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Tantric Ritual and Conflict in Tibetan Buddhist Society The Cult of Yamāntaka

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Abstract

The article examines the employment of tantric ritual as a tool of conflict resolution in Tibetan Buddhist society. In particular, the analysis focuses on the cult of the tantric Buddhist deity Yamāntaka, who is often invoked in tantric ritual to resolve communal crisis or defend society against the enemies of Buddhism. Yamāntaka, whose cult in medieval times stretched from India, through the Tibetan plateau, to Mongolia, China, and Japan, is a prime example of a tantric "war-god" who has been adopted throughout the Buddhist world in the context of ritualized violence. The adoption of violent tantric ritual created fissures, especially in Tibetan Buddhist society, that led to various legal and ideological conflicts aimed at restricting its practice.

Keywords: Buddhist warfare, Ritual violence, Tantric ritual, Yamāntaka

Introduction

Tibetan Buddhism is commonly represented in popular perceptions as a religion that deals with conflict through the noble ideals of non-violence, peace, loving kindness, and compassion. This opinion is also perpetuated by Buddhist practitioners and Tibet's spiritual leader, XIV Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, who, in his strife to establish Tibet's autonomy within the People's Republic of China, embodies the Tibetan Buddhist ideal of conflict resolution through peaceful means of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence). However, as the pages of history reveal, Tibetan Buddhist resolution of conflict has often involved means that were far from being peaceful, even when they diverged from one of the main Buddhist precepts of abstaining from killing of living beings. In this article, I look at the tantric ritual of wrathful magic (Skt. *abhicāra*; Tib. *mngon spyod*) in the cult of the tantric Buddhist deity Yamāntaka (Tib. *gshin rje gshed* known also as *gshin rje*) or the "Death-destroyer" that appears

to have been specifically employed to deal with the enemies of Buddhism. Yamāntaka, whose cult stretched from the Gangetic plains of India through Tibetan plateau to Mongolia, China, and Japan, formed part of tantric Buddhist technology that was from its inception associated with conflict resolution through violent means. This article examines various dimensions through which the theme of conflict and conflict resolution has been conceptualized in the cult of Yamāntaka. The appendix includes my own English translation of the selected passages of the so-called "Yamāntaka Chapter" included in an early Buddhist tantra, the 7th century *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*. The "Yamāntaka Chapter" provides one of the earliest textual instances of the ritual employment of Yamāntaka and violent tantric ritual directed against enemies preserved in Sanskrit.

1. Yama/Māra as the Enemy: The Internal and External Roots of Conflict in Buddhism

The name of the tantric Buddhist deity Yamāntaka literally means the "Ender (*antaka*) of death (*yama*)". This designation points to Yamāntaka's ritual function as the destroyer of Yama. Generally speaking, Yama is a Hindu-Buddhist god of death who comes to snatch people at the time of death and administers punishments or rewards in accordance with good or bad actions performed in life that determine whether a person is sent to heaven or hell. In Buddhism, however, Yama is additionally associated with Māra, who, apart from embodying the principle of death itself, is also the primordial antagonist of the Buddha and the symbol of evil. The traditional way of the Buddhist portrayal of evil is the Buddha's conflict with Māra, dramatized through the trope of "Māra's conquest" (*māravijaya*).[1] Māra embodies the two antagonistic forces of desire and death. According to the mythological account, Māra appeared in front of the Buddha to prevent him from attaining awakening (*nirvāṇa*), and, therefore, he is regarded as the paradigmatic obstacle that has to be vanquished in pursuit of soteriological aims. More importantly, Māra embodies the evil of afflictive emotions (*kleśamāra*), thus consolidating the notion of the enemy within. In the Buddhist concept of Māra as the personification of evil, the functions of Yama as death and afflictive emotions that prevent people from achieving *nirvāṇa* coalesce. This idea is further reflected in the concept of the afflictive emotions as constituting the psychological roots of conflict.

According to Buddhism, the origin of conflict lies in the so-called "three poisons", namely, *rāga* (desire), *dveṣa* (hate) and *moha* (delusion). These three "roots of evil" are considered to be the cause of transmigration in the endless cycle of deaths and rebirths (*saṃsāra*). Already in the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (Collection of Middle-length Discourses; no. 139), the Buddha explained that the cause of various conflicts lies in the afflictive emotions, among which desire, hatred, and delusion feature prominently (Walser 2018, 235). These emotional defilements are described as *raṇa*, a word meaning "combat", "war", but also "turmoil of afflictive emotions". The *Aṅguttara Aṭṭhakathā* elaborates on this concept as follows: " 'Raṇa' is called the torments (Pāli: *kilesa*) of passion, etc. With their absence, the abiding in afflictionlessness is called *araṇavihāra* 'abiding in the absence of strife' " (Walser 2018, 237).

In the psychology rendered by the early Buddhism, the idea of emotional defilement was, therefore, closely linked to the perception of conflict as the expression of the psychological "making" of the individual that through the bonds of endless cycles of births and rebirths led him straight to death. As a result, says Gombrich, "*nibbāna/nirvāṇa* [concomitant with awakening]

[1] For an overview of the *māravijaya* as a widespread Buddhist narrative, see Schmidt-Leukel 2022 and Nichols 2019.

is not a 'thing' but the experience of being without desire, hatred and delusion" (2006, 65). The same grim message of human entanglement in the strife of afflictive emotions is conveyed in Tibetan Buddhist scroll paintings (*thangka*s) by a rooster, a snake, and a pig. These three animals, symbolizing desire, hatred, and ignorance, respectively, feature on the wheel of life (*bhāvacakra*) held in the hands of Yama, the god of death (Schwieger 2021, 100). In his ritual function as the "Death-destroyer", Yamāntaka is purported to destroy the principle of death itself and the afflictive emotions that *yama/māra* embodies.

Apart from its inner, psychological dimension, the concept of conflict with Māra had important social implications that codified the representation of the non-Buddhist religious other. In this regard, Māra exists as the enemy of the Buddha and Buddhism in an external sense insofar that it is construed through the process of stigmatizing the difference between "us" and "them". The formation of the Buddhist identity *via* and *against* Māra as the embodiment of the religious other has been an important part of Buddhist self-assertion. The *Aṣṭasahāsrikāprajñāpāramitā* depicts not only Hindu Brahmins as the proxies of Māra, but also other Buddhist co-religionists who are hostile to the Mahāyāna notions of the Perfection of Wisdom. Nāgārjuna considers the arrival of Mahāyāna as the Buddha's act of saving countless beings from Māra and his people, the allodoxes (*tīrthika*s).[2] In tantric Buddhism, the emphasis of *māra* as afflictive emotions (*kleśamāra*) comes to a forefront insofar that the "three poisons", i.e., desire, hatred, and delusion become often identified with the non-Buddhist gods of the Hindu pantheon, i.e., Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva (Īśvara).

The depiction of Māra as the enemy in an external sense is additionally highlighted through the eschatology of conflict that perceives Buddhism as a religion that is approaching its end. As Schwieger pointed out, in Buddhism "conflict is contingent upon the cosmological course of time", which understands history as the cycle of four eons (*yuga*s) that decline over the course of time (2021, 142). Inherent in this millenarian view is a belief that the deterioration of the Buddhist dharma is inextricably linked to the workings of Māra and his agents, the non-Buddhists. The Buddha tells Kaśyāpa "700 years after my death, the devil Māra Pāpīyas will gradually destroy my True Dharma" (Chappell 1980, 139 and Nattier 2011, 38). Similarly, the prophesy of the *Āryacandragarbhaparipṛcchāsūtra warns that "the party of those who obstruct the Dharma – the party of Māra and so on – will arise, and their power and strength will increase. Kings, ministers, and so on will decline in faith; they will no longer perceive the distinction between virtue and vice, and they will do harm to the True Dharma" (Nattier 2011, 241). In the *Gaṇḍisūtra*, the decline of the Buddhist dharma is conterminous with the appearance of discordant monks who fall ill, while the non-Buddhists and Māras are empowered and come to the fore (Bien 2020, 10). The *Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra* predicts that with the arrival of the last eon, the *kaliyuga*, people will be deprived of practicing the path of awakening (*bodhimārga* = Buddhism), but the praxis of worshipping *liṅga* (= Śaivism) will flourish (Bisschop 2018, 398).

