

Figure 3.2 Mi-she-ring, the “long-life man,” derived from the Chinese god of longevity Shouxing, is a buffoon figure in monastic dance-dramas. He is popularly (though incorrectly) identified with the eighth-century Chan master Moheyuan, and so has come to represent the Chinese false teacher.

future, consoles the distraught monarch by revealing his daughter’s miserable condition in past lives, and her good fortune to enjoy a birth in the royal family, if only for a short time, owing to a karmic debt (*lam-chags*) that the monarch has now unwittingly repaid. The princess, having formed a connection with Padmasambhava, will henceforth continue to improve her condition in subsequent lives, to take birth eventually, as the earlier version had affirmed, as Longchen Rabjampa, referred to here by his proper name, Drime Özer. Though the tale seems to emphasize rebirth and karma once again, it is with a view no longer to vindicate those doctrines, so much as to accentuate the magnificence of Padmasambhava, knower of the three times, ultimate agent of the salvation of the Tibetan people. The archaic ritual dimension of the early version, concerned to secure the rebirth of a deceased infant in the same family into which she had been already born, is now mostly lost to history. It survived, however, as Blondeau has shown, where it first arose, in the continuing practices of Tibetan funerary ritual.

4

Plague, Power, and Reason

The Royal Conversion to Buddhism Reconsidered

The Puzzle of the Tibetan Conversion

In the preceding chapters I have emphasized primarily the representation in later Tibetan writings of themes connected with the Tibetan imperial conversion, though by focusing upon the *Sba-bzhed* (The Testament of Ba), I have also sought to suggest something of the manner in which in its early phases the growing myth of the conversion indeed referred back to aspects of the religious situation under the old Tibetan empire. In concluding part 1, let us turn now to the conversion itself, adhering so far as is possible to evidence derived from texts and artifacts that, for the most part, assuredly do stem from the period concerned.¹ On the basis of this material, I shall attempt to sketch out here, not so much a history of events, but rather a speculative reconstruction of the intentions that the early Tibetan adoption of Buddhism involved.

The conversion of Trhi Songdetsen and its ramifications for the Tibetan empire have been much discussed by contemporary Tibetans. Those investigating the earliest available sources have succeeded in recent decades in bringing a substantial body of relevant material to light that not so long ago had either seemed altogether incapable of adequate decipherment or was otherwise buried in obscurity.² Nevertheless, despite the materials that are now at our disposal, prejudgements about Tibetan history, whether stemming from an earlier phase in our knowledge of Tibet or from popular misrepresentations, remain in wide circulation.

A prominent aspect of the Western myth of Tibet is that the Tibetans were a nation of semibarbarous warriors who were civilized and thus tamed by the gentle teachings of Buddhism.³ Whatever partial truths may have contributed to this myth, the actual historical record makes perfectly clear that it would be an absurdity to describe the conversion of the empire in any such terms: after all, Trhi Songdetsen’s armies sacked the Chinese capital in 763, that is, within two years of his adoption of the religion of peace. And his son, Trhi Desongtsen, whom we know to have been raised as a child under the tutelage of Buddhist monks,⁴ was not in the least hesitant to continue to assert Tibetan military power in Inner Asia. That he at least saw no con-

tradition here is clearly indicated by the introduction to his commission of a lexical guide to Buddhist scriptural translations, which tells us:

In the horse year the Emperor Tshi Desongtsen dwelt in the Öcangdo palace in Kyi. The old armies of east and west had been rotated and the brigands quelled. The messenger(s) of the Karluk offered homage. The Great Ministers . . . and others brought much tribute from the territories, and offered camels, horses and cattle to His Majesty. As a follow-up to the awards that he granted to each according to rank from Zhanglon on down, he gave his command that . . . those who had become master translators . . . should write a catalogue of the Tibetan translations and coinages deriving from the Sanskrit of the Greater and Lesser Vehicles.⁵

The assumption that Buddhism and imperium might be incompatible is one that would not have occurred to these Buddhists, and, indeed, it is one that few serious students of Buddhist history would countenance today.⁶

Nevertheless, there is a more subtle version of this view that does, I think, continue to lurk in the background of the study of early Tibet. The argument runs something like this: Tibet rose to imperial greatness, ruling much of Inner Asia and successfully challenging even such potent adversaries as the Arabs and the Chinese, largely on the strength of its indigenous resources and traditions. (This premise seems in essence true.) Within a few generations of the conversion to Buddhism, however, the empire grew weak, and, riven by factional feuds among the nobles, it collapsed. (True as well.) Evidently, the later monarchs' religious concerns led them to divert too much in the way of resources to the monks and monasteries, and to devote too little to the maintenance of Tibet's earlier strengths.⁷ This conclusion, however, is a non sequitur.

Available evidence does not permit a neat and clear clarification of all the issues raised here, but certainly several elements of the argument are suspect. Factional feuding of the nobility, for instance, is known to have preceded and accompanied the rise of the empire, and so it was by no means uniquely tied to the presence of Buddhism.⁸ It is more likely the case that religious faction was above all the result, and not the cause, of deeper divisions among Tibet's lords. That is to say, religion became a means for the representation of political difference. We do not yet have sufficient knowledge of the imperial economy to determine to what extent patronage of Buddhism may have drained the exchequer. But at the same time, it is clear that the Tibetan armies at the frontiers were massively dependent upon *corvée* labor, the forced impression of conquered peoples into military service, and the expropriation of animals, goods, and commodities in the conquered territories, arrangements that were no doubt well suited to an empire still expanding into new territory, but probably destabilizing once the pace of imperial expansion slowed.⁹ The primary reason, in fact, to single out Buddhism as having had a special causal relation with the decline of the empire is that the predominant Tibetan historical myth, in *both* its Buddhist and Bönpo versions, does just that,¹⁰ but the myth accentuates the supposed role of religious dispute precisely because it was composed by religious partisans, for whom religion was a uniquely compelling concern.¹¹ In Tibet, as in religious societies elsewhere, such concern fundamentally shaped the manner in which history came to be written, but it is less clear that the history we are now examining was itself so shaped.

It seems, then, preferable to leave the question of the relationship between Buddhism and the empire's decline to one side, until at least there is more advance in the study of such issues of certain relevance to this, such as the imperial economy, old Tibetan civil and military institutions, and the formation of the early aristocracy.¹² But by our raising these questions, the role of Buddhism under the Tibetan empire is itself problematized, and it is this that introduces the matter to be considered here: if the old traditions of Tibet were, as seems the case, entirely adequate to support the early growth of the empire, and if the Buddhism adopted under the empire was, as I have suggested, in any case compatible with Tibet's martial culture,¹³ why did the emperors judge it to be desirable to adopt the foreign religion at all? What was Buddhism's special appeal to them?

The Power of Plague

We have seen earlier that occurrences of plague and epidemics were among the circumstances that the *Testament of Ba* recalled in connection with events leading up to the emperor's conversion, and that the earliest sources offer some confirmation in this regard. The emperor himself, in his later edict discussing the conversion, had said:

That [Buddhism] was not the old religion. Because it did not accord with the propitiations and rites of the tutelary deities, all suspected it to be no good. They suspected it would harm [me, His Majesty]. They suspected it would threaten governance. They suspected [that it brought about] epidemics and cattle plagues. They suspected it, when famine suddenly fell upon them.¹⁴

It is characteristic of our modern sensibility to think that, for the most part, epidemics and the like were outside the domain of human rational control until very recently. Many of us tend to harbor a perspective according to which—from the standpoint of public health policy and similar matters—shamanic healing, Buddhist merit making, and contact with the relics of long deceased Catholic saints represent essentially similar, quasi-magical efforts to manipulate one's environment in the absence of sound scientific knowledge. It is important for us to recall, therefore, that medieval peoples certainly did not see things in this way. They, like ourselves, held that some beliefs and practices were sensible and others foolish. Destructive diseases were, as they indeed still are, particularly terrifying deformations of human existence, and the belief, true or false, that we have won or are in the process of winning some degree of apparently rational mastery over them counts for a great deal among us. And, generally speaking, this was true, too, of medieval peoples.

