

THE TANTRIC REBIRTH MOVEMENT IN MODERN CHINA

ESOTERIC BUDDHISM RE-VIVIFIED
BY THE JAPANESE AND TIBETAN TRADITIONS*

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The present study aims to examine the so-called Tantric Rebirth Movement, which is part of the general context of reforms that involved the whole Chinese Buddhist community at the beginning of the 20th century. It was a time when, probably under the influence of the first Western studies in Buddhology, all Asian Buddhist communities began to re-think their own traditions. In China, the main aim was to reform the monastic education and to compare Chinese Buddhism with its original Indian teachings and other Asian Buddhist traditions. Tantrism was generally considered to have disappeared after its 'golden age' during the Tang dynasty. Due to its esoteric nature, to study Tantrism one had to turn to Tibet or Japan because its lineages had been interrupted in China for centuries. A number of Chinese Buddhist monks began thus to participate in pilgrimages to Tibetan areas, becoming disciples of *lamas*. On their return to China, many of these monks devoted themselves to spreading the Tibetan teachings – and above all the Vajrayāna ones – among Chinese Buddhists. Meanwhile, a similar movement was flourishing in the East, mainly focusing on Japanese Esoteric Buddhism. Many masters went to Japan so as to learn and practice the particular form of Tantrism which was widespread among Tendai and Shingon communities, and which was considered to be closely related to the original Chinese tantric teachings. The intention was the same as the 'reformist' monks, that is to deepen the understanding of a different Buddhist tradition, while at the same time re-vivifying the Chinese tantric lineages.

Key words: Tantric Rebirth, Modern China, Tibetan Vajrayāna, Japanese Esoteric Buddhism.

* Translated from the Italian by Arianna Rinaldo.

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This study deals with the so-called Tantric Rebirth Movement (Ch. *mijiao fuxing yundong* 密教復興運動) which developed within the much wider Buddhist Reform Movement in modern China.

Beginning with the last years of Qing time, we witness a growth of interest for the study and practice of Japanese Tantric Buddhism, a movement which mainly developed in Eastern China. At the same time, and particularly beginning with the 1920s, in Beijing and Western China a similar and parallel phenomenon focuses on the Tibetan Vajrayāna tradition.

Master Dayong's 大勇 life experience, in Japan first and then in Tibet, seems to indicate that the two movements were essentially an expression of the same trend: part of the Chinese Buddhist Saṃgha was attempting to revitalise the Tantric Buddhist tradition in China. Just as Faxian 法顯 and Xuanzang 玄奘¹ had done more than 10 centuries earlier, they were ready to travel the most impervious roads to the roof of the world or to cross the sea with the goal of finding scriptures and receiving teachings. Those who represented the Japanese way were focusing on the original Chinese Tantric schools which, according to them, had survived in Japan in the form of the two schools, Tendai and Shingon. Those who turned to Tibet to study, considered the Tibetan tradition a much more developed form of Tantric Buddhism, more complete than the Japanese tradition and the original Tantric form in China as well.

I will attempt to define a comprehensive scheme of the activities of these modern Chinese pilgrims, primarily focusing on a historical presentation of the lives and events of the individual masters, rather than on an in-depth analysis of their specific teachings and doctrinal features. The study of this phenomenon is quite new, and, at the present time, there is a definite lack of information on the subject in Western studies. As Françoise Wang-Toutain (2000), I hope that this study will stimulate new research.

I. The Japanese way of the Tantric Rebirth Movement²

Tantric Buddhism is one of the Buddhist traditions that remain as of today in Japan. It was introduced during the 9th century and is represented by two schools: Tendai, founded by Saichō, who is said to be a follower of the teachings of the Tiantai 天台 school in China; and Shingon, that is said to have been founded by Kūkai on the

¹ In many Chinese texts on their life and activities, Dayong, Fazun, Nenghai and the great Buddhist pilgrims of the past are associated for similarities; for example by Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000), and by Zhao Puchu 趙朴初, quoted in Wang-Toutain (2000).

² My discussion on the Japanese and Tibetan ways of the Tantric Rebirth, follows the lead of the work by Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, pp. 347–381); as for other Chinese sources, see: Dongchu (1974), one of the most comprehensive studies on Chinese modern Buddhism as of today, Lü Jianfu (1995), Yu Lingbo (1994, 1995, 1998), Zhang Mantao (1978a, 1979b, 1979c, 1979d, 1979e). Apart from a few exceptions of a more generic subject matter – such as: Müller (1993,

basis of the Zhenyan 真言 school. They are seen as the continuation of the so-called Tang Tantrism (*Tangmi* 唐密) which officially disappeared in China at the end of the Southern Song era. In the process of Tantric Rebirth, the representatives of the Japanese way were inspired by these two schools, which were considered more authentic and orthodox than the Tibetan ones. In fact, this point of view was the same as that of the tradition they were referring to which considered its own teaching as 'Pure Esoterism'.³ Another reason for the Japanese way is the relative facility with which the Chinese could deal with Japanese language in respect to Tibetan, especially in regards to Buddhist texts.

The Japanese way of Tantric Rebirth develops both within the context of the Chinese Buddhist Reforms, and as a result of the Japanese politics of the time. Quoting Welch (1968, pp. 160–161), this process can be seen as an 'inversion' of the process of diffusion of Buddhism from China to Japan dating back to 563 AD: "Japanese Buddhism began to be exported to China, partly because of the Japanese parishes that were springing up in the treaty ports and partly because of the possibilities for the use of Buddhism as an instrument of foreign policy". Without analysing the political implications behind this movement, I will first delineate a brief chronology of events that lead to this 'inversion' and then describe in detail the life and work of those who gave birth to the Tantric Rebirth.

At the end of the 19th century, following the Meiji Restoration (1868), Japanese religious authorities began sending missions to China with the scope of restoring

pp. 122–129), Welch (1967, 1968, pp. 173–179 and 1972) – very little has been produced on the subject in Western languages. In regards to the Japanese way, see: Dongchu (1974, pp. 407–435 and 989–992, 1978), Lan Jifu (1991), Lü Jiangfu (1995, pp. 620–635), Zhang Mantao (1978d), and Zhenchan (1989).

Concurrent to the movement I am analysing in this paper, there was another attempt in the Republican period to revivify Tantric Buddhism in China. It is the so-called 'School of the Seal Heart' (*yinxin zong* 印心宗), founded by Dayu 大愚, who wanted to restore the Chinese Tantric tradition without external help. For more information, see: Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, pp. 334–335).

³ The representatives of the Japanese Shingon tradition have classified the Tantric Scriptures in 'Mixed Esoterism' (Jap. *zōmitsu*, Ch. *zami* 雜密) and 'Pure Esoterism' (Jap. *junmitsu*, Ch. *chunmi* 純密). Mixed Esoterism gathers all those texts that are not included in the Pure Esoterism category, which refers only to the texts and methods that belong to the corpus of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* and the *Vajraṣekhara-sūtra*. These are the basis, respectively, of the 'Matrix *Maṇḍala*' and the 'Diamond *Maṇḍala*'. Nakamura (1964, pp. 82–89) writes about the Mantrayāna intended as the final development of Esoteric Buddhism, thus coinciding with Tibetan Buddhism: "In later days Esoteric Buddhism was greatly influenced by the religion of Tantras, which was a new trend in Hinduism [...] One of the features of the Mantrayāna was the justification of sexual desire". He also defines some rituals as 'obscene' and 'ugly and strange', and in general gives a negative interpretation of the late Tantric Buddhist tradition.

For a critical analysis of the distinction between 'Pure Esoterism' and 'Mixed Esoterism', see Appendix 1, 'On Esoteric Buddhism in China', in Sharf (2002, pp. 263–278). In his study Robert H. Sharf points out that this distinction is "inextricably tied to Japanese sectarian polemics" and that "the Chinese texts show little if any awareness of an exalted lineage of esoteric masters going back to Mahāvairocana and Vajrasattva. Nor do they give pride of place to the *vajradhātu* and *garbhadhātu* cycles, or to the teachings of the *dharmakāya* versus the *nirmāṇakāya* buddha".

local Buddhism which in their eyes had fallen in decadence.⁴ The Higashi-Honganji 東本願寺 branch of the Jōdo Shinshū school, the biggest one among the two Japanese Pure Land schools, took this role. According to Ōtani Kōshō 大谷光勝, the 21st patriarch of the school, there were two reasons for this missionary work: first of all to offer gratitude to China, and then to help Japan itself through Buddhism, so as to face the problematic situation created by the many anti-Buddhist movements protesting in Japan (Welch 1968, p. 162). In 1873 he sent Ogurisu Kōchō 小栗栖香頂, one of his disciples, to China. Ogurisu took residence in Beijing and showed a particular interest in the doctrines and expression of Tibetan Vajrayāna in the Yonghegong 雍和宮 monastery and on Mount Wutai 五臺山. In 1876 Ōtani Kōshō, on the basis of the information brought back by Ogurisu, convinced the Japanese political authorities of the necessity to create Buddhist missions in China. In August of the same year, the first monastery of Japanese tradition was opened in Shanghai. It hosted six monks among whom Ogurisu himself. Soon three laymen and other 12 monks joined. In 1877 a Chinese language school was founded in Beijing to facilitate their work of proselytism. These efforts did not have much success within the local Buddhist circles, and the missionary work was set aside for lack of Chinese followers (Satō Saburō 1966, pp. 210–211). However, during this same time, Yang Wenhui 楊文會,⁵ considered the pioneer of the Buddhist Reform Movement in modern China, and particularly of the increasing interest in Japanese Buddhism, began his activity. During his trip to England, in 1878, he met Max Müller and the Japanese scholar Nanjō Bunyū 南修文雄. The latter informed Yang Wenhui of the condition of Japanese Buddhism, and of the existence of many Buddhist texts that had disappeared in China and were preserved in local monasteries. In 1890 a relative of Yang went to Japan and met with Nanjō, who gave him hundreds of Buddhist texts later reprinted by Yang's own publishing house.