The concept of *māra/yama* consolidates the notion of conflict that operates on two simultaneous levels. First, conflict with *māra/yama* has a soteriological dimension insomuch as it refers to this unenlightened part of ourselves or the "enemy within", which comes with all the strife of afflictive emotions that obstruct the pathway to awakening. Second, conflict symbolized by *māra/yama* is not only conceived in an internal sense, as something alien and hostile within us, but also in an external sense, as a threat to the survival of Buddhism. Embedded in the apocalyptic/millenarian voice is the enemy depicted above as a religious other, which is regarded

[2] The *Prajñāpāramitāśāstra* was preached by the Buddha on the Gṛdhrakūṭa in Magadha, where he "destroyed Māra and his people, the *tīrthika*s, and saved innumerable beings" (Lamotte 2001, 43ff.).

as a threat to the existing *status quo* that will eventually lead to the obliteration of Buddhist dharma. The process of othering and stigmatizing the difference between the Buddhists and the non-Buddhists or bad Buddhists takes on a strategy of "demonizing" the religious other through the concept of Māra that follows a common way of representing evil in Buddhism in general (Boyd 1971). Thus, the conflict with *māra/yama* consolidates the notion of evil, which needs to be destroyed for the sake of individual and collective welfare.

2. "Wicked Kings" and Violent Tantric Ritual: Buddhism in Medieval Indian Conflict

In Buddhist societies, conflict is often resolved through ritual means. Ritual is employed to destroy the enemies, to win battles, to cure diseases and to appease various calamities. The ideological foundation for the Buddhist conviction that conflicts can be regulated by ritual is linked to the idea that "the world of the invisible interacts with the world of the visible and that the imagination makes it possible to influence this interaction" (Schwieger 2021, 144). One example of such "invisible powers" is the wrathful tantric deity Yamāntaka. The cult of this deity is specifically linked to the category of rituals known as *abhicāra*, a term that stands for aggressive rites directed against the enemies. The *abhicāra* may include such rites as attracting (*ākarṣaṇa*), subjecting others under one's own will (*vaśīkaraṇa*), paralyzing (*stambhana*), killing (*māraṇa*), creating dissent (*vidveṣaṇa*), driving away (*uccāṭana*), inflicting the target with fever (*jvara*), or inflicting the target with madness (*unmādana*). The Tibetan equivalent for the Sanskrit *abhicāra* is *mngon spyod*, meaning "direct action", which is often used interchangeably with the word *mthu* (power). Both terms refer to types of hostile tantric ritual.

One of the potent reasons that justify the use of violent tantric ritual in Buddhism is defence against those who threaten Buddhist practitioners. Tantric Buddhist scriptures often authorize the use of violent rituals against the enemies of Buddhism, a category that includes those who slander the Buddha's teachings, those who harm the "Three Jewels" (Buddha, *saṅgha*, *dharma*), and those who deride the authority of Buddhist masters. Tantric Buddhist ritual is also recommended against those who are considered to be "bad" Buddhists, i.e., those who violate Buddhist rules (*samaya*s), but also those who are labelled as atheists or are being simply regarded as immoral (Wenta 2022a). In this regard, the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*, on pair with other early Buddhist tantras, is explicit in saying that fierce rites of Yamāntaka should be undertaken against those who are "devoid of magic spells", "irreligious people", and those who are "hostile to living beings". Despite the appearance of the common group of targets against whom the employment of wrathful tantric ritual is justifiable, the *Mañjuśriyāmūlakalpa* stands out for its emphasis on destroying the "wicked kings". The text provides unpleasant descriptions of Indian kings, focusing on their violent character, moral degeneration, and, in some cases, enmity towards the Buddhists. This negative portrayal together with the description of violent tantric ritual that should be undertaken against wicked kings leads to the question as to whether Buddhism and the state were in actual conflict in medieval India. Was the persecution of Buddhism the reason behind the adoption of a hostile ritual repertoire by Buddhist masters in the post-Gupta period?

Academic theories that try to answer these questions diverge and seem to oscillate between the two opposing views: agonistic and non-agonistic. Some scholars, like Giovanni Verardi (2018), promote the so-called "agonistic view", suggesting that beginning with the Gupta dynasty, the relationship between Indian state and Buddhism was marked by conflict. For example, Samudragupta (circa 330-380 CE), the king of the Gupta dynasty whose empire spanned the northern, central, and western parts of India from the 4th to the late 6th century CE, demanded

a hefty prize as a "tribute of subjection" (164) from the Buddhist Siṃhala monks to allow them to reside in the sacred Buddhist site of Bodhgayā. Inscriptional evidence indicates that the Siṃhalas were enlisted as Samudragupta's vassals (163-64), suggesting that the Indian ruler was unsympathetic if not overtly hostile towards the Buddhists. The *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* provides a rather disagreeable depiction of Samudragupta as a heartless, arrogant ruler, a "shedder of excessive blood", and a great sinner whose kingdom was "inundated with carping logicians, vile Brahmins" (49-50, quoted in Verardi 2018, 163). The resentment towards the Buddhists seems to have intensified in the subsequent centuries. The case of the 7th century Gauḍa King Śaśāṇka, who was reputedly responsible for the destruction of Buddhist monasteries and even the uprooting of the Bodhi tree in Bodhgayā (188-89), under which the Buddha is said to have attained *nirvāṇa*, makes this point valid. Śaśāṇka's assaults on Bodhgayā are reported in Xuanzang's *Xiyuji* and in the last chapter of the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*, where the following description of king's hostile attitude towards the Buddhists – and another ascetic tradition of that period, the Jainas – is found:

> He [Śaśāṇka], of wicked intellect, will destroy the beautiful image of the Buddha, He, of wicked intellect, enamored of the words of the *tīrthika*s will burn that great bridge of religion [dharma], (as) prophesized by the former Jinas (Buddhas). Then that angry and evil-doer of false notions and bad opinions fell down all the monasteries, gardens, and *chaitya*s; and rest-houses of the Jainas (Nirgranthas). (49-50, quoted in Verardi 2018, 189, footnote 96)

Verardi further claims that the antagonistic attitude towards the Buddhists by Indian rulers was fuelled by the non-Buddhist Brahmins, who often acted as the advisors of kings. The Brahmins used public debates to suppress Buddhist elites, and to discriminate and ridicule their "heretical" (*pāṣaṇḍa*) doctrines. The *Manusmṛti*, the first legal text of Brahmanical orthopraxy, which, according to Verardi was "the first step to delegitimize Buddhism", compared the Buddhists to "gamblers, bootlegs, thieves, and the like", and demanded that they should be expelled from town because "they oppress good subjects in the king's kingdom" (196). Surveying many centuries of sectarian tension between the Brahmins and the Buddhists through textual, archeological, historical, and other data, Verardi argues that hatred and persecution of the "heretic" Buddhists by the Brahmanical orthodoxy continued for many centuries and visibly intensified during the Gupta period. He maintains that hostile tantric ritual (*abhicāra*) directed against the wicked kings and enemies of Buddhism, such as those described in the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*, emerged as a military response to the actual threat of Brahmanical persecution in the post-Gupta period. He elaborates on this as follows:

> […] violence becomes openly a part of the Buddhist defense strategy. The symbolization and ritualization of the stages of this process, testified to by a large number of texts and iconographies, should not lead us to believe that it was limited to symbolic actions, an all too common mistake. The *maṇḍala* is the conceptualization of a physical, territorial space where the Brāhamaṇas and their allies must be reduced to impotence for the Buddhists to survive and recreate the Dharma Kingdom, which lies at the root of political Buddhism. The Guhyasamāja Tantra explicitly invites concentration on the three-pronged vajra 'that paralyzes all the non-Buddhist teachers' projecting it on the head of the enemy which will not prevail against the buddhasainya, the Buddha's army […]. Violence is explicitly recognized as having a value, as in the case of one Viromaṇi, a Buddhist yogī who greatly enhanced the cause of Tantric Buddhism by suppressing the *tīrthika*s [non-Buddhists]. (Verardi 2011, 312)

In this regard, the need to defend the Buddhist dharma was the primary cause for the emergence of tantric Buddhist ritual. The analysis of socio-political factors does not deny the

existence of mutual animosity between the Brahmins and the Buddhists but questions the actual reasons behind it. Rather than emphasizing defence, academic theories point towards the competition for the royal patronage as a far greater motive behind interreligious antagonism (Thapar 2000, Bronkhorst 2011, Verardi 2011 and 2018, and Sanderson 2015). Thapar summarizes the alleged tension as follows:

> The antagonism between sects at the intellectual and cult level was doubtless aggravated by the fact of some becoming recipients of royal patronage. This may well have intensified the antagonism into sharp hostility where the brahmanical groups would see non-brahmanical sects as heretics and argue that by not conforming to social mores they were disrupting society and in any case they were identified as preachers of false doctrines. (2000, 224)

The question about the extent to which this alleged competition can be called "hostile" is a matter of debate among scholars. In this regard, Sanderson, the proponent of the non-agonistic view, claims that socio-historical reality during the post-Gupta period was characterized by a thriving religious environment in which different tantric sects received royal patronage from the ruling monarchs leading to what he has described as the Indian states' propagation of "tolerance in matters of religion", characterized by the "balance of influence" in which one religious tradition was not in a position to diminish the other (2015, 159). Sanderson's textual research on the corpus of scriptures belonging to the Śaiva and Buddhist tantras demonstrated the existence of different sectarian identities that are mutually influencing one another and thus owe their shared elements to the process of mutual appropriation and adaptation, even to the point of "pious plagiarism" (most often of Śaiva material by Buddhists) (*ibidem*).

