

Buddhism in Central Asia II

Practices and Rituals, Visual and Material Transfer

Edited by

Yukiyo Kasai
Henrik H. Sørensen



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Contents

Foreword	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
General Abbreviations	ix
Bibliographic Abbreviations	xi
List of Illustrations	xv
Notes on Contributors	xxi

Introduction—Central Asia: Sacred Sites and the Transmission of Religious Practices 1

Yukiyo Kasai, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Haoran Hou

PART 1

Visual Material and Transfer

- 1 Did the Silk Road(s) Extend from Dunhuang, Mount Wutai, and Chang'an to Kyoto, Japan? A Reassessment Based on Material Culture from the Temple Gate Tendai Tradition of Miidera 17
George Keyworth
- 2 Representations of a Series of Large Buddha Figures in the Buddhist Caves of Kuča: Reflections on Their Origin and Meaning 68
Ines Konczak-Nagel
- 3 Buddhist Painting in the South of the Tarim Basin: A Chronological Conundrum 97
Ciro Lo Muzio
- 4 'Khotanese Themes' in Dunhuang: Visual and Ideological Transfer in the 9th–11th Centuries 118
Erika Forte
- 5 The 'Sogdian Deities' Twenty Years on: A Reconsideration of a Small Painting from Dunhuang 153
Lilla Russell-Smith

PART 2

Practices and Rituals

- 6 Seeking the Pure Land in Tangut Art 207
Michelle C. Wang
- 7 The Avalokiteśvara Cult in Turfan and Dunhuang in the
Pre-Mongolian Period 244
Yukiyo Kasai
- 8 Bridging Yoga and Mahāyoga: Samaya in Early Tantric Buddhism 270
Jacob P. Dalton
- 9 Visualising Oneself as the Cosmos: An Esoteric Buddhist Meditation
Text from Dunhuang 288
Henrik H. Sørensen
- 10 Beyond Spatial and Temporal Contingencies: Tantric Rituals in Eastern
Central Asia under Tangut Rule, 11th–13th C. 313
Carmen Meinert
- 11 The Serlingpa Acala in Tibet and the Tangut Empire 366
Iain Sinclair
- 12 Mahākāla Literature Unearthed from Karakhoto 400
Haoran Hou
- 13 Practice and Rituals in Uyghur Buddhist Texts: A Preliminary
Appraisal 430
Jens Wilkens
- Bibliography 465
- Index of Deities and Buddhas 536
- Index of Dynasties, Kingdoms, and Empires 539
- Index of Personal Names 540
- Index of Places 544
- Index of Technical Terms 548
- Index of Text Names 555

Visualising Oneself as the Cosmos: An Esoteric Buddhist Meditation Text from Dunhuang

Henrik H. Sørensen

1 Introduction

As the hoard of manuscripts from Dunhuang (敦煌) is slowly but steadily more studied, and the community of concerned scholars are in closer contact than hitherto, it is fair to say that overall progress in research is proceeding more effectively and rapidly than before. On the flipside of this is the fact that the current large number of scholars working in the field also diminishes the chances of discovering new and paradigmatic materials and of re-discovering the significance of material that has been previously overlooked. In contrast, new findings regarding and new approaches to the manuscripts and votive paintings are now more likely to occur because of the combination of both reading the material from new angles and taking new approaches to the available data. Even so, once in a while there are manuscripts (and more rarely paintings) that have somehow fallen through the ‘mesh of the scholarly sieve’, and which—when met with discerning eyes—are brought forth in the light of day. One such case happened to yours truly during the early summer of 2020, when perusing the French catalogues of the Dunhuang material, but as usual, for some entirely unrelated reason. In actual fact, the ‘finding’ took place as a by-product of research into other manuscripts, and I only paid notice to the manuscript in question because the French catalogue’s description of the text was strangely oblique and enigmatic. Nevertheless, the description was sufficiently interesting to capture my fancy. The item in question is the manuscript S. 6897V^o,¹ which features a hitherto unidentified Esoteric Buddhist text.²

1 *Dunhuang mizong wenxian jicheng xubian* 敦煌密宗文獻集成續編 [Collated Texts of Esoteric Buddhism from Dunhuang Continued], 2 vols., ed. Lin Shitian 林世田 and Shen Guomei 申国美 (Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2000), 421–427.