After 1895, and China's defeat in the Korean dispute with Japan, specifically after the Shimonoseki Treaty (1896) which sanctioned Japan's extraterritorial rights and offered great freedom of movement to the Japanese missionaries, the Higashi-Honganji resumed its activities and founded monasteries and schools.⁶ During the first two decades of the 20th century, however, due to a strong anti-Japanese sentiment among the Chinese, very few monasteries were founded in China. After this relative failure, the focus shifted on the possibility of international collaborations, facilitating contacts and exchange between Buddhist circles of the two countries. In 1925, for example, the first East-Asian Buddhist Conference (*Dongya fojiao dahui* 東亞佛教大會) took place in Tokyo; it can be regarded as the first international con-

⁴ On this issue, see: Satō Saburō (1966), and *Higashi Honganji Shanhai kaikyō rokujūnen shi* (1937), both quoted in Welch (1968, pp. 161ss).

⁵ For Yang Wenhui (1837–1911) see: Goldfuss (2001). Also see Welch (1968, pp. 2–10), and, for his role in the development of an interest towards Japanese Buddhism in modern China, Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, pp. 348–349).

⁶ Between 1898 and 1899 at least four schools opened, in Nanjing, Hangzhou, Juanchou and Amoy. See: *Higashi Honganji Shanhai kaikyō rokujūnen shi* (1937, pp. 86–88).

ference on Buddhism in modern times. There were 20 Chinese representatives, among which the reformist monk Taixu 太虛.⁷ During a Sino-Japanese session, common standards of reform were established in the educational and social fields. The following decade, the opportunities of encounter and exchange multiplied: Japanese delegations would go to China to study Buddhist history and art, and their Chinese counterparts would reach Japan to study the local expressions of Buddhist traditions (the focus was mainly on Zen and Tantrism) with the idea of restoring and revitalising them in their homeland.⁸

Once Japanese troops invaded central China (1937–1942) the nature of these contacts between Buddhists in the two nations changed drastically. The Japanese founded about 35 new monasteries in China, in addition to the 12 centers founded from 1870. In the main cities of central China, Sino-Japanese Buddhist associations were founded and were home to the activity of many Chinese laymen and monks who had not been able or had not wanted to move to the South of the country.⁹ With the founding of the People's Republic of China, communication slowed down and was then interrupted. Contacts were re-established in the 1980s thanks to the new government policy towards religions.¹⁰

The representatives of the Japanese way of Tantric Rebirth had a leading role in this general movement towards Japan. Among them, the layman Gui Bohua 桂伯華 was the first to go East.¹¹ From 1910 to 1915 he studied in a Shingon monastery in Kōyasan 高野山, until he died without being able to return to his home country. Sengchun 僧純, a monk from Guangdong, followed his example, as did many other monks and laymen. However, there were five people who gave the most significant contribution to the development of the Tantric Rebirth Movement: the monks Da-

⁷ For Taixu (1890–1947) see: Hongmin (1997), Yinshun (1995), Yin Yongqing (1998), Welch (1967, pp. 173–177 and 1968, pp. 15 *passim*).

⁸ For a complete list of the most important monks and laymen who went to Japan to study Buddhism during the first half of the 20th century, see: Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, p. 349). Among them, I shall mention Liang Qichao 梁啟超, author of the well-known *Foxue yanjiu shiba pian* 佛學研究十八篇, and Ding Fubao 丁福保, author of the famous Buddhist dictionary *Foxue dacidian* 佛學大辭典; the above mentioned Taixu and Dayong; the monks Zongyang 宗仰, Deyuan 德圓, Tesong 特松, Xianyin 顯蔭, Daxing 大醒, Yuanying 圓瑛, Yuexia 月霞; last but not least, the famous monks Hongyi 弘一 and Nenghai 能海 lived in Japan before their entrance in the Buddhist order.

⁹ The Panchen Lama himself and many Chinese masters were part of these Sino-Japanese associations.

¹⁰ In the 1980s, Zhao Puchu, President of the Chinese Buddhist Association, often travelled to Japan. At the same time many Japanese Buddhist delegations were welcomed in the People's Republic of China. In 1984 five Chinese monks, Changshou 長壽 among them, were invited for the first time to study at the Japanese University of Buddhism. Moreover in 1986, the Sino-Japanese Buddhist Association for Scientific Exchange (*Zhongri fojiao xueshu jiaoliu hui* 中日佛教學術交流會), was created and met every two years in one of the two countries. See: Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, p. 349).

¹¹ Gui Bohua (1861–1915) was a very close disciple of Yang Wenhui. See: Goldfuss (2001, pp. 143 and 155–160).

yong, Tesong 特松 and Xianyin 顯蔭, and the laymen Wang Hongyuan 王弘願 and Gu Jingyuan 顧淨緣.¹²

In 1921 Dayong (1893–1929)¹³ had the opportunity to approach Tantric Buddhism when a few Japanese monks of the esoteric tradition were present at a sermon delivered by Taixu in the Guangji monastery of Beijing. They invited Taixu to study Tantric Buddhism in Japan but he replied that he was not personally interested, because “he did not aspire to realise Buddhahood in his present body” (*wu jishen cheng fo zhi yexin* 無即身成佛之野心).¹⁴ Nonetheless, Taixu appreciated the invitation and sent Dayong, one of his tonsure disciples to Japan. In 1921 at the age of 28, Dayong set foot in Japan for the first time and retired to study on Mount Kōya together with the Chinese layman Chen Jibo 陳濟博. He was not able to finish his studies and returned to China in 1922 to collect funding for his courses; the winter of the same year he managed to return to Japan. He studied on Mount Kōya with Kanayama Bokushō 金山穆昭, from whom he received many Shingon transmissions and the title of *ācārya*, ‘Tantric master’ (Ch. *asheli* 阿闍黎). When he arrived in Shanghai in October 1923, he was welcomed by a group of laymen, who asked him to transmit his Tantric teachings. Initially Dayong had planned to go in spiritual retirement, but he changed his mind as he understood the rising interest in Tantric Buddhism among Chinese people. In the same year, he first went to Hangzhou where he gathered hundreds of disciples and then to Wuhan where he was invited to teach ten times in a row at the newly founded Institute for Buddhist Studies (Foxue yuan 佛學院) of Wuchang; there he is said to have delivered his teachings to almost 240 laymen. In Beijing he performed similar activities at the Yonghegong. Here he met the Mongolian *bla ma* Bai Puren who introduced him in the Tibetan Vajrayāna. Dayong therefore decided to study Tibetan, and put aside his teachings within the Japanese way of the Tantric Rebirth Movement.

Tesong (1894–1972) was from Hubei and took the precepts at the age of 17; later he graduated from the Huayan 華嚴 University. In 1922 he went to Japan with Dayong and studied with Kanayama Bokushō, who lastly conferred on him the title of *ācārya* of the 64th generation. Back in China, he established a Tantric altar in the Puti 菩提 monastery. In 1924 he accepted the invitation of the Hubei authorities to perform a Tantric ritual for the protection of the State: the *renwang huguo dafa hui*

¹² For these people’s activities, see: Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, pp. 351–355). Among the other monks and laymen who went to study Tantric teachings in Japan, I would like to recall in particular Manshu Jiedi 曼殊揭諦, a Chinese monk born of a Japanese mother, who studied on Mount Kōya in 1925 and is well known for his critique of Wang Hongyuan’s work; and Tanxuan 談玄, who went to Japan in 1934, and returned to China after receiving both Tendai and Shingon transmissions. He brought back more than 2000 Tantric texts and numerous Japanese ritual objects which were displayed in an exhibition in Shanghai. Last but not least, I would like to mention the layman Cheng Zhaian 程宅安, who lived in Japan in the 1930s and later published the *Mijiao yaoyi* 密教要義 (Fundamentals of Tantrism), quite successful within the Buddhist circles of the time.

¹³ For Dayong’s biography, particularly see: Sun Houzai (1930), and Wang-Toutain (2000, pp. 709–716).