I emphasize these simple points because we too often tacitly accept the modern religionists' dichotomy of sacred and profane spheres and read it back into the worlds of our forebears. If we wish to make sense of the preferability of Buddhism to some in medieval Tibet, we need to understand how they thought it rationalized, more adequately than its competitors, the frailties of our concrete existence in the world. The adoption of the cosmology of karma and saṃsāra, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, did not preclude, and in some respects no doubt encouraged, the performance of what we might hold to be magical ritual,¹⁵ but also it did appear to make intelligible why it was that among such rituals there were sometimes those that

worked and other times those that failed; and did so in a lawlike manner. Furthermore—and this should be borne in mind in connection with all that will follow—the cosmology of karma and *samsāra* comported well with an imperial interest in legislation; that is to say, law and order may be reinforced by assenting to cosmic justice and order.¹⁶

We may note parenthetically that, despite the emperor's concern to allay fears regarding the cults of the Tibetan protective divinities and his insistence on the explanatory soundness of karma, this conflict is one that in fact has never been fully resolved for the Tibetans, even in our own times. In an address to the Tibetan community as recently as 1996, the present Dalai Lama criticized those who, he said, place too much faith in the supposed agency of divine protectors and attend too little to the management of their own karma.¹⁷ I do not think that he had Trhi Songtseten's edict in mind; the resemblance of the arguments is coincidental, and for that reason all the more striking.¹⁸

The Charisma of Reason

Weberian reflections on religion sometimes underscore a broad distinction between spontaneous, charismatic sources of authority, and rational, institutional ones, and in this connection emphasize the conception of a routinization of charisma.¹⁹ With the establishment, for instance, of a trained priesthood or church, the uncanonness of charisma becomes contained and controlled. But this is not to say that it is lost. It is important that we consider in this regard the possibilities afforded for a charismaticization of reason. Imperial Buddhism in medieval Tibet may be taken, I think, as a case in point.

The early Tibetan kings were certainly regarded as divine in their origin, and, as we have seen in chapter 1, much of what we know of pre-Buddhist Tibetan cult relates to the cult of the kings.²⁰ Tsenpo (*btsan-po*), the proper designation by which the Tibetan monarch was known, a term relating to secure power and strength,²¹ may also relate the ruler to the *tsen* (*btsan*), a class of divinities often associated with mountains, high ground, and cliffs, who in contemporary Tibetan religion are commonly regarded as demonic temple protectors.²² The title was first adopted, it seems, by the rulers of Yarlung and came to refer uniquely to the Tibetan emperor, rather in the manner that "tsar" did to the ruler of the Russian empire.²³ Chinese chroniclers were content to write the phonetic approximation, *zānpǐ*, in Chinese characters, and not to attempt a translation.²⁴ We must bear in mind, then, that the Tibetan emperor thus enjoyed a unique sacral-political status.²⁵

Later Tibetan historiography attributes three great civilizing innovations to the seventh-century ruler Songtsen Gampo (c. 617–649), whose conquests are usually seen as defining the beginnings of the Tibetan empire: the introduction of a system of writing, the codification of the laws, and the inception of Tibetan Buddhism.²⁶ These themes have been much mythologized in the writings of post-eleventh-century historians, and their accounts can be used only with great caution. Nevertheless, their association of literacy, legislation, and religious change probably does represent a genuine insight into the structural relationships among these three undeniably crucial turns in the cultural history of early medieval Tibet. The burgeoning dimensions of the Tsenpo's realm, and the attendant increase in the complexity of its civil and

military administration, and of its relations with its neighbors, most certainly required close attention to the regularization of the practices and policies of the state at many levels. Under such circumstances, writing and recordkeeping became indispensable technologies. The earliest statement of what took place when the empire was born during the early seventh century, as recorded some two centuries later in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* from Dunhuang, reflects such concerns:

Formerly, Tibet had no writing, but during the lifetime of this emperor the Great Legislation that was the Sacred Authority of Tibet (*bod-kyi gtsug-lag bka'-grius chad-mo*),²⁷ as well as the rank-order of ministers, the powers of both great and small, the awards in recognition of excellence, the punishments for misdeeds, the regularization, among farmers and herdsmen, of pelt, acreage and roadways, the measures of volume and weight, etc.—all of the righteous governance of Tibet emerged during the time of the emperor Trhi Songtsen. Because everyone recalled and experienced his beneficence, they called him by the name of "Songtsen the Wise" [Songtsen Gampo].²⁸

We may be inclined to assume that the ancient institutions of Tibetan sacral kingship provided a fully adequate ideological basis for the Tibetan empire. An early and important passage such as this one indeed supports that view, as it contains no suggestion that the royal innovations were founded upon anything besides more ancient Tibetan customs and institutions. This reading, however, may be in certain respects naive. For the process whereby the principality of Yarlung grew to become the kingdom of Tibet, continued to expand to include territories and peoples beyond the confines of the Tibetan world, and in so doing required and created a literate imperial administration is scarcely conceivable without being accompanied by significant ideological transformations. The advent of literacy and literate practices were thus consequences of and conditions for great changes in many aspects of the culture of Tibet. Our problem is to understand the nature of such changes in relation to the continuities with the past that seem also to be emphasized in our sources.

Literacy contributed to the emergence of and empowerment of new classes whose makeup is not yet well understood.²⁹ Certainly, those members of the older dominant classes who became literate—or at least came to depend upon the services of literate persons they employed—were included among them, and we must also suppose there to have been scribes, clerks, supply and taxation officers, et cetera, whose corporate identity was newly engendered above all by their employment in the creation and maintenance of written records. Even assuming, as likely was the case, that many such persons would have been of menial status, their literate labor became a condition for the power of those whom they served.³⁰ The written word, in short, was a new and powerful technology in the Tibetan world that could not readily be reduced to or subsumed within the sacral, economic, or martial powers that alone had dominated Tibet until the time of Songtsen Gampo.

The archaic, preliterate ideology of Tibetan sacral kingship, centered upon the local cults of the Yarlung valley and its environs, could not have remained perfectly stable for long. The internal constitution and foreign relations of the newly literate empire both increasingly favored writing as a vehicle for the organization not only of established knowledge but also of diplomacy, intelligence, and the assimilation and diffusion of new knowledge within a heterogeneously composed, literate community. Great skill in the techniques of the written word came to be imbued with a

peculiar charisma of its own, and it would have been natural to attribute this power to neighboring civilizations whose longer histories of literacy gave them relatively greater advancement here, and who thus offered models for Tibetan emulation.³¹ The Chinese chancellery and the Buddhist monastery were certainly not the sole exemplars of mastery over the arts of writing available to Tibetans of the seventh and eighth centuries, but they would have been among the most impressive. That foreign cultural influences, and Buddhist and Chinese influences above all, should have become important forces in Tibet in the wake of the creation of the Tibetan script was thus entailed in some measure by the circumstances attending the growth of the empire itself.³² Tibet could have maintained its archaic traditions wholly unchanged only by rereating into itself, foregoing the path of imperial expansion.

It is in part owing to the vagaries of later history that in one area alone the evidence bearing on the organization of knowledge in early medieval Tibet is far better preserved than in any other and is extremely impressive. I refer, of course, to the transmission and codification of Buddhist learning during the late eighth and early ninth centuries. For it was here, given the position of Buddhism as the dominant ideology throughout postimperial Tibetan history and the aura of sacrality that came to surround the Buddhism of the imperial period in particular, that the later tradition preserved in relative abundance documents of fundamental importance.³³ From our own distant vantage point, the reason that the achievement of the empire's Buddhists in the redaction of scriptural learning appears to overwhelm other accomplishments of Tibetan learning thus may be the result of the fortuitous conjunction of superior preservation during a later period with religious charisma acquired after the fact. Despite this, there can be little doubt that the very great efforts made to establish Buddhism and Buddhist learning in the Tibetan empire do reflect in part the value attributed to them by Tibet's rulers during the eighth and ninth centuries: monastic, clerical Buddhism, with its trained scholars and scribes, its language sciences and methods of translation, its libraries and catalogues, its systematization of reasoning and debate, provided medieval Tibet with an ideal model of organized knowledge.³⁴ In a sprawling empire in which the management of knowledge must have been felt as an ever more urgent concern, part of the charisma attributed to Buddhism stemmed from its particular mastery over the arts of the written word, its mastery of reason.³⁵

Stephen Teiser has argued recently that the Chinese emperors who sponsored the production of Chinese Buddhist canonical collections did so because it was possible to regard the canon, the Buddhist Scriptural Treasury, precisely as an imperial treasure. The royal possession of the Dhamakāya—the corpus of the Buddha's doctrine—became in effect a new source of royal charisma.³⁶ Something similar seems to have taken place in Tibet, but we may further specify that possession of the canon signified the incorporation into the monarch's domain of the well-ordered empire of enlightened reason.