2 For an attempt at conceptualising Esoteric Buddhism in both the Chinese context and in regard to its Indian origins, see Henrik H. Sørensen, “On Esoteric Buddhism in China: A Working Definition,” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia* (hereafter EBTEA), ed. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Richard K. Payne (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 156–175. See

I cannot, of course, claim that my taking notice of S. 6897V^o (or the other copy of it as found in P. 2649V^o) constitutes a true discovery, that is, one that no one else has ever seen before. Of course, the manuscript has been available and, I presume, reasonably well-known for some time, but it appears that its contents and the context in which it was produced have never been worked on to any great extent. For those reasons at least, I consider the encounter with S. 6897V^o (and P. 2649V^o) a kind of discovery, and in what follows, I share what I found when I began working my way through it.

First, I provide a brief description of the manuscript itself, followed by a fully annotated translation. Next, I discuss the contents in some detail, and in that process, identify the salient topics presented in the text and try to contextualise them, in both the context of Buddhism in Dunuang during the late medieval period and Chinese Esoteric Buddhism more broadly. A modern, annotated edition of the complete manuscript is given as an appendix.

2 Discussing S. 6897V^o

The concerned text does not occur as an individual stand-alone manuscript, but forms part of what appears to be a ritual compendium. Thus, it appears together with a number of other Buddhist texts. The recto side of S. 6897V^o is taken up by parts of the first chapter of the *Ghanavyūhasūtra* (T. 681.16), while the verso side consists of a collection of primarily ritual texts.³ Both S. 6897V^o (5) and P. 2649V^o follow directly after the text of the *Shi e'gui shi bing shui zhenyan yin fa* 施餓鬼食並水真言印法 [Mantra and Mudrā Methods for Bestowing Food and Water on the Hungry Ghosts].⁴ The two versions of the text are not vastly different, but there are more lacunae and oddities—including inversions—in the manuscript of P. 2649V^o. For this reason, I choose

also, Henrik H. Sørensen, "Spells and Magical Practices in the Early Chinese Buddhist Sources (c. 300–600 CE) and Their Implications for the Rise and Development of Esoteric Buddhism," in *Chinese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism*, ed. Yael Bentor and Meir Shahar (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 41–71.

3 The manuscript as a whole is briefly described in Lionel Giles, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Chinese Manuscripts from Tunhuang in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1957), 110b. For some similar text compilations from Dunhuang that were evidently meant for private use, see Imre Galambos, "Composite Manuscripts in Medieval China: The Case of Scroll P.3720 from Dunhuang," in *One-Volume Libraries: Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts*, ed. Michael Friedrich and Cosima Schwarke (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 355–378.

4 This is similar to the *Shi zhu e'gui yinshi ji shui fa* 施諸餓鬼飲食及水法 [Method for Bestowing Food and Water on all the Hungry Ghosts] attributed to Amoghavajra (T. 1315.21).