Despite the conflicting views on the degree of antagonism or lack thereof that characterized interreligious dynamics between Buddhists and non-Buddhists in medieval India, there is a consensus that the tantric Buddhist repertoire became more and more intent on assisting kings in the matters of state. The emergence of Buddhist tantras containing rituals meant to defeat military enemies and secure protection for the kings would make this point valid. For example, two important tantric scriptures written by tantric Buddhist masters (*vajrācārya*s) of the Buddhist monastery at Vikramaśīla during the early Pāla dynasty, the *Sarvavajrodaya* of Ānandagarbha and the *Guhyasamājamaṇḍalavidhi* of Dīpaṅkarabhadra, contain protective rituals for warding off the dangers for the king (Sanderson 2009, 106). We also know that Buddhajñānapāda, the *vajrācārya* of Vikramaśīla and the founder of the Jñānapāda school of the *Guhyasamājatantra* exegesis, regularly performed *homa* rituals to protect the reign of the Pālas at a cost of 902,000 *tola*s of silver (see Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung,* pp. 274, 278). Similarly, the so-called "Yamāntaka chapter" of the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* (51.36-40, included below) is explicit in its enemy-conquering purpose: the enemy is explicitly stated to be a king and his army, thus pointing to the sphere of royal politics and statecraft. The *Vajrabhairavatantra* gives two *vaśīkaraṇa* recipes meant specifically for the subjugation of the king and king's minister under the tāntrika's own will (Wenta forthcoming). In this view it seems plausible to assume that violent tantric ritual was used for military purposes and that *abhicāra* rituals against the enemies would reflect the need of those in power for such recipes. Unfortunately, historical evidence for the employment of the tantric rite of Yamāntaka in defense of the state in medieval India is lacking. The only indication in favour of this theory comes from the Tibetan historiographer Tāranātha (1575-1634), whose accuracy in collecting the historiographical data has often been questioned (Templeman 1981). In his *Rgya gar chos 'byung* (*The History of Buddhism in India*) and *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, Tāranātha makes several claims of employing the rites of Yamāntaka during the Pāla rule against the invading armies (Wenta 2021).

3. Yamāntaka and Conflict Resolution as Liberation (sgrol ba) in Tibet

In Tibet, one of the most famous examples of the employment of violent tantric ritual linked to Yamāntaka (Tib. *gshin rje gshed*) against the anti-Buddhist king[3] is the narrative of the would-be assassination of the King Glang Dar ma in 842 CE by the Rnying ma master Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes. Gnubs chen, born in Gnubs in western Tibet, was one of the twenty-five disciples who had been initiated into the *Eight Precepts of Attainment* (*bka' brgyad*)[4] by guru Padmasambhava (see Tulku 1975, 46-47), the 8th-century founder of the Rnying ma.[5] According to traditional accounts, at the time of Gnubs chen's initiation by Padmasambhava, a flower fell on the region of the *maṇḍala* housing Yamāntaka. After meditating on Yamāntaka for twenty-one days in remote caves above the Bsam yas monastery, Gnubs chen received a direct vision of Yamāntaka and Mañjuśrī, and Yamāntaka became his *yi-dam* (personal meditational deity) (Reynolds 1996, 251). Gnubs chen acquired exceptional mastery over black magic, which he used for protecting tantric Buddhist practitioners from prosecution during the reign of the king Glang dar ma (799-842). According to some accounts, Glang dar ma was terrified by Gnubs chen's magical powers and promised "not to harm the Buddhist tāntrikas and to refrain from disrobing and exiling them as he had done with Buddhist monks" (*ibidem*). Dudjom Rinpoche reports that when Gnubs chen was sixty-one years old, he successfully destroyed thirty-seven hostile villages with the Yamāntaka mantra (1991, 611).[6] Gnubs chen was associated with two Newār masters, i.e., Śīlamañju and Vasudhara, the first Newār scholars invited to Tibet by King Khri srong lde btsan (Lo Bue 1997, 631). Vasudhara taught him fierce spells (*drag sngags*) of Yamāntaka, which Gnubs chen wanted to use to kill Glang dar ma (Achard 1999, 21 and Esler 2014, 15). However, since Dpal gyi rdo rje had already assassinated the king,[7] there was no need for Gnubs chen to engage in violent rites. These spells were later sealed as treasures (*gter ma*) due to fear of being misused (Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, 612). Vasudhara and Gnubs chen translated together the *'Jam dpal gshin rje zla gsang nag po'i rgyud*, dedicated to Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka, the tantra which is a part of the Rnying ma Mahāyoga canon.[8] There are two forms of Yamāntaka that have been traditionally associated with the Rnying ma. The first is 'Jam dpal gshin rje Dug ri me 'bar or "Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka Poisonous Blazing Fire-Mountain" found mostly in the Rnying ma Glong chen Snying thig tradition. The second is Gshin rje gshed 'char ka nag po or "Yamāntaka Black Sun" that was later liturgically compiled by Pad ma 'phrin las (1641-1717), an important Rnying ma master of the Rdo rje brag and Byang gter traditions,[9] who remained in close association with the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-82).

The figure of Gnubs chen is important in that he is regarded as the first example of "Tibet's Buddhist political sorcerer" (Cuevas 2019, 174). His engagement in the Yamāntaka rites

[3] The textual evidence for Glang Dar ma's anti-Buddhist stance comes from the late, post 10th century Buddhist sources (Karmay 2005, 29). The earlier Dunhuang documents, i.e., PT 134 and PT 840, researched by Karmay contain no indication to suggest that Buddhism was persecuted during his reign (2005).

[4] For the history of the *bka' brgyad* from the 11th through the 19th century, see Trautz 2019.

[5] For the discussion of Gnubs chen sangs rgyas's birth and biography, see Karmay 2005, Dalton 2014 and Esler 2014.

[6] Esler states that Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las distinguishes two separate events: the destruction of 37 villages and the revolt that occurred when he was sixty-one (2014, 13).

[7] In Tibet, the story of the assassination of King Glang dar ma, who in some sources was called "the sinister king", became part of the "collective memory" and it still ritually enacted in the performance of *'cham* dances as the means of removing evil forces (Meinert 2006).

[8] See the colophon of the *Dpal zla gsang nag po'i rgyud*, 498-677 of vol. 20 of *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* (*gting skyes*).

[9] For Gnubs chen's Yamāntaka legacy in the Byang gter tradition, see Esler 2022.

during the conflict between the opposing aristocratic clans in the early 10th century is widely attested in Tibetan literature.[10] More importantly, Gnubs chen's depiction as a tantric master mitigating conflict through violent Yamāntaka *abhicāra* is often employed as a paradigmatic instance of "liberation through violent means" (Tib. *sgrol ba*) during the chaotic period of fragmentation in Tibet. As Gnubs chen's biography reports: "[During these years], occasions for 'liberating' fiendish beings into the *dharmadhātu* by means of violent *abhicāra* presented themselves repeatedly… Thus, the subjugated were liberated through violence, that is, there was no doubt that they were raised into the primordial buddhafield" (Dalton 2011, 50-51). Although Buddhism in accord with the five precepts (*pañcaśīla*) uniformly forbids killing living beings, there are some exceptional circumstances in which violence, including killing, is justifiable. What are those exceptions? According to Jerryson, there are three things that entitle an offender to exemption from responsibility of conventional Buddhist ethical rules, namely, 1) the state of mind of a person who commits violence; 2) the type of a victim; and 3) the status of the offender (2017, 41). Among these three conditions, the primary importance is given to the right intention, which wholly determines the actual action. The right intention depends on the underlying motivation of compassion, which should drive the behaviour of the one committing any violent ritual. By exercising great compassion, the practitioner "liberates" the evil person from bad karma and suffering of hells that surely awaits him from committing sins. The story of Gnubs chen certainly draws on this concept, when it says that, even though to his enemies his vile actions seemed like a horrific act of aggressive tantric ritual of *abhicāra*, for Gnubs chen it was nothing else but an exercise in compassion (Dalton 2011, 52). The same motif is repeated in the case of the "actual"[11] assassin of the king Glang dar ma, Dpal gyi rdo rje, who is said to have prepared for the assault to the king by cultivating "exceptional compassion" (*snying rje khyad par can*) (Schlieter 2006, 150). The importance of fostering compassion in performing aggressive *abhicāra* rites is already found in one of the earliest Buddhist tantras,[12] the *Susiddhikara*, which states:

> If you perform this [violent] rite to discipline a wicked person, your mind should be without anger and resentment towards that person, you should possess great compassion and concerned that he has been experiencing suffering for a long time because of his evil karma […]. People who practice evil will descend to hell and because the mantra-lords wish to remove the suffering of hell they have devised this expedient means [*abhicāra*] to save and protect them. (Trans. by Giebel 2001, 188)

The reference to the so-called "compassionate violence" as the "expedient means to save and protect" against the evil karma was not, however, a tantric innovation, but merely a continuation of the trope given already in one of the earliest Mahāyāna-sūtras, the *Upāyakauśalyasūtra*. There, the idea of "compassionate violence" understood as the auspicious merit-making activity comes to the forefront, where it becomes associated with bodhisattva's capability to bring benefit to others (Sobisch 2021, 153). In tantric milieu, the significance of compassion as the primary motivation behind the employment of violent tantric ritual created a double moral standard for the tantric practitioners, which thereby allowed them to commit any hostile action, even

[10] For the description of Gnubs chen's role in resolving conflict in Tibet, see Dalton 2011, 50-55.

[11] For assessing the historical truth behind the killing of Glang dar ma, see Yamaguchi 1996 and Khangkar 1993. For an analysis of Tibetan sources on Glang dar ma's killing, see Schlieter 2006.

[12] The story revolves around the previous life of the Buddha, when he was the ship-captain, called the Great Compassionate One (*mahākaruṇikā*). For the detailed exposition of this concept in Mahāyāna-sūtras, see Jenkins 2010 [2011] and Sobisch 2021. For the adoption of this concept by the Tibetans, see Sobisch 2021.

murder, without the fear of committing a sin. Tantric masters kill the evil ones through the use of aggressive magic and, thus, render them a service (Gray 2018). They do not act motivated by anger, but merely actualize the exercise of compassion to liberate those beings from the torments of hell that surely await them for their evil deeds. In this view, killing is perceived almost as a moral obligation to ensure that those evildoers are liberated through violence.

Another ideological aspect that justified liberation through violent means was linked to the philosophical doctrine of emptiness (śūnyatā). Adopting the tenets of the Madhyamaka [Middling] philosophy, tantric Buddhism, following the earlier Mahāyāna Buddhism, radicalized the teachings of the early Buddhist notion of "seeing things the way they really are" – that is, as empty of their inherent essence. Tantric Buddhism claimed that everything, even the *dharma*s, or atoms of our experience, which early Buddhists regarded as existent, were empty, not only of selfhood but also of any inherent existence (*svabhāva*) whatsoever and causally dependent. Such a radicalized position regarding the absolute universality of emptiness relativized every action, even the most hideous acts of killing. In this regard, the *Mahāratnakūṭasūtra* poignantly remarks that when the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī went to kill the Buddha with the sword of wisdom, the bodhisattvas ponder upon the following:

> there is no killing, nor killer, how can there be falling in [the miserable planes of existence] because of killing… All *dharma*s are without substance or entity. Therefore there is no sinner and no sin. Where is the killer to be punished? (Quoted in Cantwell 1997, 111, footnote 26)

An echo of the same idea is reflected in tantric Buddhist sources. For example, the author Bhavyakīrti (10th century) in his commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra* says that "for those who have realized the reality of selflessness" killing – which, in accordance with the basic principles of Buddhist ethics, is the first of ten unwholesome actions – does not cause downfall into hell. He repeats the same argument saying: "Being endowed with compassion and having realized the reality of selflessness, one will not fall even if one practices the ten non-virtues for the sake of beings" (Gray 2007, 253). Bhavyakīrti seeks to validate the performance of violent rituals within the altruistic context of the tantric (and Mahāyāna) tradition, in which an accomplished tantric practitioner, who has realized the emptiness of all phenomena, engages in selfless activity for the benefit of humanity: under such conditions, violent action does not produce sin.

4. Rwa Lo tsā ba and Fraudulent Dharma: Ideological Conflicts Concerning Tantric Buddhist Practice

The use of *sgrol ba* against anti-Buddhist kings was certainly not an isolated incident. Throughout the Tibetan Buddhist world, the use of *sgrol ba* in the context of wrathful tantric deities, such as Yamāntaka, is evident. The best-known example is Rwa lo tsā ba (11th century), the famous Yamāntaka sorcerer who used transgressive tantric practices, including *sgrol ba*, to set records straight with his enemies. The use of *sgrol ba* and other controversial tantric rituals was perceived negatively by Rwa lo's co-religionists. The whole life of Rwa lo narrated in his biographies[13] is depicted against the backdrop of conflict with his rivals who accused him of performing the fraudulent dharma. An example of this is narrated in Rwa lo's biography (*rwa lo rnam thar*) written by Rwa Ye shes seng ge (12th century)[14] and recounted in the 17th century

[13] For the study of different Rwa lo's biographies, see Cuevas 2015a.

[14] Rwa lo's biography by Rwa Ye shes seng ge was translated by Cuevas (2015b). For this particular episode, see Cuevas 2015b, 241-42.

by a famous Tibetan patriarch, A mes zhabs[15] as an example of "liberating" malicious people through black magic.[16] The story concerns a certain abbot, Skyo 'Dul 'dzin, who engaged in a critique of Rwa lo's transgressive tantric conduct as unbecoming of a preceptor.[17] The confrontation between the two resulted in a verbal spat in which the abbot attacked Rwa lo with the following words:

> You enjoy meat and wine of the West [i.e., India]. Occasionally, using black magic, you kill other people. Secretly, you engage in intimate intercourse with women. Because of doing these things, if you were a preceptor, you would harm the *buddhadharma.* Moreover, among other things, you utter a lot of bad things under the pretext of dharma. (A mes zhabs's *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, 17)[18]

To this critique, Rwa lo replied as follows:

> Meat and wine are part of the *gaṇacakra* ritual. If I kill people, I do it only to those who are *samaya*-breakers. This is a tantric commitment. Engaging in intercourse with women is *karmamudrā*. Therefore, it is you who are the *samaya*-breaker with wrong views; after seven days, early in the morning, I shall request that you depart.[19] Seven days later, the abbot's body, speech, and mind became paralyzed, and he passed away. (*Ibidem*)[20]

The above fragment of Rwa lo's biography criticizing his engagement in killing people through black magic and sexual rites involving real women may be considered an epitome of the intellectual atmosphere that characterized the second diffusion of Buddhism (*phyi dar*) in Tibet. It also highlights a larger ideological issue linked to the understanding of conflict in Tibetan Buddhist society in that period.

In a period of three centuries (from mid-8th to mid-11th century), Buddhism in Tibet moved relentlessly in the direction of Tantrism, variously called Mantranaya, Mantrayāna, or Vajrayāna, soon becoming an integral part of what is now referred to as "Tibetan Buddhism". Nevertheless, the trajectory of this integration process was never easy. On the contrary, during the period of the second diffusion, the adoption of tantric practices in Tibet functioned as a narrative of conflict depicting areas of struggle and obstructions set up against the proliferation of the tantras. Whenever tantric practices crisscrossed the axis of the hierarchical authority of the privileged groups, these practices became a highly contentious issue that triggered a divisive debate over its suitability for the Tibetans and set up a mechanism for their suppression by limiting its practices or by subjecting tantric scriptures to censorship.[21] The first attempt at

[15] 'Jam mgon A mes zhabs, "The origins of supreme dharma of the venerable Yamāntaka cycle" (*Dpal gshin rje'i gshed skor gyi dam pa'i chos 'byung*).

[16] *mthu dang nus pa'i sgo nas gdug pa can du ma zhig bsgral ba sogs kyi rnam par thar pa*/ A mes zhabs's *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, 18.

[17] Among the people allegedly killed by Rwa lo through the use of black magic there were Mar pa's son Dar ma mdo sde, and 'Brog mi Jo sras Indra and his brother Jo sras Rdo rje, see Tāranātha, *Gshin rje chos 'byung*, 100-01.