Buddhism and Legislation

The themes we are considering are clearly in evidence in connection with the development of the traditions and legends of Tibetan imperial legislation. We have seen earlier that the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, which attributes the redaction of the laws to

Songtsen Gampo, says nothing at all that would lead us to see the influence of Buddhist ethics at work here. This impression is borne out by surviving fragments of the old laws, which are similarly devoid of references to Buddhism.³⁷ Later Tibetan tradition, however, while retaining some records of the old laws, asserts them to have been built upon foundations derived from basic Buddhist morality and the traditions of Indian Dharmasāstra. This transformation is particularly intriguing, however, for as Stein has clearly shown, the incremental evolution of the traditions concerning the imperial legislation can be traced in a number of early documents.³⁸

Crucial evidence of this process may be found in a manuscript in the India Office Library collection (I/O 370), first studied by Richardson.³⁹ This incomplete work found at Dunhuang has the appearance of a school exercise; I have come to think of it as a poem on the rise of Buddhism in Tibet that was to be copied and memorized by young students, perhaps in the early ninth century, though, I must emphasize, we cannot know with any certainty that it was so intended or used. It shows that besides the association of Trhi Songdetsen with the promulgation of Buddhism in Tibet, which we would expect in any case, Songtsen Gampo was already in some circles being thought of as a Buddhist monarch: the seeds of the later legend were no doubt already planted. Of special interest here is the depiction of Tibetan law as harmonized with Buddhist moral principles, also anticipating the later traditions, which seek to find the basis for Songtsen Gampo's legislation in Indian and Buddhist law and morality (though in our present text, the reference to the pillar inscriptions makes it likely that Trhi Songdetsen in fact is the legislator here referred to). The text reads in part:

The lords of men, sons of the gods and supreme kings,
The Magically Sagacious King Songtsen
And the Monarch Trhi Songdetsen,
In the realm of Tibet, a human land in Jambudvīpa,
Well proclaimed the supreme greater vehicle,
The doctrine of the transcendent perfection of discernment,
The Mother of the Sugatas of the [three] times,
That, like the Udumbara flower,
Is an extremely fine and rare panacea,
Benefiting all beings.
And that, equipoised regarding suchness,
Deconstructs the extremes of being and nonbeing;
Thus they taught the teaching of Gautama, the Śākya.
Accepting [that teaching], they made it their spiritual commitment,
And greatly increased it among all beings.
For there to be firm retention of it,
It was written on a stone pillar as a compact between the lord and his subjects.
In the ocean of such sacred scripture,
The conduct of the lord and his subjects became the world-mountain.
So doing, an enduring scriptural foundation was established:
Those born within the realm, Tibet and Kham, were happy,
Harvests were good, diseases of men and cattle rare,
The authority and customs of the subjects, too, were great.
Because divine doctrine and human custom were feared,

They were honored and closely adhered to, so that Teachers, parents, relations, and friends, The elderly, and those of higher station Were gently and respectfully honored in an unerring manner. Because they had a kindly attitude towards all, They neither stole from nor plundered one other. They avoided lying, sexual license, and shamefulness, And were straightforward, reliable, heroic, and greatly disciplined. Though human in body, their customs were divine. In other kingdoms, and among other men, This was unprecedented, and will not be again; Even among the gods this is rare. Because, when his father, the king, died, the son was young, The fine doctrine and old scriptures declined. But the supreme path of truth, the virtuous doctrine, The ten virtues of the discipline, were preserved, And the royal laws of the king, lord of men, Oral traditions taught by wise ancestors— Where else were these performed as in the customs of Tibet?⁴⁰

What we may clearly discern here is an effort on the part of Tibet's Buddhists to demonstrate the harmony that was supposed to have obtained between Buddhism and the laws and customs enacted by the Tibetan court. The demonstration of such an affinity would no doubt have contributed to the rationalization of Buddhism's position within Tibet, that is, it could be seen as not an entirely alien tradition. This in turn paved the way for the development of the mythic readings of Tibetan imperial history we shall examine in chapter 8, in which the innate affinity between the Buddha's teaching and Tibet is given cosmological grounding even prior to the introduction of Buddhism.⁴¹ But in the present context, we must ask, how may Buddhism, in its aspects that emphasized the convergence of law and morality, have served the interests of the Tibetan empire?

In essence, the answer is, I think, a simple one: a requirement of the state is a state of sin. The moral teachings of Buddhism, as those of the other "universal religions," serve as a source of legal and political coercion.⁴² So long as Tibet remained a relatively restricted domain whose subjects held a common family of sacred powers in reverence and were subservient to the direct power of their chieftain, there was no need to seek a source of authority beyond what Tibetan tradition itself had to offer. The foundation of a universal state, however, ruling many diverse peoples and in active contact with many more, necessitated a framework of universal law, which Buddhism was able to supply. The legislative value of Buddhism was, in a sense, made evident by Tibet's expansion into the world.

Imperial Cosmopolitanism

The tremendous influence of Buddhism upon the later formation of Tibetan culture tends to obscure for us the role of many other cultural influences that also became available to Tibetans as a result of Tibet's geographical expansion. The evidence

suggests that Nestorian Christianity, Manichaeism, Chinese historiography and divination, and Greek medicine were to be counted among numerous foreign ways of knowledge to which the Tibetans were exposed at this time. The establishment and dissemination of a more-or-less standard writing system, of course, greatly facilitated the spread of such "exotic" learning within the Tibetan empire. It is of particular interest, therefore, that among the texts preserved at Dunhuang we find translations and summaries of literary works, histories, and other genres of writing concerned in one way or another with the foreign peoples with whom the Tibetans were now in contact.

The Tibetan empire in Central Asia at various times included the regions of Khotan, the Tarim basin, Lop Nor, and other places with Iranian and Turkic populations.⁴³ The contribution of these peoples to the formation of the culture of the empire is less clear than the contribution of China or India, though we can be sure that much of the Indian culture known to the Tibetans was in fact transmitted via Central Asia and Khotan.⁴⁴ Khotanese artistic influence was sufficient so that, in addition to Chinese and Indian styles, Tibetan sources would speak of a distinctively Khotanese style, as well.⁴⁵ Sogdian textiles, renowned for their sophisticated manufacture and design, also made their way to Tibet.⁴⁶ There is some evidence that Galenic medicine reached Tibet through Central Asian sources during this period, and this also points to the Iranian world, perhaps through Sogdiana or Khotan.⁴⁷ Khotanese literature in Tibetan translation is represented in several works dealing with the history of Buddhism in Khotan.⁴⁸ Tibetan interest in the neighboring peoples of Central Asia is further exemplified by a fascinating document in the Pelliot collection in Paris (*PT* 1283), a sort of intelligence report summarizing knowledge of the Turkish population around Beshbalıq, among other sources of evidence.⁴⁹ The old Tibetan versions of the *Rāmāyana*, too, demonstrate Tibet's participation in wider spheres of Asian culture.⁵⁰

I review these facts here because they point to an additional element of importance in interpreting the Tibetan adoption of Buddhism. I have suggested earlier that Buddhism interested the Tibetans in no small measure through its successful promotion of a particular, well-ordered, cosmological framework, which implied the ethical and ritual mastery of the cosmos it promoted, and through its institutional mastery of techniques, which conformed with the bureaucratic requirements of empire. But Buddhism had another feature favoring it that the indigenous Tibetan royal cult did not; Buddhists, so to say, spoke an international language. In fact, given the peculiar position of Tibet, Buddhism in the eighth century would have been the most prominent cultural system known in almost all the surrounding nations; its presence in India and Nepal, China, and Central Asia may well have contributed to an aura of universality.⁵¹ The Chinese princess of Jinchong, as we have seen in chapter 3, brought to Tibet Khotanese Buddhist monks, who departed for Gandhāra in what is today northern Pakistan after their royal patron's demise. And in chapter 5, we shall turn to the tenuous, but nevertheless real, transmission of Korean Buddhist materials to Tibet at this time.