to rely on the text of S. 6897V^o (5), as it affords a better read and appears to have fewer formal errors and omissions. Even so, there are indications here and there that this manuscript also has mistakes and omissions. The relationship between the two versions of the text is not entirely clear. However, it is certain that they both refer back to the same source, a master copy, and also P. 2649V^o may be further removed from a supposed *Urtext* because it is a more uneven text with more errors. However, this is also not entirely certain. Both texts feature the same abbreviations for 'bodhisattva' and '*nirvāṇa*' that are common to many Buddhist manuscripts from Dunhuang; both lack the text of the same spell, and both feature a noteworthy passage regarding the Vairocana painting in the Western Temple (西寺) of Tingzhou (庭州), to the north of Turfan in the Tarim Basin. All in all, this shows that both manuscripts derive from the same source text. As for the discrepancies between them, we may, therefore, consider them scribal errors. It should be noted that P. 2649V^o also has a number of corrections, including an interlinear insertion in smaller characters of an entire section that the copyist had evidently overlooked. However, what is perhaps the most important point with regard to the text of these two manuscripts, is that they indicate a local origin. It is evident from the manner in which the manuscript is written that Faxing (d.u., 法興)⁵ should not be considered the author of the text, but probably its transmitter in Dunhuang. As such, the ritual-cum meditation text forms part of what appears to be a sort of Buddhist text collection, most probably meant for personal or private use. The text's reference to the Vairocana image in Beš Balık, i.e. Beiting (北庭) in Tingzhou, mentioned above, indicates that the author of the text had an intimate knowledge of the Buddhist sites in Central Asia along the Silk Road, and also that he was a practitioner of Esoteric Buddhism of the type associated with Amoghavajra (704–774).

The manuscript under discussion consists of a total of 93 lines of text (see the Appendix). The calligraphy of the text is even, but of middling quality. Despite the fact that the beginning of the text appears to be incomplete—there is neither title nor formal introductory opening, as is otherwise common for this type of Esoteric Buddhist work—the manuscript itself is, nevertheless, in a good state of preservation. Moreover, its overall and reasonably adept calligraphy affords a consistent and straight-forward reading, which means that

5 A monk with the same name, Faxing, appears in a census list dating from 921 (S. 2614V^o). However, it is not certain that this is the same person as the owner of S. 6897V^o, even though the time frame actually fits rather well for both the person and the text.

there were few problems preparing the critical version on which my translation is based.⁶

In terms of the content, the text features a set of interlinked meditations. Through the meditations, the practitioner first transforms the four great elements (Chin. *sida* 四大)⁷ that make up his own body in an elaborate visualisation purifying process involving the use of so-called seed syllables (Skt. *bīja*, Chin. *zhongzi zi* 種子字). This practice is meant to transform the 'coarse' elements into holy elements, that is, the very stuff of the *dharmakāya* Buddha Vairocana. The outcome of this is a self-identification between the practitioner and the cosmos, as represented by this buddha. A *dhāraṇī* is uttered in various phases of the visualisation, including in the process of self-empowerment (Chin. *jiachi* 加持, Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*).⁸ The practitioner then continues with the visualisation, transforming his ordinary consciousnesses into the four wisdoms (Chin. *sizhi* 四智), whereby the practitioner is said to perfect the three bodies (Skt. *trikāya*, Chin. *sanshen* 三身).⁹ This phase in the practice mainly involves focusing on the seed syllable *A* (Chin. *a* 阿) (more on this in the following). In a following phase in the practice, the meditator directs his visualisation towards the salvation of beings suffering in the hot and cold hells. Through a series of special, internal visions involving an imaginary ocean of milk, he first alleviates the suffering of sentient beings, including animals and insects, by emptying the hells of their denizens and transporting them all to rebirth in the pure land of Amitābha Buddha.

Typologically, the text of S. 6897V^o is a combination of an instruction in meditation and a ritual text, even though its performative ritual aspects are entirely internalised and effectuated through the practice of meditation alone. For these reasons, I consider the text an interesting example of a meditation text that combines both an internalisation of the cosmos and, at the same time, a contemplative, outward-reaching, and active agenda of salvation. Its

6 That process was greatly aided by the chance discovery of an electronic version of the text, which although helpful, nevertheless contains formal mistakes, missing parts, and lacks comments. It was compiled by a certain Shan Zonghong (善宗弘), cf. accessed September 6, 2019. <https://www.jianshu.com/p/00ae106b5942>.