¹⁴ This sentence by Taixu is quoted by Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, p. 351).

仁王護國大法會.¹⁵ During this seven-day long ritual, he welcomed a few hundred devotees and transmitted them teachings and initiations. This event was so significant that Chen Bing and Deng Zimei (2000, p. 352) define it as “the most splendid moment in the spreading of Shingon Tantrism in modern China”. In 1925 he joined the Chinese Buddhist delegation that participated in the Tokyo East-Asian Buddhist Conference. After this he studied with master Gonda Raifu 權田雷翁 (1846–1934) and received new transmissions within the Shingon tradition. The following year, in Kyoto, he studied with a Tendai master. Beginning in 1927, when he returned to his homeland, he dedicated himself to teaching moving from city to city (Shanghai, Ningbo, Hangzhou, and Liaoning). His third and last trip to Japan, was in 1936. Afterwards he became abbot of the Jing’ansi 靜安寺 in Shanghai (1947) where, in 1953, he established a permanent Tantric altar in order to make this monastery the basis of the revitalisation of Tang Tantrism. Tesong wrote a dozen Tantric works among which the most significant and well known is *Mijiao tongguan* 密教通關 (Master key of Tantrism).

Xianyin (1902–1925) was from the Shanghai area, and took his vows when he was 17. Uncommonly intelligent, at the age of 19 he was already well known in Buddhist circles for the introduction he wrote for the well-known Buddhist dictionary by Ding Fubao 丁福保. The year after he also wrote a preface for the Japanese Taishō edition of the Buddhist Canon (*Shinshū daizōkyō* 新修大藏經). In 1923 he went to Japan to study Tantric Buddhism with Kanayama Bokushō on Mount Kōya. At the same time he also focused on the investigation of the general conditions of Japanese Buddhism. In 1925 he returned to China where he died of sickness. Among his works on Japanese Tantric Buddhism, it is worth remembering the translation of the text *Zhenyan zong gangyao* 真言宗綱要 (Essential Notes on the Shingon School), the *Riben zhi mijiao* 日本之密教 (Japanese Tantrism) and the *Zhenyan mijiao yu Zhonghua fofa zhi guanxi* 真言密教與中華佛法之關係 (Relation between Shingon Tantrism and Chinese Buddhadharma).

The layman Wang Hongyuan (1876–1937) was from Hu’an in Guangdong. For many years he taught at the local middle school, and only in his 40s began focusing on Buddhism and in particular on Tantric rituals. In 1918 he translated the *Mizong gangyao* 密宗綱要 (Essential Notes on the Tantric School) by Gonda Raifu, a Shingon monk who later became Tesong’s master. This work, under the patronage of Taixu, was the first Chinese work dedicated to Japanese Tantric Buddhism. In 1924 he received initiation from Gonda Raifu during the monk’s visit to Huzhou. Two years later he was invited by the master to go to Japan to study Shingon teachings and ultimately achieved the title of *ācārya*. Returning to China he founded the Asso-

¹⁵ It is a ritual inspired by the *Renwang jing* 仁王經 (*Taishō* 245 and 246), an apocryphal text originally attributed to Kumārajīva. Together with the *Suvarṇa-prabhāsa-sūtra* (*Taishō* 663, 664, 665), it is one of the two texts at the basis of the Chinese Buddhist ritual for the protection of the State. In particular, the *Renwang jing* has a chapter titled “Protection of the State” (*Huguo pin* 護國品) which requires a leader to have the *sūtra* recited any time some sort of natural calamity or foreign invasion is foreseen.

ciation for the Revival of Chinese Tantrism (Zhendan mijiao chongxing hui 震旦密教重興會),¹⁶ which had a bimonthly publication: *Mijiao jiangxi lu* 密教講習錄 (Notes from Tantric Studies Workshops). From 1928 on, he began transmitting his teachings moving from Huzhou to Canton, Hongkong and other cities, and welcoming thousands of disciples. In 1933 he resided in the Jiexing 解行 *vihara* as Tantric master, and concurrently worked at Zhongshan 中山 University. The following year, with the publication of the monthly *Shi deng* 世燈 (The Lamp of the World), he founded a new branch of his association: the Association for the Revival of Tantrism of Shantou (Shantou mijiao chongxing hui 汕頭密教重興會) in Guangdong. His son Wang Fuhui 王福慧 and the three laymen Feng Daan 馮達庵, Wang Yanping 王彥平 and Wang Xuezhi 王學智 were among his disciples. After his death, his line of transmission was interrupted. Nonetheless, his contribution to the Japanese way of the Tantric Rebirth is fundamental thanks to his translation work and his numerous texts on the tradition of Japanese Tantric Buddhism. He translated other works of the *ācārya* Gonda Raifu: the *Darijing shu huiben* 大日經疏會本 (Notes on the Commentary of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*), the *Mimi zhang zhong ji* 秘密帳中記 (Notes on the Secret Books) and the *Mantuluo tongjie* 曼荼羅通解 (*Maṇḍala* General Explanations). Wang also composed various Tantric works, among which it is worth citing, as an example, the text *Guangming zhenyan yanjiu* 光明真言研究 (Study on the Luminous *Shingon*) and the *Putixin lun kouyi ji* 菩提心論口義記 (Notes on the oral explanation of the *Bodhicitta* treatise).

Gu Jingyuan (1889–1973) whose Tantric name was Zhengming 正明, is the second layman who greatly contributed to the Tantric Rebirth. He was from Huaian in Jiangsu and a descendent of the famous Ming erudite Gu Yanwu 顧炎武. His initial interest was in Daoism but in 1922 he shifted his attention to Buddhism, and founded the Center of the Two Studies (Erxue yuan 二學苑) with other laymen. He was in close contact with general Tang Shengzhi 唐生智, governor of Hunan and patron of Buddhism, who invited him to transmit Buddhist teachings to his troops.¹⁷ In 1928 he went to Japan and received both *Shingon* and Tendai transmissions. After having obtained the title of *ācārya*, he returned to China and established in Shanghai the Association for the Study of Yoga (Yujia xuehui 瑜伽學會) and the Association of the Weiyin Schoolmates (Weiyin tongxue hui 畏因同學會). Later he founded the Buddhist publication *Weiyin* 威音 (Majestic Voice) in which he often wrote with the pseudonym Xie Weiyin 謝畏因. Gu Jingyuan's teaching is a mixture of different Buddhist traditions, in which Tantrism accompanies other forms of Buddhism according to the 'Buddhism of the Human Way' (*ren dao fojiao* 人道佛教).¹⁸ He wrote various

¹⁶ *Zhendan* 震旦, 'dawn', generally refers to the East; it is also the Chinese translation of Cīnasthāna, the name given to China in ancient India.

¹⁷ For an analysis of the relationship between Buddhist circles and high level officials during the Republican era, see the chapter "Friends in high places" in Welch (1968, pp. 153–156). General Tang Shengzhi, for example, was a fervent Buddhist and contributed generously to the foundation of the Buddhist Association in Hubei.

¹⁸ The "Buddhism of the Human Way" precedes the better known "Buddhism of the human realm" (*renjian fojiao* 人間佛教); for the latter see: Travagnin (2001).

Tantric works which were lost during the Cultural Revolution. Among the heirs of his doctrinal tradition, I would like to mention Wu Limin 吳立民, currently director of the Institute of Studies on Chinese Buddhist Culture (Zhongguo fojiao wenhua yanjiu suo 中國佛教文化研究所).

II. The Tibetan way of the Tantric Rebirth Movement¹⁹

Since the Yuan dynasty, we find centers of research and practice of Tibetan Buddhism in Chinese territory. Some of these sites, and a number of new ones, continued to exist and grow throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties. They were mainly visited by Tibetan and Mongolian monks and laymen, and, even if the Imperial Court showed at times interest in them, nonetheless their influence on the Chinese Buddhist world was irrelevant. On the other hand, in the first half of the 20th century, Chinese monks and devotees show a growing interest in Tibetan Buddhist teachings. Starting in the 1920s many Chinese monks went to study in Tibet, in the border regions of Kham and Amdo, and in the great monasteries of Central Tibet. A few monks focused on spreading these teachings upon returning to Han territory. Therefore, during the first half of the 20th century many monasteries and research centers inspired by the Tibetan tradition were founded; at the same time Tibetan language schools were opened and many translations of Tibetan works were produced.