The tale of the Jinchong Gongzhu, however, also made clear that the international spread of Buddhism was not at once appreciated in Tibet. Its significance in this respect could only be disclosed when the Tibetan monarchs began to adopt Buddhist symbols and conventions for the exercise of royal authority, in other words, when it began to emerge that Buddhism facilitated the symbolic expression of imperial power

Trhi Songdetsen did sanction some tantric traditions that were well established in a monastic context, and that had become widely associated with royal cult.⁶⁴ The tantrism sanctioned by the Tibetan emperor may have to some extent resembled that of the roughly contemporaneous Heian court in Japan—if our dates are accurate, Kūkai (774–835) in fact was a toddler when Samye was built in 779⁶⁵—and may have had some Southeast Asian parallels as well (though the history of Javanese and of Khmer tantrism during this period remains, unfortunately, extremely obscure). Consider now the two verses of invocation Trhi Songdetsen offers to the wrathful deities Trailokyavijaya and Acala:

Conqueror of the three realms [= Trailokyavijaya], heroic lord,
To you, who tames by your splendor, respectfully I bow.

May we definitely vanquish

The wrong views of the three worlds.

Sublime Acala, who never trembles at all,

To you, firmer than the power of Mount Meru, I bow.

By all means, may we also not tremble

When confronted by worlds of demons and enemies.⁶⁶

One hesitates to read too much into these and the other short verses opening the *Authentic Proof of the Scriptures*, but it is probably significant that the martial imagery associated with these two divinities is emphasized here (as often it is in Japan as well).⁶⁷ The creation of the mandala overcomes adversity and tames the realm, eliminating opposition to a universal, benevolent order. It may well be that ideologically the esoteric Buddhism favored by the court was so favored precisely because it flattered the imperial self-image.

The *Testament of Ba*, we have seen, reports that during the reign of Trhi Songdetsen's father, Trhi Detsuksen (705–755/756), who assumed the throne as an infant in 710, emissaries were sent to the region of Mount Kailash to invite two Buddhist teachers who dwelt in retreat there to visit Central Tibet. They declined the royal summons but sent books instead, and instructions for founding a number of temples. One of the hermits was named Buddhagupta, or Buddhagupa, and it is a matter of speculation whether he is to be identified with a teacher of the same name who made great contributions to eighth-century tantric Buddhism in Tibet.⁶⁸ Writings attributed to the latter have been found at Dunhuang, and others are preserved in the Tibetan Buddhist canons and in the traditions of the ancient Nyingmapa sect, which traces its roots to this period. The fundamental authenticity of these latter materials in this case finds support at Dunhuang, for some of the documents discovered there and attributed to our author do concern a particular version of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs-chen*) system of meditation that resembles at least some of the material preserved by the later Nyingmapa tradition. This aspect of what we may call the Buddhagupta corpus has begun to be studied in recent years by Samten Karmay and Namkhai Norbu.⁶⁹

More to the point of the present discussion, however, is a considerable body of texts also attributed to this figure and found in the canons. Much of this material is attested in the earliest extant catalogue of scriptures translated into Tibetan, the *Dkar-chang ldan-kar-ma* (The Denkar Palace Catalogue), which was compiled early in the ninth century and reflects primarily the achievement of the translation committees

working during the reign of Trhi Songdetsen.⁷⁰ Significantly, all of the four tantric commentaries recorded there are works of Buddhagupta, and two of these concern the *Awakening of the Great Vairocana* and the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra* (The Tantra Purifying All Evil Destinies).⁷¹ The latter tantra, also known from fragments at Dunhuang, has also been one of the primary texts relating to Vairocana in Tibet.⁷² The thorough investigation of the tantric commentaries attributed to Buddhagupta remains an important desideratum and promises to shed much light on Buddhist tantrism during the eighth century.⁷³ In our present context, however, they are of significance just because their presence in a palace catalogue suggests that the Tibetan court, though in general not very enthusiastic to support the translation of tantric literature, made a great exception on behalf of the commentarial traditions promulgated by Buddhagupta and associated with Vairocana.

The last group of materials I wish to survey in this connection has begun to receive some attention among art historians and archaeologists in recent years. The objects in question are a number of reliefs in stone, as well as several important cave murals, all depicting a similar crowned and mediating Buddha, sometimes accompanied by the eight major bodhisattvas. The Buddha is adorned with the ornaments of the Body of Rapture (*sambhogakāya*); his two hands rest in his lap, and his legs are folded in the vajra posture. Iconographically, this figure closely resembles the Buddha who occupies the center of what in the Shingon school is termed the Mañākaruṇa-gaṛbha-maṇḍala (The Womb Mandala of Great Compassion), namely, Mahāvairocana.⁷⁴

The icon in question has been found in at least three locations in far eastern Tibet recently studied by Amy Heller, where it is depicted in relief and accompanied by inscriptions dating to the early ninth century, to the reign of Trhi Songdetsen's son Trhi Desongtsen.⁷⁵ In one case, the inscription at Denmatrak, a lineage of masters is mentioned who are otherwise known from a Dunhuang Tibetan Chan text, a work that was first studied and translated by Marcelle Lalou nearly a half century ago.⁷⁶ It is possible that the inscription is a slightly later addition, in which case the image of Mahāvairocana at Denmatrak may in fact date to the reign of Trhi Songdetsen. Local folklore attributes it to a much earlier period, to the princess of Wencheng's arrival in Tibet in the early seventh century, but no evidence that has so far come to light makes this very plausible.⁷⁷

Besides these sculpted reliefs, a mural depicting a precisely similar form of Mahāvairocana, again surrounded by the eight bodhisattvas, is also known from Anxi Yulin cave 25 in Gansu Province. This mural dates to the period of Tibetan occupation at the end of the eighth century or the beginning of the ninth.⁷⁸ That is, it may also be attributed to the reign of Trhi Songdetsen or that of his son Trhi Desongtsen. Moreover, cave 14 at Dunhuang, although most of its murals date to just after the period of Tibetan occupation, contains a portrait of Vairocana (in this case sometimes identified as Avalokiteśvara in meditation) that appears to resemble so closely the images of Vairocana just mentioned that either it must predate the remainder of the cave, and so be identified among the images under discussion, or else it was executed with deliberate reference to them.⁷⁹

These facts point convincingly, I think, to the conclusion that the cult of Vairocana was widely promulgated with imperial support, and that it expressed a significant homology obtaining between, on the one hand, emperor and empire, and on the other,

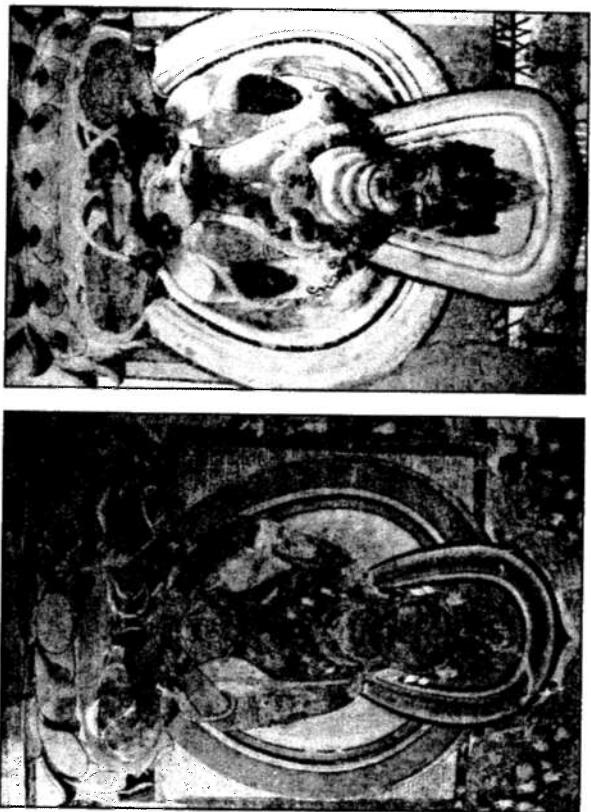


Figure 4.2 *Left:* Vairocana, Anxi Yulin cave 25 (after Anxi Yulinku). *Right:* Vairocana, Dunhuang cave 14 (after Dunhuang Mogao).