[18] *khyod nub kyi rigs su sha chang la longs spyod*/ *skabs su mi'i la mthu gtad btang nas gsod*/ *lkog tu bud med bsten pas gzhan gyi mkhan po byas na bstan pa la gnod zer zhing*/ *gzhan yang mang po'i gseb tu chos gtam la bsnyad btags ngan smras mang du byas pa*/

[19] *sha chang za ba tshogs kyi 'khor lo yin*/ *dam nyams gsod pa sngags kyi dam tshig yin*/ *bud med bsten pa las kyi phyag rgya yin*/ *de bas dam nyams log lta can khyod kyang*/ *zhag bdun tho rangs gshegs su gsol bar bya*/ *gsungs pas*/ *mkhan po de zhag bdun na lus ngag yid gsum rengs nas 'das*/

[20] *gsungs pas*/ *mkhan po de zhag bdun na lus ngag yid gsum rengs nas 'das*/

[21] Note that the initial resistance to the adoption of the more controversial tantric practices, such as violent rituals, does not seem to continue beyond the 11th century (that is, until the heavy-handed Manchu interventions

suppression of tantric praxis took place during the first diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet (*snga dar*) when Khri lde'u srong btsan (776-815) issued the Imperial Translation Decree that ordered to keep the tantras secret and forbade teaching them to the unqualified (Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013, 75). Furthermore, he forbade the translation of tantric scriptures "haphazardly", i.e., according to the literal meaning (76). Although the medieval constructions and assaults on tantric practice have assumed different forms and emphasis,[22] this tendency has lingered on. For example, the Ngor Chronicle states that "taking the texts literally without knowing the theory of the Tantras, the Buddhists employ many erroneous practices for obtaining release and practicing yoga" (Klimburg-Salter 1997, 238). Among others, especially the decree of the great Puh rangs king, Ye shes 'od (Karmay 1998, 5) tried to restrict controversial tantric practices, including *sgrol ba* which were carried out in an aggravated fashion. The decree of Ye shes 'od criticized *sgrol ba* saying that "sacrifices have become widespread, so that beings are being 'liberated' alive" (Dalton 2011, 14). The direct killing of a person was supposed to be substituted by the effigy. As Dalton summarizes:

> Yeshe Ö was working to negotiate a new relationship between religious violence and the state. The Buddhist tantras bestowed upon their most accomplished practitioners the right to enact violence, and this presented a direct threat to the authority of the Tibetan court. Yeshe Ö reacted by insisting that live liberation remain outside legitimate Buddhist practice. True Buddhists, he maintained, would never offer sacrificial flesh to the buddhas, and when they do perform a violent rite, they always use an effigy. (*Ibidem*)

The exclusion or legal condemnation of *sgrol ba* by Ye shes 'od reflects a turbulent ideological conflict among the Buddhist adepts practicing tantra, in which a distinction was being drawn between the "right" and "wrong" tantric practice. This rigid normative separation reinforced the dialectical tension between "us" and "them" that further consolidated into categories of orthodoxy and "heresy" respectively. The modern English word "heresy" is derived from the ancient Greek word "hairesis", which initially included a broad range of meanings. It was Origen (184-254) who first used "heresy" to denote exclusively doctrinal errors (Henderson 1998, 17). Thus, the entire tradition of heresiography that developed in Western monotheism, hinges upon establishing the patterns of heretical refutation, conceived as the defense of orthodoxy, "the correct belief". As John B. Henderson pointed out:

> The heretic attained the status of the ultimate 'other' in these postclassical civilizations [i.e. Western, Middle Eastern, and Chinese]. He was all the more dangerous because the threat he posed came from within the culture. […] To control this threat required the disciplined efforts of the greatest philosophers and theologians […], all of whom were celebrated for their identification, description, and refutation of heresy. (1)

As a matter of fact, the making of orthodoxy always arises in response to "heresy", through which the threat of an internal enemy can be controlled. Although coming from a totally different cultural context, Henderson's understanding of heresy that needs to be identified, described, and refuted seems not far from the efforts of the *phyi dar* scholars. One of them, Jñānākara, the author of the *Mantrāvatāra* and a close associate of Nag tsho lo tsā ba, takes pains to construct

in the 18th century). In fact, all the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism have adopted such rituals. For the Tibetan Buddhist lineages that adopted the cults of Yamāntaka and Raktayamāri, see Cuevas 2021 and Wenta 2022b.

[22] For instance, Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa* (*The Lamp on the Path of Enlightenment*, 1983), written in response to Byang chub 'od's "confusion" regarding certain tantric practices; 'Brom ston's critique of tantric practice; Ye shes 'od decree attacking the so-called "village *tāntrikas*"; Zhi ba 'od's edict condemning *rdzogs chen* as influenced by heretic Śaiva masters; and Ngor Chronicle's disapproval of erroneous tantras, to name a few.

tantric "heresy" by identifying, describing, and refuting "the other" through schematizing its harmfulness to the orthodox ways (Wenta 2018). The opponent is clearly identified as his fellow tantric colleagues, labeled rather pejoratively as "small-minded people" (*blo chung rnams*), "false teachers" (Tib. *dam pa ma yin pa'i bla ma*, Skt. *asat-guru*), or "non-Buddhist sectarian"[23] (*mu stegs can*). According to Jñānākara, the engagement in transgressive tantric practices, such as *sgrol ba,* was often seen through the lens of epistemological error (Tib. *'khrul pa*), which was defined as "understanding wrongly" (Tib. *log par rtogs pa*). The term *'khrul pa* also includes the meaning of confusion, delusion, and going astray. Some authors, like the 11th century Jñānākara, specify that "understanding wrongly" means "apprehending the incorrect view" (*log par rtogs pa ni phyin ci log tu bzung ba*), which is further defined as a tendency to exaggerate/impose (Tib. *sgro 'dogs*, Skt. *samāropa*) and underestimate/deny (Tib. *skur pa 'debs*, Skt. *apavāda*). These two technical Yogācāra terms[24] are often used to portray dogmatic extremes of realism and nihilism. The tendency to gravitate towards extremes is a characteristic feature of fraudulent teachers (Tib. *dam pa ma yin pa'i bla ma*, Skt. *asat-guru*) who, through their authoritative instructions, and due to the power of afflictive emotions, such as desire, hatred, etc., not only superimpose the incorrect view and deny the correct view, but also make others enter the tantric practice according to the literal meaning.[25] Thus, epistemological error defined as the tendency for the extreme *samāropa* and *apavāda*,[26] as well as, afflictions that cloud the mind are both attributable to false teachers who introduce others to erroneous practice (*'khrul spyod pa*) based on a literal understanding of tantric scriptures. Since tantric teachings have given rise to a variety of unjustified interpretations promoted by "frauds" who, on account of their impurities, accept tantric scriptures literally and, subsequently, fall into the trap of "unjustified denial" and "false attribution",[27] it is mandatory to write a treatise in order to understand and fully realize the unmistaken meaning (*phyin ci ma log pa'i don rtogs shing go bar byed pa'i phyir*).

It is interesting to notice that the attribution of error in understanding tantric scriptures to those who are labeled "frauds" replicates the same argument of emotional impurities already professed by the Buddha as the root of conflict. In this way, a fraudulent teacher becomes identified as such because he is in a grip of afflictive emotions (*kleśamāra*) and thus embodies the paradigmatic enemy of Buddhism as a whole.

[23] For the discussion on the limitations of translating *mu stegs can* (literally, the forder) as "heretic", see Jones 2021.

[24] For the conceptual differences of *samāropa* and *apavāda* in the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka schools, see Ruegg 1981a, 95 and Tanji 2000. The application of these terms in tantric Buddhism is, however, poorly understood; see Kyuma 2009.

[25] *dam pa ma yin pa'i bla ma'i gdams ngag gi dbang gis sgro 'dogs skur pa 'debs shing 'dod chags la sogs pa nyon mongs pa'i dbang gyis sgra ji bzhin 'jug par byed pa rnams*/ Jñānākara's *Mantrāvatāra*, p. 26.

[26] It is worth noticing that Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna, whose *Bodhipathapradīpa* (*The Lamp on the Path of Enlightenment*), was written to clear off the points of dispute on the controversial tantric practices, also identifies *samāropa* and *apavāda* as the two errors about *mantranaya*. The former (i.e. *samāropa*) wrongly superimposes the right to engage in any tantric practice (even the most controversial one), the later (i.e. *apavāda*) overly corrects *mantranaya* to the point that tantric practices are dismissed entirely. For the translation of Atiśa's commentary on the *Bodhipathapradīpa*, see Ruegg 1981b, 212-114.