Tibetan Buddhism can be regarded as the continuation of the last forms of Indian Buddhism. Therefore, in regards to Tantric doctrine, it has maintained a series of writings and oral teachings that cannot be found in the Chinese tradition, like those belonging to the *Anuttarayogatantra* category. The translations from the Tibetan, begun during the Yuan dynasty, were exclusive to the monasteries dedicated to the Tibetan tradition both in Beijing and on Mount Wutai. Even if their existence can be documented at court, they were not spread within the Chinese Buddhist world. They were ‘discovered’ by the Chinese Sangha at the beginning of the 20th century thanks to the works of Tibetan and Mongolian *sprul sku* and *bla ma*, and later Chi-

¹⁹ For the Tibetan way of Tantric Rebirth, see: Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, pp. 347–381), Dongchu (1974, pp. 436–458), and Huang Yingjie (1995), an accurate chronological description of the events. As for other Chinese sources, see: Dongchu (1978a), Lü Jianfu (1995), Yu Lingbo (1994, 1995, 1998), Zhang Mantao (1978a, 1978b, 1978c, 1978d, 1979a). As for Western studies on the subject, worthy of notice is the already mentioned article by Françoise Wang-Toutain (2000), in which the description of Fazun’s life is preceded by some very interesting notes, and the study in progress by Gray Tuttle (2003), which I had the opportunity to read thanks to the author’s courtesy short before editing this article. Also see: Bianchi (2001, 2002, 2003), and Esposito (1998, 2002).

A part from a few exceptions of some common Tibetan words and names (such as Dalai Lama, Drepung, Lhasa, Panchen Lama, and Tashilunpo), where phonetics are employed, Tibetan words are given in Chinese characters and/or in Wylie transliteration in the present paper. In the cases where I could not trace the original Tibetan words, only Chinese transcription is given.

nese monks and laymen. At this time, we attend to the first real attempt to spread Tibetan Buddhism in China. Tantric Rebirth involved primarily the *dGe lugs pa*, and secondly *rNying ma* and *bKa' brgyud* traditions.

The day in 1924 when the 6th (or 9th) Panchen Lama entered Beijing after being excluded from the political affairs in Lhasa,²⁰ is considered the beginning of the “spreading of Tibetan Vajrayāna in the East” (*zangmi dong chuan* 藏密東傳).²¹ With his support many other Tibetan and Mongolian masters started teaching in Chinese. Among them, the Mongolian *bla ma* Bai Puren 白普仁 (1870–1927), who was an expert in rituals for the protection of the State, was in charge of performing local Tantric rituals in Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou. In 1925, he organised an immense 21-day long ritual; the event was attended by 108 *bla ma* of the Yonghegong temple who performed the *Jingguang ming fa* 金光明法 ritual. After this episode, he was given the title of *mkhan po* (abbot) by the Panchen Lama. The activity of Bai Puren was originally supported by the political authorities of the time, but was also meant for the Chinese people. This also characterised the activities of the other great Tibetan and Mongolian masters who followed in his footsteps. During the Hangzhou rituals, for example, he transmitted the practice to more than 300 people and initiated 81 participants.

At the same time, another master of the *dGe lugs* tradition was active in Beijing: the *dge bshes* Duo jie Jue bo 多杰覺撥 (Tib. rDo rje rTis pa dGe dgen)²² (1874–?), who was originally from Kham and educated at the Drepung (Ch. Zhebangsi 哲蚌寺) monastery in Lhasa. As in Bai Puren’s case, Duo jie Jue bo was initially commissioned by the government. However, he soon operated in a more popular environment for both lay people and Buddhist monks and nuns. His incredible success is unique in the history of *dGe lugs pa* preaching in China. At the beginning of the

²⁰ For a critical analysis of the role of the 9th (or 6th) Panchen Lama (1883–1937), see: Jagou (1999); for the Panchen’s lineage, also see: Ya Hanzhang (1994).

In 1923, the Panchen Lama left Lhasa for India and later took residence in Beijing. The Dalai Lama had had doubts on him for the past years accusing him of being an accomplice of the British and the Chinese in the attempt to weaken his authority in Tibet. Therefore he decided to affirm his supremacy by raising taxes in those territories that were under the jurisdiction of the Panchen (near the Tashilunpo), and summoning him to Lhasa. For an analysis of the events and the reasons of the Panchen Lama’s ‘escape’, see: Jagou (1999, pp. 44–108).

²¹ In 1932, the Panchen Lama performed the *Kālacakra* (*Shilun jingang fa* 時論金剛法) ritual in the Forbidden City, gathering about 100,000 people. In 1933 he directed the founding of the Institute of Tantric Scriptures in Beijing (Beijing mizang yuan 北京密藏院). The following year he performed the *Kālacakra* in Hangzhou, gathering tens of thousands of new disciples; afterwards his teachings were transcribed and translated in Chinese by Liu Jiaju 劉家駒 and Zhao yi 趙一. In the same year, he welcomed the Chinese monk Taixu as a disciple. 1934 is also the year of the creation of the Bodhi Study Society (Puti xuehui 菩提學會), which focused on Buddhism of Tibetan tradition. Honorary presidents of the society were the Panchen Lama himself, master Nuona 諾那 of the *rNying ma* tradition and the *sprul sku* Anqin 安欽, a monk of *dGe lugs* tradition. For the Panchen Lama’s religious activities in China, see: Jagou (1999, pp. 109–136).

²² Wang-Toutain (2000, p. 712) reconstructs the Tibetan name of Duo jie Jue bo in: rDo rje Chos dpal. In a private communication, Gray Tuttle told me that “a very knowledgeable scholar from Kangding says that Duo jie Jue bo’s Tibetan spelling is rDo rje gCos pa”.

Republican era, Duojie Juebo was officially sent to Mongolia by the government to perform the Green Tārā (Tib. *sgrol ljang*, Ch. *lǜ dūmǔ* 綠度母) ritual to solve the current political problems. In 1925 he went to Beijing to pay homage to the Panchen Lama and was subsequently invited to teach at the recently founded Institute of Tibetan Language Studies (Zangwen xueyuan 藏文學院). In the winter of that same year, Duojie Juebo translated more than 20 Tantric rituals in Chinese. The following year, he was invited to Hangzhou by the layman Tang Xiangming 湯彙銘, and translated another 50 texts. At the end of 1926, he gathered 108 of these translations in a volume titled *Micheng fa hai* 密乘法海 (Vajrayāna Dharma Ocean). For this reason he is considered the initiator of the translation work of Tibetan Tantric scriptures in modern times. In 1931, after a pilgrimage to mount Emei 峨嵋山, he left for Chengdu where he performed various Tantric rituals, spread his teachings and initiated hundreds of people, thus favouring the increase of Tantric practices which characterised Sichuan in the following decades. After a pilgrimage to India, he returned to the Drepung monastery.

Together with Bai Puren and Duojie Juebo, there is another master who strongly contributed to the Tantric Rebirth Movement: the 7th *hutuktu* Zhangjia 章嘉 (Tib. lCang skya) (1889–1957).²³ According to Welch (1968, p. 174), he was in some way the initiator. For most of his life he lived in the Yonghegong in Beijing and on mount Wutai, of which he had obtained jurisdiction at the end of the Qing dynasty. In 1912 he was summoned by the new president Yuan Shikai whom he tried to convince to adopt a policy in support of Buddhism. After this meeting, he is said to have been warmly welcomed by the Chinese Buddhist community. Zhangjia was active in the 20s and 30s, especially with the Chengdu Society for Buddhist Studies (*Shaocheng Foxueshe* 少城佛學社).²⁴ He also had various public roles: from 1927 he was a member of the Commission for Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs (*Mengzang weiyuan hui* 蒙藏委員會). Between 1935 and 1950, he was member of the Committee for the Supervision of the Guomindang; he was also member of the National Assembly and President of the Chinese Buddhist Association.

During the 1930s, thanks to the influence of masters like Bai Puren and Duojie Juebo, and the support of the Panchen Lama, the interest in the Vajrayāna teachings grew among Chinese Buddhist circles. More and more Tibetan and Mongolian masters were active in China, especially those of the *dGe lugs pa* tradition.²⁵ As for the

²³ This is the seventh human manifestation of the Mongolian lineage of the lCang skya *sprul ku*.

²⁴ In 1917 the Society for Buddhist Studies was founded by Nenghai and other laymen in Chengdu, before he took the monastic vows. See Qiu Shanshan (1997, pp. 146–147).

²⁵ For example, in 1930, the *bla ma* of Inner Mongolia, Baozhen Jingang 寶珍金剛, was invited to reside in the Jilean 極樂庵 monastery in Beijing in order to transmit Tantric teachings such as the Yamāntaka-Vajrabhairava practice. Anqin, a monk of *dGe lugs* tradition, coming from the Taer 塔爾 monastery (Tib. sKu 'bum) in A mdo, in 1934 transmitted the *Jixiang tiannü* 吉祥天女, which he later translated in collaboration with Fazun. Awang 阿旺 (Tib. Ngag dbang), abbot of the Sera monastery in Lhasa, is one of the most active representatives of the *dGe lugs* tradition in China in the 20s and 30s. He stayed in Chengdu for a couple of years in the 30s to teach and collect funds for his monastery. Other active representatives are: the *dge bshes* Xirao Jiacao 喜饒嘉錯

transmission of the *rNying ma pa* teachings, Nuona 諾那 and Gongga 貢噶 are definitely the most important cases. The *sprul sku* Nuona (Tib. mGar ra) (1865–1936),²⁶ abbot of the Ri bo che monastery in Khams, left Lhasa in 1923 for political reasons, similarly to the Panchen Lama.²⁷ After a pilgrimage to India, he came to Beijing in 1924 and was officially recognised by the local government. He then spent three years in Sichuan, mostly in Chongqing, welcoming thousands of disciples. After moving to Nanjing, he was nominated member of the Commission for Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs, just like the *hutuktu* Zhangjia; he is still venerated there today.²⁸ He remained in Nanjing for 6 years, often travelling to transmit his teachings to Shanghai, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Lushan, to the Mogan mountains, to Guangdong, Hebei and so on. In all these locations, he had hundreds of devotees.²⁹ His disciples founded the Society of Nuona's Students (Nuona tongxue hui 諾那同學會) to gather funds for his trips and the publication of his works. Nanjing's central government gave him the title of *puyou chanshi* 普佑禪師 ('vastly blessed meditation master').