Vairocana and his mandala or realm. The reliefs at Drenmatrak or the murals at Anxi Yulin, were, from this perspective, emblems of the Tibetan emperor's pervasive presence and stem but benevolent authority throughout his domains. It is in this respect that Christopher Beckwith has rightly referred to what he calls the "kosmokrator symbolism" of Samye, that is, its demonstration of the imperial agency of a universal legislator; and he further argues that in this respect Samye was of a piece with religious symbols of imperial power throughout the early medieval world, be it specifically the world of Carolingian Catholicism, Abbasid Islam, or Tibetan Buddhism.⁸⁰ We may go further than this, I think, to find evidence here not only of the symbolization of a particular world order, but of the active construction of that order through the imperial promotion of religious monuments and icons. John Strong writes of the legend of Aśoka's stupa building that,

in building eighty-four thousand stupas over eighty-four thousand minute relics, Aśoka was trying to reconstruct the Buddha's physical body on the face of his own realm, Jambudvīpa.⁸¹

And Strong concludes his analysis of the Indian emperor's project in these words:

No longer are the Buddha's physical remains randomly dispersed here and there; they are now cosmologically organized and spread throughout the kingdom. And no longer does the dharmakāya represent quite so naively just the corpus of the Buddha's Teachings; it is now more cosmological and has been systematically implanted in and identified with the kingdom.⁸²

Similarly, but now drawing on the ritual and symbolic resources of the tantras, Tshī Songdetsen and his successors sought not merely to present to their dominions conceptual analogies and symbols, but rather to make use of these in a thoroughgoing "mandalization" of the kingdom that surely also involved the promotion throughout Tibet of temples, teachers, book copying, ritual practices, and much else besides.⁸³ The conversion of Tibet, therefore, was from this perspective much more than the adoption of an alien religion, as if it were a question of the application of a mere patina or veneer; it was to be the wholesale conversion, the fundamental transformation, of a human domain into a Buddha-realm, an empire governed by superhuman insight, power, and law. For this indeed was the imperial ideal, already latent in indigenous Tibetan conceptions of the Tsempo's divinity, and Buddhism provided an exceptional vehicle for the expression of it.⁸⁴ Though the collapse of the Tibetan empire, and the reaction against Buddhism that it may have to some extent entailed, would in some respects undo this achievement, the fact that later Tibetan Buddhists, in their historical legends, came to see their land in just such terms points to more enduring success.

Converting the Conversion

Earlier, I remarked that customarily, when we think of conversion, it is individual conversion that we have in mind. Following James, we sometimes think of this as a sudden and dramatic reorientation of consciousness, marked by profound changes of sentiment and of faith.⁸⁵ By contrast, what I have attempted to illustrate here is that when it is conversion of a nation that is at issue, the gradual transformation of cosmological frameworks, of ritual, intellectual, and bureaucratic practices, and of the historical and mythic narratives through which the national identity is constituted are among the key themes to which we must attend.⁸⁶ Moreover, in the case of Tibet, it is now clear that there were in fact two conversions that can perhaps be roughly correlated, but by no means identified, with the so-called earlier and later propagations of the Buddha's teaching in that land.⁸⁷ In the first instance, there was the imperial adoption of Buddhism, which corresponded with the expansion of the old Tibetan empire, the formation within it of a literate administration, and the need to represent Tibetan imperial power both within and beyond the frontiers of Tibet. In the second, there was a conversion of the conversion narrative itself, ensuring that the Buddhist conquest of Tibet would endure long after the conquered empire had vanished. It is tempting to speculate that it was the empire's adoption of the rituals and symbols of esoteric Buddhism that in large measure forged the passage between these two movements. That is to say, one of the chief means whereby the old empire represented itself as the realm of the Buddha's knowledge and power helps to explain the myths that were later woven about it.

63. Davidson 1994 provides a thoughtful account of aspects of this transition. Wylie 1977 offers interesting speculations on the meaning of the term *bla-ma*, but on this see now Lopez 1998, ch. 1. Pace Lopez, however, I am inclined to think that the term *bla-ma* does preserve some echo of the term *bla*, "vital soul." Refer to Kapstein 1992b. Oral tradition among masters of the Rnying-ma-pa school sometimes also invokes the concept of *bla* in this connection.
64. Traditional summaries of the history of this collection are given in Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, pp. 554–555, 580–588. Germano forthcoming offers a thorough investigation of the formation of the *Mkha'-gro snying-thig* corpus.
65. The treasures (*gter-ma*) are discussed in chapters 7 through 10, with references to earlier research in the notes to those chapters.
66. *Mkha'-gro snying-thig*, vol. 3, pp. 377–390. The story is repeated by Klong-chen-pa's disciple Bya-bral-pa Bzod-pa in *Mkha'-gro snying-thig*, vol. 3, pp. 491–497.
67. This is evident in modern retellings, e.g., Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, pp. 512–521.
68. *Ba-dru-gu-ni phun-yon*, a work probably dating to the fourteenth century (see ch. 8 here), for instance, declares: "[I]n the future, beings will have much on their minds and will become extremely wild. . . . When that occurs, disease, famine, and strife will spread among all creatures, and, above all, China, Tibet, and Mongolia will become like a ravaged ants' nest, so that the subjects of Tibet will fall on hard times."
69. Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, pp. 533–537.
70. Dudjom 1991, vol. 1, p. 517. It is possible, however, that the Rnying-ma-pa tradition is in fact preserving a recollection of the *Dba'-bzhed*, which according to Dienberger (ch. 2, n. 11), describes a "rather unsuccessful journey of Padmasambhava." See also ch. 8, below.
71. *Padma bka'-thang*, pp. 535–547.

Chapter 4

1. Agin I remind the reader that the version of the *Sba-bzhed* referred to here is a post-tenth-century work based on an earlier text, perhaps the recently rediscovered *Dba'-bzhed* (see ch. 2, n. 11). The anticipated publication of the latter will no doubt contribute to the refinement of the arguments offered in the present chapter.
2. See especially Bogoslovskij 1972, pp. 52–66; Ariane Macdonald 1971; Richardson 1998, esp. pp. 89–99 [1980], "The First Tibetan *chos-byung*," and pp. 196–202 [1992], "Political Aspects of the *Snga-dar*," Samuel 1993, pp. 451–455; Snellgrove 1987, vol. 2, pp. 381–463; Stein 1986a; Tucci 1980, pp. 5–15. Of course, many of the other writings on aspects of early Tibetan religion and culture to which reference is made in this book also offer fundamental contributions to our understanding of the early adoption of Buddhism.
3. For instance, Harvey 1990, p. 202, writes: "Buddhism contributed to ending Asoka's warlike expansion of his empire and tamed the warlike Tibetans and Mongolians." As Lopez 1998, p. 7, rightly observes: "The history of Tibet was portrayed as . . . having turned, with the introduction of Buddhism in the seventh century, from a society that had been directed outward, to conquer the world, into one that directed all its energies inward, to conquer the mind." Deniéville, for one, clearly recognized the discrepancies between ideology and practice and so rightly remarked (1952, p. 223): "Ce n'est pas sans accrocs, déviations et entorses que s'actualisent dans l'histoire les principes des grandes doctrines religieuses et morales, et il serait aisé de montrer comment les préceptes antimilitaristes du bouddhisme furent copieusement et perpétuellement violés par les bouddhistes d'Extrême-Orient. . . ." See also Deniéville 1957.
4. The evidence is reviewed in Richardson 1998, pp. 140–148, "Great Monk Ministers of the Tibetan Kingdom," esp. pp. 143–144.

5. Simonsson 1957, pp. 239–241; *Btsan-po lo-rgyus*, p. 60; Ishikawa 1990, p. 1; *na'i lo la bisan po khri lde strong btsan pho brang skyi'i 'on sang rdo na bzhags' stod smad kyi dmug rnying rje'd dang rñun chen bñul gar log gi pho nyas phyug btsul blon chen po[s] . . . rgya las gyang mang po becad del mnga ran dang lang phul mo che phyug lu phul' zhang blon man chad so sor bya dga' dga' sisal ba'i lan la . . . lo isā ba mkhas par chud pa[s] . . . theg pa che chung las byung ba'i rgya gur gyi skad las bod kyi skad du bsyur cing ming du bñags pa dkar chag bris te . . . ces bka' sisal . . .*

6. Renondeau 1957; Deniéville 1957; Forte 1976; and Ling 1979 offer some useful points of departure for reflection on the question of Buddhism's relation to political expediency. On Buddhism in its relation to modern Japanese nationalism, see now Heisig and Maraldo 1994, and, on the historical background of the current tragedy in Sri Lanka, Tambiah 1992. Concerning Tibet, particularly in recent centuries, Dawa Norbu 1985, p. 177, argues: "The very history of *chos-srid gñis-lan* demonstrates that even if force is renounced in principle, it is still a necessary part of a state's existence. . . . This does not mean no force was used in Buddhist Tibet; one can recall three incidents of monastic participation in warfare in this century alone." Goldstein 1989 provides a detailed account of Tibetan political life, and the role of the clergy within it, during the period 1911–1950.