[27] *Skur pa* (Skt. *apavāda*) and *sgro 'dogs pa* (*samāropa*). These are two technical terms of early Yogācāra formulated in response to the earliest Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness and the Middle Way. The early Yogācāra asserts that the true Middle Way consists in neither superimposing (*samāropa*) what do not actually exist nor negating (*apavāda*) what actually exists. In a tantric context, however, these two technical terms are used in reference to *mantranaya*'s soteriology. For example, in the *Vajrayānāntadvayanirākaraṇa* ascribed to Jñānaśrī, *apavāda* means to "exclude inferior people (*mchog ma yin pa*) from those to be instructed (*gdul ba*)", while *samāropa* refers to the superimposition of difference between the proper accomplishment and the path (Kyuma 2009, 280).

5. Yamāntaka and Buddhist Warfare

It would be wrong to think that the ritual use of violence was merely a speculative enterprise that did not have any consequences for the social reality. On the contrary, the justification of *sgrol ba* and other hostile tantric ritual in the context of Yamāntaka had important historical and social consequences insofar that the performance of aggressive rituals often supported actual military campaigns. As Schwieger pointed out, "rituals for defending against war were not considered to be of any lesser significance than military actions" (2021, 143).

The confirmatory evidence for the use of Yamāntaka in military context is the 17th century, when the ecclesiastical conflicts of rival Tsang and Ü factions brought the issues of protection to the forefront. In an effort to establish their rule in Tibet, the Tsangpa Desi government commissioned army-averting rituals against the Mongol armies and their Gelukpa/Ü allegiances. As a result, expertise in wrathful rituals aimed at destroying the enemies became increasingly sought after, and lamas dabbling in such matters were commissioned by the ruling lords to perform large-scale repelling rituals (Gentry 2010, 145). The elevation of ritualists trained in wrathful rites had a direct impact on their increased influence on the political stage. One of the most important Tsangpa stalwarts of that period, widely reputed for his skill in enemy-destroying rites also through the rituals of Yamāri, was Sog bzlog pa blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624). This so-called "Mongol Repeller" had an active share in Tsangpa expansionist's polity because of the enormous prestige he enjoyed among his contemporaries (145-46). An even more potent example for the employment of Yamāntaka ritual is the Fifth Dalai Lama's annexation of Tibet and the establishment of the modern Ganden Phodrang government. During the period ranging from 1638 to 1641, the Fifth Dalai Lama frequently engaged in violent tantric ritual to fight the Tsangpa opposing forces (Cuevas 2019, 182). However, it was the year 1641, which witnessed the historic performance of aggressive tantric rituals dedicated to the Rnying ma form of Yamāntaka as Black Sun, that would be remembered in Tibetan history as the final defeat of the Tsangpa enemies. Another form of Yamāntaka adopted by the Fifth Dalai Lama with the sole purpose of "protecting, repelling and killing" adversaries was, the already mentioned, Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka Poisonous Blazing Fire-Mountain Blazing Razor. This violent cycle, compiled by 'Bri gung Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, came down from the lineage of Gnubs chen and was used by Chos kyi grags pa to fight the armies of Gushri Khan and the Ganden Phodrang during the war of 1639-42 (Fitzherbert 2018, 105-07).

It was perhaps this military aspect of Yamāntaka that contributed to the spread of his cult beyond the borders of Tibet. In China, during the reign of the Manchu ruler Qianlong (reign 1735-96),[28] the cult of Yamāntaka was systematically integrated into the state religion as a symbolic source of legitimization of the Qing emperors (Bianchi 2008). One of the most important Tibetan Buddhist temples established by Qianlong in Beijing was the Yonghegong,[29] also known as the "Lama Temple". At the back of the Yonghegong was the "Yamāntaka Tower" (ch. *Yamandagalou*) located close to the "Hall of the War God" dedicated to the Chinese god of war, Guanyu. The physical proximity of these two deities points to their martial function. The Yamandagalou was a martial tower, and it was used to store Qianlong's own weapons and to officiate rituals at the time of war (Berger 2003, 118).

[28] For a discussion of Qianlong's lineage, see Bianchi 2008 and Wenta (forthcoming).

[29] For a recent study of Yonghegong, see Greenwood 2013. For a description of the iconography, see Lessing 1942. For a history of Yonghegong, see Bianchi 2008.

The cult of Yamāntaka was also present in the first half of the 17th century in northern Mongolia,[30] where it became enmeshed with the indigenous cult of incense offering of the white and black war standard (*sülde*)[31] of Genghis Khan, who was venerated as a powerful ancestor deity of the Mongol nation (Kollmar-Paulenz 2012, 249). The worship of the war standard of Genghis was undertaken during the war campaigns and various sacrifices, including human, were offered to the standard in order to appease the ancestor-spirit (*ibidem*). The "Hymn to Yamāntaka" (XBM 65) discovered in the Xarbuxyn Balgas collection shows striking similarity with the ritual texts dedicated to the worship of *sülde* of Genghis not only in terms of analogous textual features, but more importantly in the way in which "the representation of Yamāntaka and the *sülde* of Cinngis coincide" (Chiodo 2000, 146).[32] Both descriptions clearly point to a context of warfare where Yamāntaka and the *sülde*[33] are propitiated in order to destroy "countless armies" (see below, footnote 32).

The martial aspect of Yamāntaka, known as Daiitoku myōō (大威徳明王),[34] is also preserved in Kūkai's Shingon[35] and Saichō's Tendai sects of Japanese tantric Buddhism (jp. *mikkyō*), where he became one of the Five Great Wisdom Kings (jp. *godai myōō*). Daiitoku is identified with the righteous wrath of Amida nyorai (Amitābha) of the western quarter (Covaci 2016, 14). The iconography of Daiitoku is built upon the iconography of the Six-faced Yamāntaka as presented in the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* (see below), insofar that Daiitoku is depicted as six-headed, six-armed, six-legged, and riding on a water buffalo. His main face is fierce and often shows fangs. He carries various weapons in his hands, including a club (sometimes represented as the *daṇḍamudrā*), a sword, a trident, and a noose (*ibidem*). He is always depicted with flames around his head. Another name used in reference to Daiitoku is Goemmason ("Destroyer of Death") because he destroyed the King of the Underworld (jp. Emma-O) (Coulter and Turner 2000, 140), thus Daiitoku shares the same mythology with the narrative plot of Yamāntaka destroying Yama. The cult of Daiitoku was linked to the subjugation of enemies both in the court and on the battlefield, and also to the removal of poisons and pain (Fowler 2016, 157). Daiitoku rituals were used for military victory for the overthrow of the Taira forces in 1152, 1157, and 1183 (Covaci 2016, 14). The only notable temple dedicated to Daiitokuji established near Osaka during the Heian period, called the Mountain of the Buffalo's Waterfall (jp. *ushinotakiyama*), was the place of pilgrimage at the time of war (Duquenne 1983, 659). The

[30] The cult of Yamāntaka might have arrived in the northern parts of Mongolia during the reign of Atlan Khan of the Tümed (1507-82), who is particularly remembered for his alliance with the 1st Dalai Lama (Bsod nams rgya mtsho), then abbot of the Dge lugs pa 'Bras spungs monastery. According to the *Altan erike*, Altan Khan built a temple dedicated to Yamāntaka in Cabciyal, which was the same place where Altan Khan initially met with Bsod nams rgya mtsho; this event marked the beginning of their long-term association. See *Altan erike*, 123, n. 22r-22v, and 210, quoted in Chiodo 2000, 145, n. 53.

[31] For the different meanings of *sülde* as "virtue", "power", and also "soul" that could return after death, see Kollmar-Paulenz 2012, 248-49.

[32] The Hymn to Yamāntaka (3r, 8-3v, 3) gives the following description of the deity: "Holy Yamāntaka, because you have a fierce mind, you hold a chopper and a skull-bowl. You cut off the heads of countless armies of demons, and wear them as a garland (around the neck)". In the *Cayan sülde-yin sang* (3*r*, 7-12), we find the following depiction of the sülde of Genghis: "Making an offering I bow to you, holy White Standard. Because you are fierce and powerful, angrily you a hold a chopper and spear. You cut off the heads of countless armies and wear them as a garland (around the neck)" (Chiodo 2000, 146).

[33] It is interesting to notice that in later times, the *sülde* of Genghis embodied the war-deity known as *sülde tenggeri* depicted as a warrior (Kollmar-Paulenz 2012, 249).