Shortly before dying, Nuona wrote to the *sprul sku* Gongga (Tib. Gangs dkar) (1893/1903–1956)³⁰ asking him to come to China and transmit his teachings. Gongga belonged to the *karma bKa' brgyud pa*, but also followed the *rNying ma pa* tradition. In 1935, he went to Sichuan, both in Chengdu and Chongqing, and gathered many disciples. Two years later, in Lushan, he consecrated the *stūpa* containing Nuona's ashes. He performed various Tantric rituals on request of the Nanjing government. In 1939 he returned to Khams and went back to China in 1945. For three years he was actively transmitting the teaching in various cities: from Chengdu to Chongqing, from Kunming to Hankou, Changsha, Nanjing, Shanghai and Hangzhou, finally returning to Kangding (Tib. Dar rtse mdo) in 1948. He translated about 110 rituals, such as the *Mahāmudrā* (*Da shouyin* 大手印) of *bKa' brgyud* tradition and various works of *rNying ma* tradition, mostly belonging to the 'Great Perfection' (Tib. *rDzogs chen*; Ch. *da yuanman* 大圓滿).³¹

(Tib. Shes rab rGya mtsho) (1884–1968), active in Chengdu as well; Saqin 薩欽 *bla ma* from Tashilunpo, who worked at the Institute of Tantric Scriptures in Beijing; Dongben 東本, a *dge bshes* from the Drepung monastery who taught at the Institute of Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Studies in Chongqing in 1937 and *mkhan po* Rongzeng 榮增. See Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, p. 357).

²⁶ According to the Panchen Lama's biography, Nuona's Tibetan name seems to be Nor lha. My thanks to Gray Tuttle for this suggestion. For Nuona, particularly see: Zhimin Jingang – Huihua Jingang (1997).

²⁷ It seems he escaped from Lhasa after five years in prison. See: Jagou (1999, p. 112).

²⁸ Françoise Wang-Toutain (2000, p. 712) informs us that Nuona's doctrinal tradition has remained also in Taiwan.

²⁹ According to Welch (1968, p. 175), his devotees believed that he had developed all six "paranormal powers (*shentong* 神通): seeing and hearing at a distance, reading thoughts, changing shape, knowing the past and future, and resolving all difficulties".

³⁰ For Gongga particularly see Esposito (1998 and 2002). Gongga's date of birth is indicated by Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, p. 358) as 1893, and by Monica Esposito (1998, p. 221 and 2002), on the basis of a Fahai's manuscript in her belonging, as 1903.

³¹ Among the most active representatives of the *rNying ma pa* and *bKa' brgyud pa* in China, one must mention Babang Qinzun 八邦親尊, Duga 督噶 and Shenglu 聖露. As for the *Sa skya* tradition, we must consider Dengzun zhaba 登尊扎巴, Seka Quzha 色卡取扎 and Gensang Zecheng 根桑澤程. The latter resided in Sichuan between 1936 and 1937, taught at the Institute for Sino-

The activities of these Tibetan and Mongolian masters, within the context of the reforms taking place among Chinese Buddhist circles, facilitated the exodus of many Chinese monks and laymen towards the West. The pioneers of this movement are Dayong, Fazun 法尊, and Nenghai 能海, in the predominant *dGe lugs* tradition, and Fahai 法海 for the *rNying ma* tradition.

I have already mentioned how the activities of master Dayong demonstrate a connection between the two different expressions of the Tantric Rebirth: the Japanese way and the Tibetan way. As we have seen, he was a disciple of the reformist monk Taixu who sent him to Japan. Upon returning, he met Bai Puren and Duo jie Juebo, was profoundly touched by them, and thus decided to go to Tibet. In 1924, under Taixu's patronage, he founded the Institute of Tibetan Language Studies within the Ciyin 慈因 monastery in Beijing. Among his first disciples, many came from the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Wuchang, like Fazun, Zhaoyi 趙一 and Guankong 觀空. In the fall of 1925, Dayong decided to accompany 20 students to Tibet. They reached Kham during a period of difficult relationship between the two countries and were not welcomed by the local people and mistaken for a political delegation. They stopped in Kangding and on the Paoma 跑馬 mountains where Nenghai joined them in 1926. They stayed there until spring 1927, focusing on the study of the Tibetan Buddhist scriptures. In the meantime, Dayong translated a *Lam rim* text by Tsongkhapa: *Putidao cidi lue lun* 菩提道次第略論 (Short version of the gradual path of the *bodhi*). On their way West, they were stopped once again by the local army at Ganzhi 甘孜 (Tib. Kar mdzes). They stayed at Zhajia 扎迦 monastery where they studied with a *bla ma* from Central Tibet. Dayong was thirty-seven when he died there in 1929, like other members of the Chinese delegation.³²

Among Dayong's disciples, Fazun inherited the role of the master within the Tantric Rebirth Movement, especially excelling as a translator. His vast literary production, including Tantric works but mostly exoteric works, makes him stand out above all other contemporary monks interested in Tibetan Buddhism, including master Nenghai. The latter distinguished himself from his friend and rival in other activities that were secondary in Fazun's work, in particular the foundation of monasteries, in which the study of Tibetan doctrines had a practical application.³³

Tibetan Buddhist Studies (Hanzang jiaoli yuan 漢藏教理院) in Chongqing and translated various *rDzogs chen* rituals. See Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, p. 358).

³² In Dayong's delegation there were two monks who are worthy of mention. After the master's death, Zhaoyi remained in Kham another year, and then returned to China to teach at the Institute of Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Studies founded by Taixu and Fazun in Chongqing in 1930. He is known for some translations from Tibetan, among them the 'Heart Sūtra' (*Xin jing* 心經) and the *Dabai sangai jing* 大白傘蓋經. Guankong, on the other hand, stayed on the Paoma mountains for ten years and returned to China to teach at the Chongqing Institute, after an invitation by Taixu. He later went to Lhasa, where he studied at the Drepung monastery with great Tibetan *bla ma*, like Kangsa *rin po che*, Nenghai's master. Guankong wrote the *San zhuyao dao jianglu* 三主要道講錄. Among the Chinese monks who went to Tibet to study the *dGe lugs* tradition I shall mention also Taikong 太空, Bisong 碧松, Shengjin 勝進, Zhuanfeng 轉逢 and Junbi Jimei 君庇極美 (Ouyang Wuwei 歐陽無畏). See Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, pp. 359 and 361).

³³ Both Fazun's and Nenghai's works have recently been reprinted in Taiwan and in the People's Republic of China.

Fazun (1902–1980),³⁴ was from Hebei and became a monk at the age of 20 in Fayuan 法源 monastery in Beijing. In 1922 he began to study in the newly founded Institute of Buddhist Studies in Wuchang until, in 1924, he moved to the Institute of Tibetan Language Studies of Beijing. Fazun then followed Dayong to Kham and, after his master's death, in 1931 he moved back to Wuchang where he became a disciple of the *dge bshes* Andong 安東 (Tib. 'Jam dpal Rol pa'i bLo gros; 1888–1935), a famous master from the Golok region. He received about 40 initiations with him and many teachings. In the fall of the same year, master and disciple reached Lhasa. Fazun resided at the Drepung monastery where he deepened his knowledge of the work of Tsongkhapa, particularly the *Lam rim* and the *Mizong dao cidi* 密宗道次第 (Gradual path of Tantrism). He also studied other works (among them logic, *vinaya* and the *Abhisamaya-alamkāra*), and received many new initiations. In 1933, Taixu invited him to return to China and teach Tibetan. Fazun reached Shanghai in 1934 after a pilgrimage to India, and then moved to the Institute of Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Studies in Chongqing. He returned to Lhasa in 1936 to convince *dge bshes* Andong to move to China. A few days after his arrival, the master died; Fazun spent a few months in Lhasa, and then left for India not having found any Tibetan masters that would follow him to Chongqing. He brought a considerable amount of texts with him, including a copy of the Tibetan Canon and the complete works of Tsongkhapa. He spent his remaining years in the Institutes of Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Studies of Chongqing and Beijing, mostly translating and teaching Tibetan. In 1953 he participated in the foundation of the Chinese Buddhist Association and in 1956 he was nominated vice-president of the Chinese Institute for Buddhist Studies (Zhongguo foxue yuan 中國佛學院). Between 1966 and 1973, Fazun was accused of being a reactionary. Afterward he was rehabilitated, and became president of the Institute for Chinese Buddhist Studies until his death in 1980. His remains are in a *stūpa* on Mount Wutai. He translated and composed more than 50 works, a variety of texts from monastic discipline to *Prajñāpāramitā*; from pieces of the Mahāyāna scholastic to logic; from the history of Buddhism to texts on the learning of Tibetan, and finally to a few Tantric works. His most important and vast literary production is Tsongkhapa *opera omnia*, and in particular the *Lam rim* texts.