7 In Esoteric Buddhism, there are actually five elements, i.e. earth, water, fire, wind, and space. *Foguang da cidian* 佛光大辭典 [Great Dictionary of Foguang Shan; hereafter FDC], vol. 2 (Gaoxiang: Foguang chubanshe, 1988), 1056b–1057a.

8 See the detailed discussion in David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and Their Tibetan Successors* (London: Serindia, 1987), 240–243.

9 The four wisdoms are: The mirror-like wisdom, the wisdom of equanimity, the wisdom of wondrous vision, and the wisdom of accomplishment. FDC, vol. 2, 1769c–1771a. For the relationship between the three bodies and the four wisdoms, see *ibid.*, vol. 1, 561a.

overall concern with the liberation of sentient beings is, of course, in full alignment with standard Mahāyāna and contemporary Daoist ideology.¹⁰

As will be clear in the discussion below, one gradually realises that the text is, indeed, a unique one, which has so far not appeared in the extant canonical material transmitted in the Chinese language. However, this does not mean that its overall message, description of practices, nor basic terminology are so. The text actually conveys concepts and ritual elements that are familiar from the literature of Esoteric Buddhism, broadly stated, but here imagined and internalised.

3 Translation (S. 6897V^o)

If one desires to visualise the three-thousand great thousand-fold worlds, as well as the worlds in the ten directions, one must first enter the signless meditative absorption [(Skt. *samādhi*)] of the Mahāyāna. One should begin by making holy the four great elements. Then, in the quiet of the night, at midnight, and in the three watches of the night, one must rise well-rested and sit correctly [in meditation], with an erect body. Restrain and pacify [(Chin. *shoushe* 收攝)] the six roots and the six consciousnesses [(Skt. *ṣaṭvijñāna*)], only leaving the thought consciousness [(Skt. *manovijñāna*)]. Then this thought consciousness is called the wondrous observing wisdom. [Then one should] gaze straight down and visualise a space disk on top of which one places the seed syllable letter *HE* [(Chin. *he* 訶)]. It is of dark colour, and emits a dark light, fully transforming the Vairambha wind, which is extensive and limitless, extending sixteen *lakh*. Then visualise on top of the space disk, a water disk. Place in the middle of it the letter *FU* [(Chin. *fu* 縛)] as the seed syllable. It is of white colour and emits a white light which transforms and completes the water disk, and which has a depth of eleven myriads and twenty-thousand *yojanas* and eight *laks*. Complete the golden disk. On the golden disk is placed the letter *A*. It is of yellow colour, and emits a yellow light, transforming the golden disk. Above the golden disk, extend [the visualisation] to the place where one's own body sits. Visualise oneself sitting on top of the golden disk, [with] one's own body sitting on the ground. [Then] visualise the letter *OM* [(Chin. *an* 唵)] as the seed syllable, which transforms and completes a fiery consumption of the impure four great elements. In the space of a moment, they are completely transformed into ashes and cinders, all pure. If one sees one's own body and

10 One may even read this as reflecting in an incipient manner some of the standard elements that later became salient features in the Shuilu (水陸) tradition of the mid-Song period.