[34] For a comprehensive overview of the cult of Daiitoku myōō, see Duquenne 1983.

[35] For the cult of Yamāntaka *abhicāra* in the Shingon tradition, see Payne 2018.

cult of Daiitoku was also involved in the black magic rites meant to cause harm to some target. These rites usually comprised of the fire-oblations and made use of transgressive substances, such as bones of animals and excrement (660).

Conclusion

The cult of Yamāntaka provides us with various vistas for the conceptualization of conflict in Tibetan Buddhist society. Embedded within the theoretical framework of the Buddha's conflict with Māra, Yamāntaka is envisioned as a destroyer of evil that functions on two interrelated levels: inner and outer. Yamāntaka is regarded as the enemy of Yama, the inner evil of afflictive emotions that prevents people from attaining awakening, but also as the external enemy, a religious other who is often depicted as someone who is in the grip of afflictive emotions. From its inception, the cult of Yamāntaka was linked to the tantric ritual of violent magic especially directed against the enemies of Buddhism. The Tibetan version of Yamāntaka popular in the Rnying ma tradition was connected to the controversial practice of "liberation through killing" (*sgrol ba*). Throughout Tibetan history, this tantric practice, along with other transgressive rituals, instigated attempts to restrict its usage on the Tibetan soil. These restrictions, reflected in the proliferation of various edicts legally forbidding the performance of such practices, point to the ideological conflict that initially characterized the adoption of tantric rituals connected to wrathful tantric Buddhist deities, including Yamāntaka, on the Tibetan plateau. This ideological conflict led to attempts at establishing the norms of tantric orthodoxy – a topic that is, however, still poorly understood. Despite the various attempts at forbidding the Tibetans practicing the tantra, the cult of Yamāntaka flourished not only in Tibet, but also in many other regions of Asia. While the evidence from India is somewhat lacking, later centuries provide ample proof for the employment of Yamāntaka in a strictly military sense. In Tibet, Mongolia, China, and Japan, Yamāntaka becomes a warfare god that is evoked to destroy the enemies, and functions as a ritual aid to concrete military campaigns taking place between antagonistic armies.

Appendix

Ritual Against the Wicked Kings and Other Enemies from the "Yamāntaka Chapter" of the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*[36]

No lunar day, no asterism, no fasting is prescribed; he should cause this painting (*paṭa*) to be painted, when danger from enemies has arisen (MMK 51.1, 431)[37]

On the first night after he has begun [the painting], there will be a great danger threatening his enemies. On the second night, even the mighty enemy will be overpowered by a great fever. On the third night, the target dies and goes to the world beyond. That *mantrin*, provided he is very collected, when it is done, there will be peace for him. The body of the enemy will be desiccated (it will be burnt up by fever), and the ruin of [his] family will follow. (MMK 51.7-9ab., 431)[38]

He should draw the *paṭa* of Yamāntaka in that way when a great danger is at hand. He should paint him as five-faced, six-footed, black, wolf-bellied. Wrathful, clothed with a skin of a tiger. With various weapons, fierce, carrying a club, terrifying, with red eye, angry, three-eyed. With his hair flying upwards like a flame, but in part grey. He should be the likeness of black collyrium, fierce, having the colour of a monsoon cloud. He should draw him mounted on a buffalo and resembling the form of death. [He is] of fierce actions, most terrible, fearsome, the killer of Rudra. [He is] the killer of death, rising up, destroyer of living beings. [He is] extremely aggressive, able to accomplish any magical acts, fierce and very terrible. Terrifying even to fear, killer of all living beings. (MMK 51.9cd-15ab., 431-32)[39]

He should gather a fruit of the *ariṣṭa* tree (soapberry tree, i.e., garlic), its leaves and its bark together with its root; sour gruel (*kañjikā*), together with tamarind tree (āmla), and powder of human bone; *kaṭutaila*, poison (*viṣa*), vinegar/sour grass (*amlavetasa*), reed/citron, ginger (*ardraka*), rājikā, and blood which has arisen from human. Having got these all together he should then set up a *paṭa* screen in an isolated place facing the south, under a *paṭa* facing north. (MMK 51.28-30, 433)[40]

Having made a hearth depending on his goal and having lit it with bonewood from the *kaṭu* tree and also with a straw (*kaṭaka*), [he should have a] concentrated mind on that hearth. Having taken all that what has been combined (the substances which are being prescribed by the *homa*), as indicated by the injunctions, he should summon the fire-deity with the mantras of the lord of wrath, adopt a trident *mudrā* in this or any of the rites, and give 1008 oblations in the hearth with anger. (MMK 51.31-33ab, 433)[41]

[36] For the alternative translation of this chapter and the entire *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*, see *The Root Manual of the Rites of Mañjuśrī*, translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee, 18000 Words of the Buddha.

[37] *na tithir na ca nakṣatraṃ nopavāso vidhīyate/ arīṇāṃ bhaya-m-utpanne paṭam etaṃ likhāpayet//*

[38] *prathame rātrim ārabdhe arīṇo 'pi mahad bhayam/ dvitīye mahājvareṇāpi āviṣṭaḥ śatrur ūrjitaḥ* [em.; *śatrumūrcchitaḥ* ed.]// *tṛtīye muñcate prāṇāṃ* [= *prāṇān*] *paralokagato bhavet/ kṛte* [em.; *kṛtas* ed.] *tasya bhavec chānti suprasannena* [em.; *aprasannena* ed.] *mantriṇā// dehaṃ śuṣyati śatror vai gṛhabhaṅgopajāyate/*

[39] *lekhanīyaṃ* [em.; *likhanāt* ed.] *paṭam evaṃ tu yamānta*[*ka*]*sya mahābhaye// ṣaṇmukhaṃ ṣaṭcaraṇaṃ lekhyaṃ kṛṣṇavarṇaṃ vṛkodaram/..... kruddhaṃ vyāghracarmanivasanam// nānāpraharaṇaṃ ghoraṃ daṇḍahastaṃ bhayānakam/ raktanetraṃ saroṣaṃ ca trinetraṃ* [em.; *trinetra* ed.] *gaticihnitam// ūrdhvakeśaṃ sajvālaṃ* [em.; *sajālaṃ* ed.] *vai dhūmravarṇaṃ kvacit tathā/ kṛṣṇāñjananibhaṃ ghoraṃ prāvṛṇmedhasamaprabham// kṛtāntarūpasaṅkāśaṃ mahiṣā-rūḍhaṃ tu ālikhet/ krūrakarmaṃ mahābhīmaṃ raudraṃ rudraghātakam// yamajīvitanāśaṃ vai udyantaṃ sattvaghātakam/ krūraṃ bhṛśaṃ sarvakarmāṇaṃ bhīṣaṇam atidāruṇam* [em.; *bhīṣaṇāpatidāruṇam* ed.]// *bhayasyāpi bhayatrāsaṃ mārakaṃ sarvadehinām/*

[40] *gṛhyāriṣṭaphalaṃ patraṃ tvacaṃ cāpi samūlataḥ/ kāñjikaṃ āmlasaṃyuktaṃ mānuṣāsthisucūrṇitam* [em.; °*sacūrṇitam* ed.]// *kaṭutailaviṣaṃ caiva amlavetasam ārdrakam/ rājikaṃ rudhiraṃ caiva mānuṣodbhavasambhavam// gṛhya sarvaṃ samāyuktaṃ paṭaṃ sthāpya vivekataḥ/ dakṣiṇābhimukho bhūtvā paṭaś cāpi udaṅmukhaḥ//*

[41] *kṛtvāgnikuṇḍaṃ yatheṣṭaṃ vai śuklakāṣṭhaiḥ kaṭu-m-udbhavaiḥ/ jvālayaṃ* [=*jvālayan*] *kaṭakaiś cāpi tasmiṃ* [=*tasmin*] *kuṇḍe samāhitaḥ/ gṛhyāt sarvasamāyuktaṃ vidhinirdiṣṭahaumikam// agnim āhūya* [em.; *agnirāhūya* ed.] *mantrais tu krodharājasya vai punaḥ/ baddhvā śūlamudrāṃ tu sarvakarmeṣu vā iha// sahasrāṣṭamāhutir* [em.; °*āhutiṃ* ed.] *dadyād agnikuṇḍe saroṣataḥ/*

On the first day, his [the king's] son will die […] when the *sandhyā* arises. On the second day, his wife will die, along with his ministers and all the members of his court. On the third day, there will be the death of that person in the name of whom it [the ritual] has been done. (MMK 51.33cd-34, 433)[42]