7. Even Tucci 1980, p. 12, writes: "The attitude of *Glang dar ma* was doubtless in part formed by the concern he must have felt at the growing economic power of the monasteries, at their privileges and their arrogance. The steady extension of the religious community brought the existence of the state into serious danger. In addition there was the monasteries' freedom from taxation, the continual increase of their property through the assignment to them of estates and pastures, and the growing proportion of the population working for them in agriculture or as herdsmen, and therefore exempted from military obligation and compulsory labour. Also, donations did not only go towards the building of a temple; in addition they had to support the monastic community belonging to the temple, so as to secure for all time the performance of the ceremonies directed by the donor or testator in accordance with his will. This development deprived the state of considerable resources in both men and revenue. . . . Neat as this may seem, Tucci offers no documentation to support his assertions here. Though elements of his argument are no doubt correct, the fact remains that our knowledge of the economy of the old Tibetan empire remains too poor to permit us to affirm his broad conclusions regarding the implications of Buddhist monasticism for the old Tibetan state.

8. Thus, even in the tale of Tibet's first mortal king, Gñi-gum-btsan-po, the king's death is brought about by rivalry with a retainer. Evidence of feuds involving the nobles and the court is found throughout *OTA* and *OTC*. See, for instance, Beckwith 1987, pp. 11–17; Beckwith 1983.

9. A similar boom-and-bust pattern may be discerned in the histories of many ancient and medieval empires. See, e.g., Finley 1973, pp. 175–176 on the decline of Rome.

10. Karmay 1972 offers a complete translation of an important Bon-po religious history; Kverne 1995 summarizes the Bon-po historical view in brief.

11. Cf. Tucci 1971b [1947], cited in ch. 2, n. 4 above.

12. This is not by any means to minimize the many advances that have already been made in these areas, especially in the contributions of Beckwith, Lalou, Petch, Richardson, Takeuchi, Thomas, Uebachs, and Uray, among others (see bibliography). Despite this, a synthesis of the data that would offer a clear account of the economic conditions of the rise and decline of the Tibetan empire has not yet been achieved, though Bogoslovskij 1972 remains a pathbreaking effort in this regard.

13. The Eastern Tibetan Buddhization of the Gesar epic illustrates this well (Stein 1956).

14. I concur here with Ariane Macdonald 1971, pp. 308–309, and Stein 1986a, that Tucci's emendation of *ma-lags* ("was not") in the first sentence to *ma-legs* ("was no good") is probably not warranted. Richardson 1998 [1980], pp. 93 (trans.) and 97 (text), and Snellgrove

1987, vol. 2, p. 411, follow Tucci in their translations of the text. The text is in all cases based upon that given in *Mkhas-pa'i dga'-ston*, vol. 1, p. 374.

15. As Samuel 1993, p. 446, puts it, "Buddhism was acceptable as a new, improved shamanic technique, which would maintain the good fortune and welfare of the country without threatening the established order laid down in the past." Without quibbling about the use of the term "shamanic," this seems generally correct. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that there were important factions in Tibet that did not find Buddhism acceptable in this or any other way and reacted sharply against its introduction. We should avoid placing too much emphasis upon apparent accommodation between Buddhism and other religious systems, at the expense of the evidence that suggests confrontation.

16. See the *Bka' yang-dag tshad-ma*, as cited in ch. 3, p. 45.

17. *Chos-skyong bka'-slob*, pp. 184–185. On this dispute, see ch. 7, n. 43.

18. One can point to other occasions on which worship of the protectors appears as a contentious issue. In a work connected with the germinal stage in the development of the Rnying-ma-pa tradition, the *Rdor-sens zhu-lan* of Gnyan Dpal-dbyangs, which evidence from Dunhuang demonstrates to have been in circulation no later than the early ninth century, we read:

Question: If yogins worship the deities and mother-spirits of Tibet and Kham, does that accord with the texts of yoga or not?

Response: According to the declarations of Samantabhadra-Vajrasattva,

The worship of worldly gods and demons as superiors,
Would be like a king's acting as a commoner.

Do not beseech them for your provisions, for that would contradict the very point of yoga. (P 5082, p. 165 [138a–5])

This passage has been discussed in Easman 1983. The entire text is translated in Kapstein forthcoming.

Similarly, writing in the thirteenth century, Sa-skya Pandita enters into controversy regarding the appropriateness of taking refuge in the protectors. He concludes that if the protectors are Buddhas or bodhisattvas, then they are already included in the refuge in the Three Jewels, so that no special refuge in them is warranted, whereas if they are not, then by no means should one take refuge in them at all (*Sa-pun gsung-'bum*, vol. 1, p. 18).

19. Weber 1964.

20. Ch. 1, n. 11, and, in this chapter, n. 2.

21. For example, *bisan-sa* means "stronghold," and *bisan-thabs*, "forceful means."

22. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956, ch. 12. Philippe Cornu, cited in Samuel 1993, p. 162, states that they are "all male, and are the spirits of past monks who have rejected their vows."

23. The Manchu emperors, however, did attempt to appropriate *bisan-po* as part of a proper title of their own, in the phrase *tshe-ring gnam-gyi she-mong bisan-pos sa-seng yong-s-la mnga'-sgyur-ba*, "he who exercises his rule over the whole earth owing to the steadfast (*bisan-po*) power of long-living heaven," i.e., who rules by the mandate of heaven. This occurs in the Qing imperial proclamations published in *Bod-kyi yig-tshags*, beginning with no. 47, the Qianlong emperor's 1790 decree to the Eighth Dalai Lama. In earlier documents, however, the equivalent phrase was *tshe-ring gnam-gyi she-mong-gis da-lia yong-s-la mnga'-bsgyur-ba*, "he who now exercises his rule over everything owing to the power of long-living heaven" (Document 43, reign of Qianlong, dated 1762), or similar expressions used at least as early as the Kangxi emperor's 1713 decree (no. 36) granting a title to the Fifth Panchen Lama. We can only speculate as to why *bisan-po* was added during the Qianlong reign, though the ancient resonances of the expression may well have played a determining role here. To the best of my knowledge, however, indigenous Tibetan sources never use *bisan-po* to describe the Manchu or other Chinese monarchs.

24. Pelliot 1961, p. 79. The Chinese chronicle clearly reflects, however, that *bisan* was more or less correctly understood to mean "hero," although it was left untranslated.

25. Tucci 1971b [1955–1956], vol. 2, pp. 569–583, "The sacral character of the kings of ancient Tibet"; Haahr 1969; Stein 1981. On this last mentioned, see also the remarks of Snellgrove 1987, vol. 2, p. 381.

26. A particularly clear formulation of these as three interrelated phases is found in *Bod-kyi deb-ther*, pp. 19–23.

27. The interpretation of the term *gsug-lag* as it is used here has aroused considerable controversy, especially since the appearance of Ariane Macdonald 1971, where it was argued that this was the proper name of the pre-Buddhist imperial Tibetan religion. Stein 1985 very convincingly demonstrates that this cannot be maintained, and that the term refers broadly to what we might term "wisdom," particularly the worldly wisdom of good governance. Hahn 1997 has added to this an exceptionally insightful discussion of the possible etymology of the term.

28. OTC, lines 451–455.

29. Bogoslovskij 1972, ch. 4, describes some of the social transformations that appear to have accompanied the evolution of the empire's political organization during the seventh through the ninth centuries. As he remarks (p. 143) concerning the imperial legislation: "au droit traditionnel de l'époque des clans, se substitua un droit de société de classes. Le but essentiel de cette législation était le maintien et le renforcement des rapports de classes naissans, rapports d'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme."

30. Allan Grapard, in his paper "Ritual and the Economy of Power," presented to the Evans-Wentz Workshop at Stanford University in April 1997, has argued, on the basis of Sakachara Towao's research on Heian-period sutra-copyists in Japan, that their lives were "as bad as that of any assembly-line worker today." He adds: "Analysis of the materials and styles of [their] clothes indicates that sutra-copyists were treated like low-rank officials, below whom, still, were novices and servants. A far cry from the treatment accorded to prelates, and even more so from that of high-level officials who were granted free houses on large pieces of land in the capital and clothing made of expensive materials." Of course, we cannot by any means extrapolate from Heian Japan to contemporaneous Tibet, but we should be cautioned at least not to assume the condition of scribes to have been particularly exalted.