Nenghai (1886–1967),³⁵ was from the Mianzhu district in Sichuan and had a quick 10-year career in the army. In 1916 he resolved to become a monk, but was dissuaded by his sister and his wife who were hoping for the birth of a heir. Therefore in 1917, he founded the Chengdu Society for Buddhist Studies, which would become one of the main Buddhist circles in the city, a meeting point for Chinese and Tibetan masters and thinkers. In 1924, forty-one days after the birth of his child, Nenghai took the novice vows in Tianbaosi 天寶寺 from Foyuan 佛源, master of the 43rd generation of the Chan Linji school. The following year he received the complete ordination at the Baoguangsi 寶光寺 monastery in Xindu. While browsing the catalogue of the works included in the Tibetan Canon at the Yonghegong, he was

³⁴ For Fazun, particularly see: Fazun (1943), and Wang-Toutain (2000).

³⁵ For Nenghai, particularly see: Bianchi (2001), Qingding – Longlian – Zhaotong (1997), Zhimin – Fu Jiaoshi (1984), and Dingzhi (1995).

surprised by the quantity of Tantric texts. He then decided to go to Japan to study Shingon teachings because he was strongly convinced of the necessity to know Tantric doctrines. In Chongqing he read a note by Dayong, who had just returned from Japan and was about to leave for Tibet. Dayong's words convinced him not to go to Japan with the argument that Japanese Tantric Buddhism was not as profound and splendid as the Tibetan Vajrayāna. In 1926 Nenghai went to Kangding with Yongguang 勇光³⁶ and then reached the Paoma Mountains where he reunited with Dayong, Fazun and their group. Here he focused on Tibetan language and studied the *Lam rim* under the guidance of *dge bshes* Jiangba Gezun 降巴格尊.³⁷ The following year, Nenghai spent a few months in the Namog 那摩 monastery, where he studied Tantric texts with *dge bshes* Jiangyang 降陽, and in particular the *Gurupūjā* (*Shangshi gong* 上師供). Between 1928 and 1932, he was at the Drepung monastery in Lhasa where he became Kangsa 康薩 (Tib. Khams sa)³⁸ *rin po che*'s disciple and received the Tantric transmission of Yellow Mañjuśrī and of Yamāntaka-Vajrabhairava. After a pilgrimage to India, he later returned to China and dedicated his time to translations and teachings. In 1938 he founded his first monastery of Tibetan tradition in the Jincisi 金慈寺 of Chengdu. Between 1940–1941 he studied in Lhasa for the second and last time, spending 12 months with Kangsa *rin po che* and receiving more than 400 Tantric transmissions. Before setting back, his master gave him three monastic vests, the begging bowl, sacred scriptures and icons, shoes and clothing, as well as the 'Dharma shell' (*faluo* 法螺) to symbolise the complete receipt of his doctrinal tradition. In the following ten years he founded six other monasteries in the *dGe lugs* tradition; he called them 'Tantric vajra monasteries' (*micheng jingang daochang* 密乘金剛道場).³⁹ In 1953 he was elected member of the permanent committee of the Chinese Buddhist Association which had been founded that same year. Nenghai died the first of January of 1967 while sitting in the lotus posture in the meditation hall of the Qingliangqiao 清涼橋 on Wutaishan. His remains are still preserved today in a commemorative *stūpa* inside the monastery itself. Nenghai's vast literary production consists mainly of translations and commentaries of Tantric texts: about fifty-five

³⁶ Yongguang (1901–1988) was one of Nenghai's closest disciples. He studied in Tibet for 19 years. Upon his return he was the abbot of the Shijing 石經 monastery for a decade.

³⁷ According to Wang-Toutain (2000, p. 715), this is Byams pa dGe 'dun. The same master is called Cigu 慈顧 or Ciyuan 慈願 in Fazun's texts.

³⁸ My reconstruction of Kangsa's Tibetan name is based on the etymology given in the short biographical essay "Kangsaba renpoqing xingji chugao" (First draft on Kangsa *rin po che*'s trackway), in Qingding (1999, pp. 47–57). In a private communication, Gray Tuttle suggested that this Tibetan master might be identified with Khang gsar (1888–1941), a representative of a famous incarnation series of Lhasa, based on information in Dorje Yudon (1990).

³⁹ The term I translated as 'monastery' is *daochang* 道場 (Skr. *bodhimaṇḍa*), literally 'the place of the *bodhi*'; it refers to the place where Buddha achieved his spiritual realisation, and therefore stands to indicate the seat from which Buddhas and Bodhisattvas preach the Law. Within the Tantric tradition, the term is used in reference to the location of Tantric rituals; it is thus a possible translation of *maṇḍala*. The name that Nenghai gives to his monasteries is therefore particularly meaningful, because it immediately identifies them with places in which *tantras* are studied and practiced.

works (fourteen of which were compiled posthumously by his disciples on the basis of his teachings), among which I shall mention the *Gurupūjā*, the Mañjuśrī's *tantras* (*Wenshu fa* 文殊法), the *Yamāntaka-Vajrabhairava-tantras* (*Daiweide fa* 大威德法), and the *Lam rim* practice (*Puti cidi xiufa* 菩提次第修法).

During the first half of the 20th century the main interest in Chinese circles was towards the *dGe lugs* tradition; however, there were also many masters and laymen, mostly disciples of Gongga, who focused their attention on the teachings of *bKa' brgyud pa* and *rNying ma pa*, and in particular on those of *rDzogs chen*. This tendency anticipated the second of Tantric Rebirth Movement which will characterise the 1980s. Some of these Chinese Buddhists turned to Tibetan teachings for purely personal reasons without contributing to their spreading in China.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Genzao 根造 (1922–1995),⁴¹ Xindao 心道 (?–1968)⁴² and his famous disciple Fahai, and others,⁴³ were committed to the diffusion of the Tibetan Dharma in China. They welcomed disciples, founded centers for Tibetan practice and worked on translations of Tibetan texts into Chinese.

Fahai (or Miaokong 妙空, 1919/1921–1991),⁴⁴ was born in Qinghai (A mdo) probably from a Tibetan mother and a Chinese father. He entered Taer 塔爾 monastery (Tib. sKu 'bum) at a young age. At 13 he was taken to China by Xindao⁴⁵ to

⁴⁰ This is the case of Chen Jianmin 陳健民 (1903–1987) from Hunan, who was a disciple of Gongga, with whom he went to Kham; in 1952 he moved to Southern India where he stayed until his death. In the same manner, the layman Zhang Dengji 張澄基 (1920–1988) from Hubei, himself a disciple of Gongga, studied eight years with him and then, in 1948 went first to India and then to the United States. See Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, p. 361).

⁴¹ Genzao, educated on Mount Putuo 普陀, went to Kham to study Buddhism of *rNying ma* tradition. He returned to China in 1950 and in 1953 founded the Changle jingshe 常樂精舍 monastery. He also published the series *Changle wenku* 常樂文庫, which contained instructions on the application of the *rNying ma* teachings. See Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, p. 362).

⁴² Xindao studied in the Tibetan areas of today's Gansu and Qinghai, received the title of *mkhan po*, and later was active in various regions of China: from Shaanxi to Gansu, from Ningxia to Qinghai all the way to Xinjiang. Today his doctrinal tradition is still alive in some monastic communities in the North-West of China. See Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, p. 361).

⁴³ Among those who contributed to the spreading of the *bKa' brgyud pa* and *rNying ma pa* teachings, I shall mention Liu Liqian 劉立千 (1901–), who went to Kangding in 1934 to study Tibetan language and Tibetan Buddhism. Upon returning to China he dedicated himself to the translation of many doctrinal and historical works; and also the nun Yuanzhao 圓照 (1891–1994), originally from the North-East area, a disciple of Gongga, who in 1977 founded the Fahua 法華 monastery in Southern Shaanxi. After her cremation, during which her internal organs burned with difficulty, there were many relics left. Last but not least, the layman Guo Yuanxing 郭元興 (1920–1989) studied Tibetan on his own and later became a disciple of Gongga. In addition to his translation work, he wrote many volumes explaining the *rNying ma pa* teachings, such as the *Da yuanman* 大圓滿 and the *Shixiang baozang lun* 實相寶藏論. See Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, p. 361).