When the repetition of the mantra is done at midnight in the presence of the *paṭa* [then] the same thing will happen for the destruction of the enemies. His kingdom will be destroyed, and there will be an outbreak of plague in his army. Bad omens – as if the sky is on fire, a hurricane, or excessive rainfall [– will happen]. The whole of the army of the enemy will be lost. Various calamities will befall him; his body will become desiccated, beset by fatal disease. Whose body? That king's, without a doubt. His whole busy house will be filled with non-humans. He will be in a constant state of agitation, he will not have any bed, there will be a twister upon earth. His palace will be beset pervaded by *rākṣasa*s, *preta*s and *piśāca*s (lit. "the eater of raw flesh"). Filled with suffering and oppressed, he becomes afraid of everything, he is afraid on all sides, tormented by fierce pain. All the gods upon earth beginning with Śiva will not be able to lift a hand to protect him. (MMK 51.35-40, 433)[43]

He should offer into the fire in front of the *paṭa neem* tree (*picumanda*), *kaṭutaila*, sour gruel (*kañjika*), the five poisons, blood (*rudhira*), human flesh, salt (*lavaṇa*), the three spices, *rājikā*, powdered human bone, vinegar (*amlavetasa*) and ginger, the roots of *datura*, a hair or a fruit of *kośātaki*, the root of long pepper, alkali, saffron, thorns (*kaṇṭaka*), the root of thorn apple, garlic, carrot/turnip, onion, beer, and other intoxicating drinks. Putting all these together he should offer it into the fire in the presence of the *paṭa.* (MMK 51.55-58, 434-35)[44]

When he has made 1008 oblations, his enemies will be destroyed from the roots. Or rather he will kill everyone associated with the king or his courtiers, whether they are good or bad. If he makes the offerings at the second *sandhyā* (midday), then he [the king] will be uprooted from the root. If the *jāpin* makes offerings at the third *sandhyā* (evening), there will be a famine for him [the king] and all his people together with his townsmen.

There will be droughts, plagues, and the whole area will be overrun by *rākṣasa*s. There will be fire falling from the heavens, rocks will fall from the sky, there will be thunder strikes with lightning. The whole area of that kingdom will be beset by many disasters and there will be invasions coming from the forces of the enemy. There will arise many disasters of many different kinds in his [king's] country, along with a great destruction of wealth. (MMK 51.59-63, 435)[45]

If he offers into a fire a single *datura* root, his enemy will go mad. If he regularly offers the three spices, then the target will be seized by a great fever. If he offers a bit of vinegar in the fire then a great fever produced from cold will arise for him – for any wicked kings, who are arrogant with power and who invaded his lands. Any cruel, great king, no matter how much wealth he has and if he is supported by a great army, will definitely die within two or seven days. (MMK 51.64-65, 435)[46]

[42] *prathame putramaraṇaṃ sandhye* [em.; *sattve* ed.] *prāpte tu taṃ bhavet|| dvitīye cāpi bhāryā vai pārṣadādyāḥ sanāyakāḥ|tṛtīye maraṇaṃ tasya yam uddiśya* [em.; *yasyoddiśyaṃ* ed.] *hi tat kṛtam||*

[43] *ardharātre yadā jāpaḥ kriyate paṭasannidhau|śatrūṇāṃ ca vadhārthāya tat tathaivānuvartate|| rāṣṭrabhaṅgaṃ bhavet tasya senāyāṃ mārisambhavam|agnidāhaṃ mahāvātaṃ mahāvṛṣṭiś ca jāyate|| samastaṃ sarvataś cakraṃ paracakreṇa hanyate| vividhopadravā tasya mahāvyādhisamākulam||deha̱ṃ śuṣyati sarvaṃ vai tasya rājño na saṃśayaḥ|amānuṣākīrṇaṃ sarvatra* [em.; *sarvantaṃ* ed.] *gṛhaṃ tasya samākulam|| dhṛtiṃ na labhate śayyāṃ āvartaṃ ca mahītale|rākṣasaiḥ pretakravyādaiḥ gṛhaṃ tasya samāvṛtam||ārtto bibheti sarvatra tīvraduḥkhaiḥ suduḥkhitaḥ|aśaktā rakṣituṃ tasya maheśvarādyā bhuvi devatā||*

[44] *picumandaṃ kaṭutailaṃ ca kāñjikaṃ viṣapañcamam|rudhiraṃ mānuṣaṃ māṃsaṃ lavaṇaṃ trikaṭukaṃ punaḥ|| rājikaṃ śaṅkhacūrṇaṃ ca amlavetasa mārdrakam|dhurdhūrakasya tu mūlāni kośātakyā tathaiva ca||eraṇḍamūlaṃ yavakṣāraṃ kusumbhaṃ cāpi kaṇṭakam| madanodbhavamūlaṃ ca laśunaṃ grñjanakaṃ tathā|| palāśaśākhoṭakaṃ caiva palaṇḍuṃ sasurāsavā|sarvāny etāni samaṃ kṛtvā juhuyāt agnau paṭasannidhau||*

[45] *hute sahasramaṣte tu śatrunāśaḥ samūlataḥ|sarvāṃ vā rājikāṃ hanyāt* [em.; *hanyā* ed.] *pārṣadyāṃ śubhāśubhām|| samūloddharaṇaṃ tasya dvitīye sandhye tu juhvatā|tṛtīye samanuprāpte sandhye juhvata jāpinā||durbhikṣaṃ bhavate tasya jane cāpi sanaigame|anāvṛṣṭimahāmāryaḥ rākṣasākīrṇa sarvataḥ|| agnidāhaṃ śilāpātaṃ vajranirghātaśāśaniḥ| janapadaṃ deśaviṣayaṃ vā tavāḥ* [em.; *yavāḥ* ed.] *tasya narādhipe|| bahnopadravasampātaṃ varacakrāgamaṃ tathā| anekadhā bahudhā cāpi* [em.; *bahudhāścāpi* ed.] *tasya deśe upadravāḥ|jāyante vividhākārāḥ mahālakṣmīpraṇāśanaiḥ||*

[46] *dhurdhūrakamūlaṃ juhuyād ekaṃ unmattis (=unmatta) tasya jāyate|kaṭukaṃ* [=*trikaṭu*] *juhvato nityaṃ mahādāhena gṛhyate| atyamlaṃ juhvato magnau mahājvaraṃ śītasambhavam|| sambhavet tasya deśasthaḥ* [em.; *de-*

If he wants to kill someone, then having made a puppet (*kṛtiṃ*) he should write a name: the deity name or a *nakṣatra* ('asterism under which the target was born') using a charcoal of the cremation ground, which should be placed on the ground in front of the *paṭa*. Standing on [the puppet's] head with his foot, he should be in a wrathful state, and do the recitation. He (the king) will become overpowered by a major disease, or he will die on the spot. That lord of men will be seized by piercing pains for no apparent reason, or he will be killed by an animal, or he will become crippled. He will be eaten by fierce *rākṣasa*s, and various impure beings that have arisen from non-human birth (*kravyādin*), *pūtana*s, *piśāca*s, *preta*s and the mothers, or he will be killed immediately by his own attendants. (MMK 51.66-69, 435)[47]

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hasthaḥ ed.] *duṣtarājñāṃ balagarvitām/ mahārājñām* [em.; *mahāyakṣāṃ* ed.] *dhanināṃ krūrāṃ mahāsainyasamāṣrtām/ dvirātre saptarātre vā* […]/

[47] […] *maraṇaṃ tasya jīvitam// yo yasya devatābhaktaḥ nakṣatro vā nāmato likhet/śmaśānāṅgāraiḥ kṛtiṃ kṛtvā paṭasyāgrato bhūsthitaṃ* [em.; *paṭasyāgratabhūṣrtam* ed.]/ *ākramya pādatā mūrdho* [em.; *pādato mūrdhnā* ed.] *saṅkruddho japam ācaret// akasmād vividhaiḥ śūlaiḥ gṛhyate 'sau narādhipaḥ/mahāvyādhisamākrāntaḥ mṛyate* [=*mriyate*] *vāpi tatkṣaṇāt// paśunā hanyate vāpi* [em.; *cāpi* ed.] *vyaṅgo vā bhavate punaḥ/bhakṣyate rākṣasai krūraiḥ kaśmalair manuṣodbhavaiḥ* [em.; *kaśmalāmānuṣo°* ed.]// *kravyādaiḥ pūtānaiś* [em.; *pūtana* ed.] *cāpi piśācaiḥ pretamātaraiḥ/ tatkṣaṇād dhanyate vāpi* [em.; *cāpi* ed.] *ātmanaś cāpi sevakaiḥ//*

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