31. This seems to be reflected in the later legends of Strong-btsan's minister Thon-mi Sanphola, which probably exaggerate the degree to which Indian linguistic science served as a model for the Tibetans as early as the seventh century. However, by the early ninth century, when the emperor Kirti Lde-strong-btsan issued his preface to the *Sgra-sbyor-bam-gnyis* (Simonsson 1957; Ishikawa 1990), it is clear that the relevance of Indian linguistics to things Tibetan was now seriously considered. See also Verhaegen 1992a; Kapstein in press.

32. Particularly intriguing in this regard is the role of the *Shujing*, fragments of the Tibetan paraphrase of which are preserved among the Dunhuang finds (PT 986). Refer to Coblin 1991; Stein 1983, esp. p. 201ff. and 210–212.

33. Despite whatever decline may have occurred in the Buddhism of Central Tibet during the century or so intervening between the collapse of the dynasty and the monastic revival of the mid-tenth century, it is striking that much of the Buddhist literature that had been translated by the imperial committees was preserved, as was the knowledge required to read and understand Buddhist canonical texts. It appears too that this included knowledge of the system of Tibetan-Sanskrit equivalencies that had been devised during the late eighth century. See ch. 1.

34. Again, the lexicons and catalogues of the early ninth century strongly suggest this to have been the case (Sakaki 1916–1925; Lalou 1953; Simonsson 1957; Ishikawa 1990).

35. I am not arguing, of course, that reason itself among the Tibetans was an outcome of the introduction of literacy among them. The creation of a literate culture no doubt encour-

ages and facilitates the rationalization of many social activities and probably also supports the development of second-order reflection on reason, but this is not to say that it engenders reason itself. My thesis, in short, is broadly compatible with Goody 1986, but probably not with Goody 1977. For a model study of literacy during the early medieval period that merits careful comparison with roughly contemporaneous Tibet, see McInerick 1989, supplemented by the articles on several aspects of early medieval literacy in Europe in McInerick 1990.

36. Stephen F. Teiser, "On the Idea of a Chinese Buddhist Canon," unpublished. I am grateful to the author for permitting me to refer to this work-in-progress. "Charisma" is not a word of his choosing, however; he speaks instead of "an ideal of power."

37. Uray 1972b; Stein 1986a; Richardson 1998 [1989], pp. 135–139, "Early Tibetan Law Concerning Dog-bite," [1990], pp. 149–166, "Hunting Accidents in early Tibet," and [1991], pp. 182–188, "An Early Judicial Document from Tibet." This last is of special interest in this context, as Buddhist monks were involved in the proceedings described. French 1995, 1996, follows Uray 1972b in attributing elements of Buddhist moral law to the legislation of Strong-btsan-sgam-po. Uray's work, however, was primarily an attempt to interpret the late record found in the sixteenth-century *Mkhas-pa'i dga'-ston*. The subsequent research cited tends to support the view we propose here, that the Buddhist elements were elaborated long after the fact by Buddhist chroniclers, though the process of creating a Buddhist gloss on the early history of Tibetan legislation no doubt began during the late imperial period.

38. Stein 1986a.

39. Richardson 1998, pp. 74–81, "'The Dharma That Came Down from Heaven': A facsimile of the original manuscript was given in the first publication of the article (Richardson 1977). Stein 1986a.

40. *IO* 370 (5), lines 1–16, following the text as given by Richardson 1998, p. 75.

41. The Fifth Dalai Lama, for instance, writes in *Bod kyi deb-ther*, p. 15, that "the royal line had arisen from the exceptional power of the blessing of absolute great compassion [= Avalokiteśvara in his absolute aspect]" (*don gyi thugs rje chen po'i byin rldos kyi mthun phul du byung ba las bskrun pa'i rgyal rigs*).

42. Allan Grappard, "Ritual and the Economy of Power," n. 30 above, makes a similar point about medieval Japan and the role there of "fear of hell." Teiser 1988, p. 12, analogously notes the relationship in Tang China among "a Buddho-Taoist pantheon staffed by bureaucratic divinities; a systematized picture of the afterlife in heavens and hells; the involvement of Buddhist and Taoist monks as ritual specialists at critical junctures in the life of the individual and the community; and a comprehensive worldview in terms of which fate and retribution could be figured and the divinatory arts could be practiced." The promulgation of the Buddhist moral cosmology in early ninth-century Tibet is well in evidence in the first of the Ldan-na-brag inscriptions, given in Heller 1994a, appendix, p. 12. Khri Strong-ide'u-btsan's edict, which we have cited elsewhere, (pp. 45, 53) offers further confirmation along these lines.

43. On the history of Tibetan expansion in these areas, see Beckwith 1987; Wang Xiaofu, *Tang Tufan Dasi zhengzhi guanxi shi*.

44. We have earlier seen (pp. 41–42) that the monks brought to Tibet by the princess of Jinchong were from Khotan. In the early ninth century, the *Sgya-'byor bam-gnyis* (Ishikawa 1990) specifies that the Buddhist preceptors active in the court were from *myi-'og*, Skt. *aparatāka*, the western regions—that is, countries to the northwest of India.

45. On the question of Khotanese influence in the development of Tibetan artistic traditions, refer to Vitali 1990, pp. 6–8, 11–15, 52–54, though, as Vitali argues in the last passage cited, *Li-hugs*, "Khotanese style" may in fact refer sometimes to the style of Xixia and not Khotan.

46. Watt and Wardwell 1997, pp. 34–37, offers the splendid example of a child's coat and pants made in part of Sogdian silk and preserved in Tibet.

47. Beckwith 1979.

48. See ch. 3, n. 26.

49. Bacot 1956; Moriyasu 1981; Ecseedy 1964; Szeeth 1983.

50. Balbir 1963; Jong 1989; Kapstein in press.

51. See Zürcher 1962, map pages 8–9 ("The spread of Buddhism from the 5th till the 12th Centuries A.D.") and 10–11 ("Buddhism in Central Asia and China till the 13th Century A.D.").

52. A graphic example of this is fig. 4.1, the famous painting of a Tibetan king in the depiction of the Vimalakirti story in Dunhuang cave 159; Dunhuang Wenwu Yanjiusuo, comp., *Dunhuang Mogao* 4, plate 91.

53. The development of Angkor Wat in the Khmer kingdom (ninth century), Barabudur in the Sailendra domains in Java (late eighth century), and Todai-ji in Heian Japan (eighth century) are all suggestively close to the period of Basam-yas's foundation.

54. It is likely, however, that some Tibetans had already been receiving ordination in non-Tibetan monastic communities (Snellgrove 1987, vol. 2, p. 420).

55. Chayet 1988, 1990; Mémet 1988.

56. *Sha-bzbed*, pp. 42–45.

57. *Sha-bzbed*, pp. 43–44, for instance, speaks of the icons of Guhyasamāja according to the tradition of Buddhajñānapāda.

58. Richardson 1998 [1990], pp. 177–181, "The Cult of Vairocana in Early Tibet."

59. This association appears most clearly in the case of Tabo, founded by the late tenth-century West Tibetan ruler Ye-shes-'od and located in Himachal Pradesh; see now Klimberg-Salter 1998.

60. Thus, in the introduction to the *Sgya-'byor bam-gnyis*, Khri Lde-strong-btsan famously declares: "The tantras of secret mantra, according to the texts, are to be kept secret. It is also not appropriate to explain and to teach them to the unqualified. Still, in the meantime, though it has been permitted to translate and to practice them, there have been those who have not deciphered what is expounded allusively, and seizing upon literal understanding have practiced perversely. It is stipulated that, among the tantras of mantra, there have also been some haphazardly translated into the Tibetan language. This being so, hereafter it is not permitted to translate haphazardly the tantras of mantra and the mantra-terms except for those *dhāraṇīmāntras* and tantras whose translations have been enjoined on order from above" (Ishikawa 1990, p. 4).

61. Refer to the studies mentioned in ch. 1, n. 49.

62. See, for example, Bernard Frank 1991, pp. 163–185, "La réplique du maṇḍala sculpté du Toji."

63. See Malandra 1993, pp. 71–90, on the development of the group of eight bodhisattvas in India, in particular in the iconography of the Ellora caves. Heller 1994b surveys ninth-century representations of Vairocana known from eastern Tibet and adjacent areas, several of which are also surrounded by the eight bodhisattvas. Despite my reference here to the *Mahāvairocanaśālistambodhi*, we must be very cautious about interpreting the precise relations between texts and icons until we have achieved a better understanding of the rituals involving these deities that were promulgated in the times and places under consideration. As Kuo Li-ying 1994, pp. 152 and 158, suggests, any number of differing liturgical traditions may be involved. The occurrence in Kuo's work of the eight bodhisattvas in a confessional context is also of much interest, given that at Ldan-na-brag they are depicted accompanied by an inscription concerning karma and rebirth (see n. 42 in this chapter).