⁴⁴ For Fahai, particularly see: Esposito (1998, 2002) and Fori (1993). Fahai's date of birth is indicated by Esposito (1998, p. 221 and 2002) as 1919 and by Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000) as 1921.

⁴⁵ On the contrary, Esposito (2002) refers the name Daoxing.

study with eminent monks such as Xuyun 虛雲,⁴⁶ and his disciple Huiding 慧定. In 1941 he became abbot of the Yuantong monastery. He invited the *sprul sku* Gongga to teach Tibetan Buddhism and soon became a close disciple. Towards the end of the 1940s, he followed Gongga to Khams and specifically on Mount Gangs dkar. Here he spent many years studying and five years in spiritual retreat in a cave. In 1956 he reached Chengdu from Shanghai with the intent of returning to Khams. When he learned of Gongga's arrest, he went back and established himself on Mount Tianmu 天目 in Zhejiang where he remained from 1958 to 1964. During the Cultural Revolution, Fahai retired to a cave on that same mountain where in 1985 he founded the Qianfo 千佛 nunnery of *rDzogs chen* tradition and practice. The teachings he received from Gongga in the early 1950s belong to the *rDzogs chen* tradition, and include, as Monica Esposito (2002, p. 1) reminds us, the exegesis of the well-known *Ye shes bla ma* by 'Jigs med gLing pa (1728–1791). Among his disciples, we can cite Chen Bing 陳兵, professor of Buddhism at Sichuan University.

Final Remarks

Let us now analyse how different scholars have interpreted the movement I have been describing in this article. Firstly, I will try to clarify whether its definition as 'Tantric Rebirth' can be considered correct or if it is somehow misleading, as Françoise Wang-Toutain (2000, p. 725) seems to suggest in her recent study:

Il est vrai qu'actuellement, dans les sources chinoises, qu'elles soient continentales ou taiwanaises, le bouddhisme tibétain (*zangchuan fojiao*) est très souvent associé et même parfois totalement identifié à l'enseignement ésotérique (*mizong*) ou *mijiao*. Certes, jusqu'à l'époque des Qing, les textes tibétains qui furent traduits en chinois étaient essentiellement des ouvrages relevant des *Tantra* et l'iconographie tibétaine, qui s'était diffusée dans différentes régions de l'Empire, était en majeure partie d'inspiration ésotérique. Pourtant, il me semble qu'à partir de 1925, lorsque Dayong, Fazun, Nenghai et leurs amis commencèrent à s'intéresser au bouddhisme tibétain, ils ne prirent pas uniquement en compte son enseignement ésotérique, mais bien plutôt l'ensemble de la doctrine qui, d'après eux, tant en ce qui concerne le canon disciplinaire que les vues philosophiques des écoles idéalistes et du milieu, avaient su conserver l'enseignement original indien.

Indeed, an assimilation of Tibetan Buddhism and Tantric teachings is rather frequent in both Chinese and Western works concerned with the Tantric Rebirth.

⁴⁶ Xuyun (traditional dates: 1840–1959) was a Chan master. His activities include the restoration work of many Chinese monasteries, the attempt to create the Chinese Buddhist Association and the revitalisation of lineages that belonged to the Chan school and had disappeared in previous centuries. See his autobiography: Cen Xuelü (1995); also see the English translation by Luk and Hunn (1988).

Holmes Welch (1968, p. 173), for instance, who was probably the first Western scholar to show some interest in it, presents the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as a “Tantric variety, noted for its use of magical gestures, diagrams, and incantations”. Similarly, Gotelin Müller (1993, pp. 122–129) devotes to this movement an entire chapter of her work, titled “Esoterik oder die Faszination des Kultischen”. Both these authors tend to identify the Tibetan and the Japanese ways of the Tantric Rebirth, considering them as two different aspects of the same movement.⁴⁷ While believing that the two ‘ways’ are to be considered similar and parallel in many aspects, I am though inclined to admit that only the ‘Japanese way’, being exclusively concerned with Tantric teachings (particularly belonging to the Tendai and Shingon traditions), can be fully identified with a Tantric Rebirth. Accordingly, Chen Bing and Deng Zimei insert the ‘Tibetan way’ of Tantric Rebirth in a general chapter devoted to ‘Tantric fever’ (*mijiao re* 密教熱), but treat it under a more generic title: ‘Tibetan Buddhism fever’ (*zangjiao re* 藏教熱), taking also into account the interest showed by some masters for the esoteric teachings preserved in Tibet. Moreover, the term ‘rebirth’, if interpreted as “revitalisation of Tantric lineages”, seems to be more apt to define the Japanese way of the movement than the work and deeds of masters such as Nenghai, Fahai and others, who rather devoted themselves to spread the Tibetan Vajrayāna, a different form of Tantric Buddhism, among Chinese devotees. Nevertheless, I decided to refer to the general movement treated in this paper as a Tantric Rebirth because of the following considerations: firstly, because I still think that the main aim of the majority of the masters who went to Tibet was of a Tantric nature; secondly, because the majority of their works was either on Tantric subjects or intended as a preliminary path to Tantric practice, in accordance with the *Lam rim* teachings; and finally, because I am inclined to believe that most of them went to study under Tibetan *bla ma* with the intention to revitalise Tantric Buddhism in China, regardless of the differences between the Tibetan Vajrayāna and the form of Esoteric Buddhism which was practised in China under the Tang.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Gotelin Müller (1993, p. 122), for example, states: “Das Interesse an der Esoterik hatte einen doppelten Charakter: zum einen war da die in Japan bewahrte eigene verlorene Tradition (*shingon*, chin. *zhenyan*), zum anderen die allgemein als ‘lamaistisch’ bekannte tibetisch-mongolische”.

⁴⁸ The already mentioned Appendix 1 in Sharf (2002) questions the existence of a distinction between esoteric and exoteric teachings within Buddhism in Tang China. The author states that Chinese sources do not support “the Japanese understanding of a self-conscious esoteric school or lineage in the T’ang” and that “the compound *mi-chiao* is ubiquitous in Chinese translations of Indian scriptures, where it is used to denote the sublime and subtle teachings of the Buddha”. Moreover, according to Robert H. Sharf, the Chinese “did not possess, and apparently did not feel the need for, a term to denote or circumscribe ‘Tantra’ in the T’ang”. Even if it might be true that Tantric Buddhism was not viewed as an independent school during the Tang dynasty, it is clear enough that the representatives of the Tantric Rebirth Movement believed it to be so. Might it be because they were “influenced by doctrinal and sectarian developments in Tibet and in Japan”, as according to Sharf it is the case for Western and Eastern scholars, they all believed in the existence of a Vajrayāna school in ancient China and were persuaded that they could thus re-vivify it.

As for the origins of the movement, Chen Bing and Deng Zimei (2000) see it as a result of specific needs of the political authorities of the time.⁴⁹ Because of the fall of the Empire and the unstable situation of that era, they began – as they had done in the past – to look to the masters of Tantric rituals in order to guarantee the country's protection and avoid disasters. The Yonghegong, a monastery of Vajrayāna tradition in Beijing, assured the presence of qualified and available masters within the city limits.⁵⁰ In addition, many masters were invited from the farthest regions of Tibet and Mongolia and from Japan. Chen Bing and Deng Zimei maintain that the presence and activity of these Tantric masters, *sprul sku* and *bla ma* soon attracted Chinese Buddhist devotees and gave birth to what Chinese scholars have defined as 'Tantric fever' (*mijiao re*).

According to Gotelin Müller (1993, p. 129), the growing interest towards the Buddhist *tantras* in China in the first half of the 20th century, was both an alternative and a complement to the new 'logic and rationalistic' trend which characterised Chinese Buddhism in modern times. On the one hand there was a renewed interest in Yocācāra scholastic, seen as a 'scientific' Buddhist approach to reality in modern and Western terms, and on the other hand a rebirth of a 'mystic and mysterious' trend, which mainly expressed itself through the *tantra* and its methods. Both are seen by the author as an answer offered by the Buddhist Reform Movement to the West and its 'modernity':

Die Doppelung der buddhistischen Renaissance trägt daher die typischen Merkmale „moderner“ Existenz. Einerseits wollten die chinesischen Buddhisten ihre Zeitgemäßheit durch die Wiederentdeckung solcher alter Traditionen unter Beweis stellen, die sich am besten in ein von westlichen Maßstäben geprägtes Modernitätsbewußtsein einfügen lassen konnten. [...] Andererseits erbten sie mit der Suche nach einer letztlich westlich verstandenen Modernität aber auch deren Zerspaltenheit, und so zeigt der Hang zur Esoterik, was in diesem so definierten Selbstbewußtsein unbefriedigt geblieben war.

