al., “rnying ma rgyud ’bum/ (sde dge oar ma/),” BUDA: The Buddhist Digital Archives, https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW21939?

9. **The Jikme Lingpa Gyubum** – Rigdzin Jikme Lingpa (1729/1730–1798; P314) created 26 volumes based on many exemplars, including Ratna Lingpa's collection.

From these, notable surviving editions include:

- **The Derge Gyubum** (W21939): 26 woodblock-printed volumes sponsored by the Derge nun Tsewang Lhamo (d. 1812; P10MS14671), printed between 1794–1798 and distributed in Central and Eastern Tibet.
- **The Zhichen Gyubum** (W2PD17382): 39 volumes in cursive script preserved at Katok Zhichen Monastery, produced at Drakmar Monastery under Kunzang Khyabdal Lhundrub (b. 17th cent.; P6988).

Other important Bhutanese and Himalayan editions include:

10. **Gdongkarla Gyubum** – Built in 1647 under the patronage of the King of Khaling, Dewa, and his consort, following the instructions of Spa-gro Chöje Chöwang Lhundrub (b. 17th cent.; P2718). This 28-volume set, located in western Bhutan, was reportedly completed in just over two months.
11. **First Gangteng Gyubum** – Created ca. 1642 by Padling III Tshultrim Dorje (1598–1669; P1692) to fulfill the wishes of his master, Gangteng Tulku I Gyalser Pema Trinle (1565–1642; P2659).
12. **Second Gangteng Gyubum** – Produced ca. 1726/1727 under Tulku Mipham Wangpo (1709–1738; P531) to continue the legacy of Gangteng Tulku II Tendzin Lekpai Dön Drub (1645–1726; P514).
13. **Tshamdrak Gyubum** (W21521) – Compiled by Tshamdrak Tulku Ngawang Drubpa (1682–1748; P526) from the first Gangteng edition, likely completed between 1726–1728.
14. **Drametse Gyubum** (W3CN6760/W2PD19897) – An 18th-century manuscript at Drametse Monastery in eastern Bhutan.
15. **Pasgar Gyubum** – An 18th-century manuscript preserved at Pasgar Monastery in Thimphu, Bhutan.
16. **Sangye Ling Gyubum** (W1KG16449) – Kept at Sangye Ling Monastery in Tawang, India.

These six Bhutanese *Gyubums* form a single lineage from central Bhutan, all in 46 volumes.

17. **Tsenor Gyubum** (W2PD19896) – A 33-volume edition created in the late 18th century as a memorial to Katok Rigdzin Tsewang Norbu (1698–1755; P676).
18. **Tingkye Gyubum** (W21518) – A 36-volume edition, including a three-volume catalogue, printed in Thimphu between 1973–1975 under the guidance of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (1910–1991; P625) and sponsorship of the Queen Mother of Bhutan, Phuntshok Chodron, and others. The original was compiled by Rigdzin Pema Chöpel (1772/1773–1836; P2DB20793) at Tingkye Monastery.

From the Nepal–Tibet border region come:

19. **Nupri Gyubum** – A 37-volume manuscript compiled in 1813–1814 at Brakar Taso under Drakar Taso Tulku Chökyi Wangchuk (1775–1837; P5630), now preserved in Nupri, Nepal.
20. **Kathmandu Gyubum** – Another 37-volume manuscript from Solukhumbu, eastern Nepal, likely early 19th century, now held in the National Archives of Nepal.

Later and modern notable editions include:

21. **Vairocana Gyubum** (W21519) – Eight volumes of rare Nyingma tantras translated by Vairocana and others in the eighth century, compiled by Tokden Rinpoche (1938–2023) and published in 1971.
22. **Gatkar Nyingma Gyubum** (W1BL6) – A 25-volume set preserved at Drakmar Monastery in Gatkar, lower Dolpo, western Nepal, mostly in *Ume* script.
23. **Pal Tsek Gyubum** (W1KG14783) – A 58-volume digital image collection compiled by the Pal Tsek Tibetan Ancient Book Research Institute and published in 2009.
24. **Chinese Tibetology Collection** (W3CN3207) – A 49-volume photocomposition set compiled by the Kanjur and Tanjur Comparative Research Office of the China Tibetology Research Center, published in 2015.

The detailed histories of these editions are drawn from the works of Guru Tashi, Jikme Lingpa, Dze Gepa Chenpo Gyurme Tsewang Chokdrup, the Pal Tsek Institute, Tenzin Chogyal, Thubten Chodar, Orna Almogi, and Dolpo Tulku Orgyen Choying Yeshe, with additional research by Rup Chandra of the Shechen Research Unit.

Appendix II

Depiction of the Laṅkā transmission. The main figure is Vajrapāṇi in blue color and in his peaceful form; surrounded by the five *Vidyādharas* and King Ja in the upper part, followed by Nyag Lotsawa Yeshe Zhonnu (*nyag lo tsA ba ye shes gzhon nu*, 8th c.), Nubchen Sangye Yeshe (*gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes*, 9th c.), Zurchen Shakya Jugne, Lonchenpa and Gyurme Dorje (*'gyur med rdo rje,* 1646-1714)[222]

[222] Jeffrey Watt and Karma Gellek, "Vajrapani (Bodhisattva & Buddhist Deity) - Bodhisattva," Himalayan Art Resources, 2013, https://www.himalayanart.org/items/30996.