64. Evidence of this may be also seen in the liturgy for the seven tathāgatas authored by Śāntarakṣita on behalf of the Tibetan king (*P* 3953, in vol. 80, pp. 38–52), where the colophon (p. 52, plate 5) specifies that the composition is intended to "promote the longevity of the divine Tsempo, the son of the gods, Khri Strong-ide'u-btsan, and to make firm his crown,

elevate his royal authority, purify his karmic obscurations, and increase his provisions [of merit and gnosis]. . . ." (*dpal lha btsan po lha sras khri strong lde'u btsan gyi sku ishe bsring ba dang/ dlu mng btsan pa dang/ chab srid mtho ba dang/ las sgrub shyang ba dang/ tshogs gyis spet ba'i ched du. . .*). I am grateful to Leonard van der Kuip for this reference. The genuine antiquity of the text in question is verified by its inclusion in the *Ldan-kar-ma catalogue* (Lalou 1953, no. 147).

65. Refer to the argument of Richardson 1998 [1977], p. 67, concerning the year of Bsamyas's foundation.

66. *Bka' yung-dag tshad-ma*, p. 98 (64b6–8): *kham ssum nam rgyal dpa' bas ngon mdzad pa/ bñid kyi' dai la gus par phyag 'tshal tel/ srid pa gsum nam rgyal dpa' bas ngon nam par rgyal ba nges par bsgrib par byad/ 'phags pa mi g'yo g'yo ba kan mi bñen/ ri rab mtho bas bñan la phyag 'tshal tel/ budh dang phas kyi rgal ba'i 'yig ren gyis/ nam yang sus kyung mi g'yo bsgrib par byad/*

67. Bernard Frank 1991, p. 180. "Leur rôle est de subjuger, briser, brüler les forces, les pechants opiniâtement mauvais."

68. Tradition attributes to him a lengthy letter addressed to Khri Strong-lde'u-btsan (Dietz 1984, pp. 79–84 [introduction] and 358–400 [text and translation]; Snellgrove 1987, vol. 2, pp. 446–449). I am inclined to regard this text, at least in the form in which it is preserved, as pseudographic, though it may be based in part upon an authentic early work.

69. Karmay 1988a, pp. 59–76; *Sbas-pa'i rgun-chung*.

70. Lalou 1953, nos. 322, 324, 326, 328.

71. Lalou 1953, nos. 322, 324.

72. Skorupski 1983.

73. Among the problems we face here, one of the foremost remains the precise identification of the works that can be securely attributed to the eighth-century author Buddhagupta. For instance, though Lalou 1953, no. 322, is the sole commentary on the *Mahāvairocana-hisambodhi* attributed to this master in the *Ldan-kar-ma catalogue*, the Peking edition of the Tanjur lists three commentaries on the same text by this author: *P* 3486, 3487, and 3490. (Though "Buddhagupta" is the form of the name used in *P*, "Buddhaguppa" is consistently used in the *Ldan-kar-ma*.) [N.B. As this book goes to press it has been announced that Stephen Hodge has translated, and is due to publish shortly, one of these commentaries by Buddhagupta.]

74. The iconographic resemblance by itself, of course, does not confirm that the same texts and liturgies are involved.

75. Heller 1994a, 1994b, 1997a, 1997b.

76. See Richardson, cited in Heller 1994a; the Dunhuang manuscript in question is *PT* 996, first studied in Lalou 1939.

77. Richardson 1998 [1997], pp. 207–215, is inclined to draw skeptical conclusions regarding the Wencheng princess's actual influence. He writes (p. 212) that she was "a dim figure . . . who made no mark on either Tibetan or Chinese history in the remaining thirty years of her life [following Strong-btsan sgam-po's death], and whose religious affiliation is uncertain. . . ."

78. Dunhuang Yanjiusuo, comp., *Anxi Yulinku*, plate 39.

79. Dunhuang Wenwu Yanjiusuo, comp., *Dunhuang Mogao* 4, plate 169. In addition to these images, a unique gilt bronze statue has appeared on the international art market depicting exactly the same icon. The quality is very fine, and the statue is stylistically unlike anything else known so far, though it resembles the reliefs and murals just mentioned in many telling points of detail, e.g., the pattern in the textiles of the Buddha's robes. It seems plausible, though given the object's uniqueness this remains uncertain, that it is indeed an authentic imperial Tibetan bronze, and if it is, then it is surely significant that it represents the figure that I have begun to think of as the Tibetan Imperial Vairocana.

80. Beckwith 1987, pp. 173–196.

81. Strong 1983, p. 117.

82. Strong 1983, p. 119.

83. *OTC*, cited here in ch. 3, n. 45, and the documents studied in Uebach 1990 exemplify this well.

84. China, of course, had already pioneered the political exploitation of Buddhist cosmology and symbolism under the Empress Wu (reigned 690–705), to mention only one of the most prominent examples that may well have been known in Tibet. Refer to Forte 1976.

85. James 1987.

86. Hobsbawm 1992 demonstrates that the concept of the "nation" is in fact of recent origin and, strictly speaking, is inapplicable to the period with which we are here concerned. "National identity," in this context, I use to refer to what Hobsbawm terms "popular proto-nationalism." On the application of these concepts to premodern Tibet, see further Dreyfus 1994; Kapstein in Goldstein and Kapstein 1998, ch. 6.

87. *bstan-pa snga-dar, bstan-pa phyi-dar*.

Chapter 5

The present chapter was originally presented at the conference "Korea's Place in the East Asian Buddhist Tradition," organized by Robert Buswell at the University of California at Los Angeles in September 1995. I am grateful to the organizer and to the other participants for their suggestions contributing to the present revision.

1. Tibetan ethnonyms are frequently multivalent and must be interpreted with caution according to context. Tibetans may wish to ponder in this regard such common designations as *sog-po* ("Mongolian," but no doubt originally "Sogdian"), *hor-pa* (referring to any number of Turkic and Mongolian peoples, or Tibetanized peoples possibly of Turkic or Mongolian extraction, and probably derived from "Uighur"), *mon-pa* (used for many peoples of Tibet's southern frontiers, including, in earlier times, the people of present-day Bhutan), etc. Even *bod-pa*, "Tibetan," in some contexts refers restrictively to the people of Central Tibet in contrast to eastern Tibetans. The fluid use of ethnonyms we find in Tibet is by no means an uncommon phenomenon elsewhere in Inner Asia.

2. *Deb-dmar*, p. 18, n. 138, for instance, mentions *kai'u-hi* (< *ka'u-ti*). The work in question was written during the period 1346–1363. Joachim Karsten and Leonard van der Kuip have indicated to me that they have located other, similar references in works of the Yuan and early Ming. On the other hand, the earliest Korean references to Tibet date to the Tang period: the pilgrim Hye Ch'o, who traveled to India during the early part of the eighth century, mentions Tibet on several occasions (Yang Han-sung et al., pp. 44, 47, 48) and significantly remarks, "The king and the common people do not know Buddhism. There are no monasteries. . . ." Koreans also gained some familiarity with Tibet under the Mongols; the retired king Ch'ungson was in fact exiled to Tibet during the third decade of the fourteenth century (Sohn, Kim, and Hong 1970, p. 118). H. Sørensen 1993 complements the present discussion by surveying East Asian reports of Tibetan lamas who visited the Korean peninsula.

3. *'Dzam-gling spyi-bshad*, p. 28.

4. *'Dzam-gling spyi-bshad*, p. 34.

5. *'Dzam-gling rgyas-bshad*. On this work, see also Wylie 1958, 1962.

6. *'Dzam-gling rgyas-bshad*, p. 162: *rgya nng gi yul nas man 'ju'i yul brgal te shar phyogs su song ba na kwo le 'am rgya gar ser sogs kyo ko ri ya zer ba dag gi yul kho zhang zer ba yod yul de'i mi nams gzugs byad bzang lad tshul tugs zab pa/ cha lugs dang yi ge sogs sang/ gyi rgya nng dang 'dra yang skad rigs mi 'dra yul de'i bud med nams rang gi pha ma dang/ khyo po dang/ bu sogs las gzhan pa'i mi nams yang mthong ba'i skabs med zer John Jorgensen, at the conference mentioned in the introduction to this chapter's notes, remarked*

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