A different explanation, mainly based on a politic and diplomatic analysis of the Tantric Rebirth, is given by Holmes Welch (1968, p. 173) in one of his major works on Chinese Buddhism. On the Tibetan way of the movement, he wrote:

⁴⁹ Plenty has been written on the link between Tantrism and the State. As for the Chinese situation during the Tang dynasty, Strickmann (1996, p. 40), for example, recalls that the *abhiṣeka* Tantric ritual offers a strong example of the involvement of the great Tantric masters with the Imperial court: "La participation royale au rituel tantrique est un thème qui imprègne la littérature tout entière, et ce n'est pas par accident que le mystère centrale du tantrisme, la consécration, à été modelé à partir de l'ancien rituel indien de l'investiture royale. Il n'a pas seulement transformé les moines en rois tantriques, mais également les rois en maître tantriques".

⁵⁰ This position is in direct contrast with what Fafang 法舫, a disciple of Taixu and Dayong said as a witness of the events: the presence of many Tibetan and Mongolian masters teaching in China is presented by him as a reaction to the disastrous conditions of the two Vajrayāna monasteries in Beijing (Yonghegong and Huangsi 黃寺), in which the monastic rules were not respected and the regular transmission of the Tantric teachings had been interrupted. See: Jagou (1999, p. 112).

Just as Buddhism was used by Japan to serve political ends in China, so it was used by China to serve political ends in Tibet. Indeed this Chinese use of Buddhism had a much longer history, going back to the early Ch'ing dynasty when the K'ang-hsi Emperor had sent an army to expel the Dzungars from Lhasa and install the seventh Dalai Lama. That initiated Ch'ing influence not only over the Tibetans but also over the Mongols, who belonged to the same theocratic system. K'ang-hsi and his successors became patrons (*danapati*) of Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism, which suited their Manchu mentality no less than it satisfied their political needs.

After the collapse of the Ch'ing dynasty, the Tibetans began to consider themselves an independent nation. Successive Republican governments tried to persuade them that they were not – that they were one of the five races of China and that Tibet was Chinese territory. In the effort to revive imperial policy, Buddhism was among the better cards in a poor hand: that is, the Chinese could still argue that Tibet was bound to China by a common religion. This was not altogether factitious. For example, [...] Mountains like Omei and Wu-t'ai Shan had long been equally sacred to Chinese and Tibetan pilgrims and had provided the venue for Sino-Tibetan syncretism. Most important of all, the Tibetan school of Buddhism had once flourished in the home provinces and could be made to flourish there again.

Welch's position seems to reduce the movement analysed in this article as a mere political game. He sees the Tibetan way of the Tantric Rebirth as the result of an astute move by the Republican authorities, who, like the political choices of the Qing dynasty, were using Buddhism to reestablish their power in Tibet. For example, he refers that the antecedent of this Chinese political strategy was the meeting between Yuan Shikai and the *hutuktu* Zhangjia in 1912. The new president of the Chinese Republic seemed to have consulted him on Buddhist issues and on the problem of borders, thus considering him an intermediary between the Chinese and the Tibetan governments, just as the Zhangjia *hutuktus* had been during the Qing dynasty. It seems that the *hutuktu* himself persuaded him of the necessity to protect all Buddhist traditions in the same way, and suggested to use Buddhism as a means to solve the political problems with Tibet and Mongolia. According to Welch, the most important facts that confirm his thesis refer to the Panchen Lama, and his political activities during his long residency in China.⁵¹ In the same manner, Welch (1968, p. 161) tends to interpret the rising interest towards Japanese Buddhism in general, and within it the Japanese way of Tantric Rebirth, as a result of diplomatic and political needs of the time. For example, he informs us that in 1871 Etō Shinpei 江藤新平 sent a memo to the political leader Iwakura Tomomi 岩倉具視, proposing a plan to conquer China. Among the proposed means to succeed in the plan was the idea of using Buddhism strategically, because: "Two percent of the Chinese are Confucians

⁵¹ For the Panchen Lama's political activities in China, see: Jagou (1999, pp. 137–215).

or Christians. The rest are Buddhists like our own people”; and again: “Priests should be selected from the various sects and dispatched to China as spies (*kanja*)... In order to make geographical investigations of China, several [lay] people should be very secretly selected and dispatched, possibly intermingled with the above-mentioned priests or possibly on some other basis”.⁵²

Welch’s description of the events might well be historically correct. However, I do not share the emphasis he allocates to the political implications of this phenomenon. The Chinese and Japanese political games cannot be taken as the *only* reason for the strong attention given to the Japanese and Tibetan Buddhist traditions by the Chinese Buddhist world.⁵³

In conclusion, we can definitely assume that the encounter with Tibetan and Japanese masters favoured a growing interest in the local Buddhist circles towards the Japanese and Tibetan doctrinal tradition – as stated by Chen Bing and Deng Zimei; that some Chinese Buddhists reacted to the new rationalistic trend within Buddhism feeling attracted by Tantric practices – as states Gotelin Müller; or that political interests had their role in such new trends – as stated by Holmes Welch. However, I believe that the role and voice of the masters of the Tantric tradition would have remained unheard if a more general movement to reform Chinese Buddhism had not been taking place at the same time. I am thus inclined to say that this Tantric Rebirth is part of and finds its roots in the larger reflection and reform which characterised the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. At this time, all the Buddhist communities were influenced by the Western world and the first Buddhological works by both Western and Eastern scholars. In China this process was evident in the work of the so-called ‘reformist monks’; their main goal was improving monastic education, and comparing Chinese Buddhist traditions with the original Indian teachings and other Buddhist traditions in Asia. In my analysis, I have shown how Taixu, the most representative authority of the Buddhist Reform, has facilitated and sup-

⁵² According to Welch (1968, p. 161), the publication of this memo in 1900 was a confirmation of the intrinsic danger in the Japanese missionary activity.

⁵³ On this issue, and in regard to the Tibetan way, Françoise Wang-Toutain (2002, p. 719) makes a distinction between what was happening within the Tibetan way of the movement in the 1920s and in the 1930s: “Il me semble que dans leur intérêt pour le bouddhisme tibétain, Dayong, Fazun et Nenghai n’avaient pas d’arrière-pensée politique. Le fait que le Collège fondé par Dayong et les frais de l’expédition qu’il conduisit en 1925 furent entièrement financés par des fidèles laïques me semble témoigner en ce sens. Mais il n’en était pas de même pour l’Institut d’études du bouddhisme sino-tibétain. Dans un discours intitulé «la mission de l’Institut d’études du bouddhisme sino-tibétain dépendant de l’Institut du bouddhisme mondial», prononcé à Shanghai en 1932, Manzhi 滿智 insiste très longuement sur les liens très étroits qui ont toujours existé entre la Chine et le Tibet et sur le rôle important joué par le bouddhisme dans cette relation. L’intérêt politique, ou même national, de l’Institut est présenté en tout premier lieu et longuement développé. L’intérêt religieux ne vient qu’en second plan. [...] En décembre 1936, la Commission des affaires mongoles et tibétaines (Mengzang weiyuanhui) met en place un programme d’échanges entre religieux chinois et tibétains. Si l’on considère les raisons qui amenèrent les religieux chinois à aller étudier le Dharma au Tibet, on pourrait donc distinguer deux périodes. Des années vingt au début des années trente, l’intérêt est essentiellement centré sur l’étude du Dharma. Après le début de la guerre avec le Japon, le gouvernement s’immisce dans cette activité afin de maintenir les liens avec le Tibet.”

ported the activities of those Buddhists who adhered to the Japanese and Tibetan paths of the Tantric Rebirth. Taixu, a monk of undisputed Chinese upbringing, sent many monks to study in Japan and Tibet and accepted some Tibetan teachings himself. Many of the representatives of the Tantric Rebirth, like Fazun and Nenghai, focused on the study of Tibetan doctrines as well as the texts of the ancient tradition (*Āgama*) and of the Mahāyāna scholastic. The fact that some of them were also supporters of the rebirth of a Tantric tradition already present in the past in Han territory, seems to me a clear expression of their intent to affirm the completeness and legitimacy of the Chinese Buddhist tradition as a whole. The Buddhist Reform meant to widen the horizon and create a more complete form of Buddhism, and these masters believed that their activities responded to these needs. Particularly, it aimed to investigate various Buddhist traditions aside from the Chinese and to revitalise the lineages and practices that had disappeared in China. The first objective has primarily a scientific value in modern terms, while the latter must be inserted in a pure traditional content, which considers a legitimate esoteric tradition the one that derives from an uninterrupted initiatic transmission of its spiritual principle. Furthermore, another main objective of the Buddhist Reform was to find a 'scientific' method to investigate Buddhism; and Japan became the alternative to the Western world. As proof, Chen Bing and Deng Zimei emphasise the fact that the first Chinese 'scientific' methods applied to Buddhism were clearly influenced by the methodologies experimented in Japanese universities and monasteries.⁵⁴

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⁵⁴ Chen Bing – Deng Zimei (2000, p. 350). For the authors, the first Chinese Buddhologic work that used a 'scientific' research method is the above-mentioned Liang Qichao, *Foxue yanjiu shiba pian*.

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