all of the bones, then one combines empty nothingness of suffering and constant no self, and visualises the four elements [(Chin. *sixing* 四行)],¹¹ in which one contemplates the truth of suffering [(Chin. *kudi* 苦諦)] burning the four great elements.¹² It is not necessary to destroy the mind's consciousness [in the visualisation].¹³ [Because] if the mind's consciousness is being destroyed, the wondrous contemplative wisdom will also be destroyed. Therefore, if the nature of consciousness is destroyed, it follows that one will be unable to have contemplative wisdom, thus making the [entire] affair incomplete. It will simply be a colourless realm. At the time of burning at the end of the *kalpa*, the fire will not be able to burn sentient beings. Therefore, the consciousness of your own mind will be like this as well. It will not be burnt in the fire completely [in the meditation], and as that is the case, place on the above ashes [of the consciousness] the letter *A* as the seed syllable. Then this *A* letter, as well as the ashes, will of themselves transform into the pure *dharmakāya* of Vairocana, the essence of which is signless. Proceeding from this, one reaches the knees, where one places the letter *A* as the seed syllable. It transforms [the element] earth. It is of intense yellow colour, [emitting] a yellow light. Proceeding from the knee to the waist, one places the letter *FU* as the seed syllable, transforming the [element of] water. It is of an intense white colour and [emits] an intense white light. Proceeding from the waist [and up], one reaches the shoulders, [where one places] the letter *OM* as the seed syllable, transforming [the element of] fire, which is of an intense red colour, [emitting] a red light. Proceeding from the face one reaches the chignon, [where] one visualises the letter *SVĀ* [(Chin. *suofu* 娑縛)]¹⁴ as the seed syllable. It transforms the element of wind into an intense purple colour, which emits a purple light. On top of the crown of your head, visualise the letter *HE* as the seed syllable, which transforms [the element of] space with an intense dark colour, [emitting] a dark light. These, then, are the four great holy elements. They are the essence of the Great Sun, the World-Honoured Vairocana Buddha's *dharmakāya*. Following this, proceed from the crown of the head to the feet, limb by limb, joint by joint, and visualise in all [of them] the letter *A* as the seed syllable. All should be empowered with the [following] *dhāraṇī* when making the visualisation. One must also utter:

-
- 11 Here, the text employs the standard terminology for rendering the idea of 'element,' similar to the five elements or agents (Chin. *wuxing* 五行).
- 12 I suppose that the meaning of this is that, as the elements are contingent, i.e. temporary and causal, they are subject to impermanence, which is at the heart of the noble truth of suffering.
- 13 This is what is referred to at the beginning of the meditation as 'retaining the consciousness.'
- 14 This is in accordance with the phonetic system for transcribing Sanskrit initiated by Amoghavajra.

“*Namo samanta buddhanaṃ* (‘Praise to the Universal Buddha’).¹⁵ When the [letter] *A* is placed on the crown of your head, [the visualisation] is complete. Then [one proceeds with the visualisation] from the top knot of your head and down to your feet, and for self-empowering the crown of one’s head, one uses the *Yiqie rulai xin tuoluoni* 一切如來心陀羅尼 [Heart Dhāraṇī of all the Tathāgatas] to empower it [(Chin. *jiachi* 加持)]. This, then, is the method for perfecting one’s body. The *dhāraṇī* goes, [...].¹⁶ With this *dhāraṇī*, one empowers the crown of one’s head, as well as both shoulders, chanting it once for each of them, while at the same time visualising your own body seated on the extensive full moon disk. The moon disk then becomes your complete mirror-like wisdom. Then, in its brilliance, behold the three-thousand great thousand-fold worlds as in your own body. Proceeding from the top of the head down to the chest, this is the form realm of the twenty heavens [(Chin. *ershi tian* 二十天)]. Continuing [the visualisation] from the chest [on down], one reaches the lower abdomen, where one visualises the six heavens of desire [(Chin. *liuyu tian* 六欲天)], Mt. Meru [(須彌山)], the great oceans [(Chin. *dahai* 大海)], and the four continents [(Chin. *sizhou* 四洲)]. Proceeding from this, one reaches the feet, where one should visualise all the sentient beings [stuck] in the three evil paths [(Chin. *san’e dao* 三惡道)].

This [visualisation] compares with the wall in the Western Temple of Beiting [(庭西寺)], on which there is a painting of Vairocana Buddha, etc., and is no different from that. Having situated the three-thousand great thousand-fold worlds in oneself, then at that time, you should, with [both] mind and mouth, utter as follows: “Letter *A*, adorn my body!” Limb by limb, joint by joint, all the parts of one’s body are transformed [so that] the letter *A* becomes my body, and the letter *A* becomes my life force, which is also due to the power of empowerment of my upholding of all the *tathāgatas’* mind. “This, my present body, is the *dharmakāya*. Its essence is the same as the *dharma* realm and no different from the *dharmakāya* of all buddhas.” By refining the eight consciousnesses, one perfects the four wisdoms. The four wisdoms [in turn] perfect the three bodies [(Skt. *trikāya*)], the pure *dharmakāya* of Vairocana, which is formless in essence, illuminating the worlds of the ten directions.

15 The manuscript reads, *Nanwu suomantuo munan* (南无娑謨陁暮喃), which is obviously a corruption of *namo samanta buddhanaṃ* (南莫三滿多沒馱喃).

16 The manuscript has a lacuna here, indicating where the text of the same *dhāraṇī* should rightly be. The only *mantra* I have come across, and which matches this title, is the *Sarva tathāgatahrdayasamavairocanadhāraṇī* found in Dānapāla’s translation of the *Raśvīmīla viśuddhaprabhadhāraṇīsūtra* (T. 1023.19, 717a).

This meditative absorption is called the Śuraṅgama Samādhi.¹⁷ At that time the *sambhogakāya* [i.e. the bliss body] dwells in meditative absorption. If one wishes to attain merit, one should give rise to the four immeasurable states of mind [(Chin. *si wuliang xin* 四無量心)].¹⁸ First, visualise the ocean of milk in the lower abdomen, and visualise the letter *A* in the ocean, with the letter *A* becoming the root syllable. Proceeding from the letter *A*, visualise a golden lotus flower extending from the navel. Within the flower, visualise the letter *A* changing into a complete altar. On the altar, place the white-coloured letter *VA* as the seed syllable. It transforms into a moon disk with a great and precious Bhilaṅka Pearl [(Skt. *śākya bhilaṅka maṇi ratna*)].¹⁹ Proceeding [with the visualisation], the precious pearl on the full moon disk emits a thousand rays of purifying light that issue forth, streaming into the ocean of milk. When the frosty stream of rays enters the ocean of milk, it then cools. Its cold milk runs in six streams into the eight hot hells, completely extinguishing and exhausting the fire there. This milk then flows into the mouths of all the evil and sinful people there, all of whom will surely be satiated, and they will surely all be relieved from their sufferings. Furthermore, visualise that from your body, one hundred million rays of light emanate, which illuminate the bodies of the evil people, and upon which all their karmic hindrances will surely be eliminated and exhausted. Moreover, inside all of the rays, visualise all evil people being transformed. In each of them can be seen transformed people. When beholding this, all the transformed people extol Amitabha's name. Due to the power of invoking the Buddha, they will go for rebirth in Amitabha's paradise after they die. [Then] visualise that all the hells have become empty. Furthermore, and in your mind, visualise that there is an ocean of milk. In the ocean of milk, visualise the letter *A* becoming a triangular altar. On the altar, visualise the letter *RA* [(Chin. *luo* 囉)] as the seed syllable, which transforms into the sun disk and the precious pearl. Proceed from the precious pearl on the sun disk to visualise one-hundred million rays of light illuminating this ocean of milk. The ocean of milk then heats up, and its hot milk runs into the eight cold hells. The hells and their icy mountains will surely all be eliminated and done away with. Then visualise the warm milk flowing into the mouths of the evil people,

17 The four immeasurable states of mind are kindness (Skt. *maitri*), great compassion (Skt. *karuṇā*), joy (Skt. *muditā*), and being impervious to adverse conditions (Skt. *upekṣā*). FDC, vol. 2, 1777a–1778b.

18 This most likely refers to the *Śuraṅgamasamādhisūtra* (T. 642.15). However, as it is unclear which textual source is actually referred to here, this could also refer to one of the meditative absorptions found in the *Shou lengyan jing* 首楞嚴經 [Pseudo-Śuraṅgama Scripture] (T. 945.19).

19 For this holy relic, see FDC, vol. 7, 683obc.

upon which all of them will become fully satiated and removed from the suffering of the cold. Then emit [from your own body] thousand rays of light, which illuminate the bodies of those evil. In this light, each of them should be visualised as a transformation buddha, whereupon each one in this crowd of evil people will see these transformation buddhas, their mouths extolling the name of Amitābha. Because of the buddha's power, with each recitation, all of them will go for rebirth in the realm of Sukhāvātī. [Then] visualise that all the hells become empty. Then visualise the milk reaching the kings and ministers in the realm [(Skt. *gati*)] of humans [(Chin. *rendao* 人道)], and from them, extending to both rich and poor people, all of whom will surely be satiated. Then extend one-million rays of light to illuminate the rich [people], etc., who will abandon suffering and be liberated upon rebirth in the paradise of Sukhāvātī. Visualise [next] travellers to distant places and those who are very sick; behold [how] their mouths become full of milk, so that they become fully satiated. Their sickness and painful suffering will be done away with, and they will [also] be reborn in the land of Sukhāvātī. Then visualise those in the realm of domestic animals, including lions, tigers, wolves, blood-sucking creep, wild beasts, oxen, donkeys, horses, etc., as well as snakes, scorpions, mosquitos, gadflies, ants, etc., all such kinds. In their mouths, they will surely all [receive the] milk and be fully satiated. Then emit [from your own body] thousand rays of light illuminating the evil peoples' bodies. In each ray of light, each of them will appear as transformed people, and each of these delivered, and all of them will give rise to joy and be reborn in the paradise of Sukhāvātī.

[The practitioner should then] enter the four limitless *samādhis*. Visualise the letter *A*, and on the crown of one's head, visualise the bodhi tree. In the bodhi tree, one should [next] visualise the western world of Sukhāvātī. Then visualise Amitābha Buddha, Avalokiteśvara, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, and all of their host. Next, in the muddy water [of the paradisaical ponds], visualise ten-million lotus flowers. In the flowers, visualise ten-million youths of transformed rebirth. Your own body then transforms into one of them. [Next], visualise your eyes beholding Amitabha Buddha. Afterwards, one enters the four limitless *samādhis* and may access the three-thousand great thousand-fold worlds. This is referred to as the mirror-like wisdom of the *nirmāṇakāya*. Above, one should behold names of the small thousand-fold worlds. The mirror-like wisdom of *sambhogakāya* can be seen as the middle thousand-fold worlds. If the *dharmakāya* Vairocana's entire great and complete mirror-like wisdom body is seen as above, it is referred to as the great thousand-fold worlds. Moreover, it extends in the four cardinal directions, above, and below the three-thousand-fold worlds of the ten directions, which are all illuminated. Therefore, he is called Vairocana Buddha in Sanskrit. In Chinese, this means 'All Illuminating One'. He is explained as the essence of the great complete mirror encircling

the *dharmadhātu*. Hence, without the latter there will be no illumination, and without this, it (i.e. the light) can not reach everywhere. The former two bodies [(i.e., the *sambhogakāya* and *nīrmānakāya*)] also will not reach everywhere. The third, the *dharmakāya*, is able to illuminate and is all-pervading. When one reaches this stage of abandonment, then one abides in the wisdom of the nature of equanimity. Its essence has three types of equanimity. The first is to see life and death as fully even, and one neither enters nor leaves them. The second is to see the nine worthy ones²⁰ as the same, without there being high or low. The third is to see suffering and bliss as the same, without choosing and without rejecting. Then the essence of this wisdom of equanimity is your own [basic] ground. One may then receive and use the two in one's *sambhogakāya*. Then, like above, they may be referred to in meditative absorption as the thought consciousness, which is called the wisdom of wondrous contemplation and introspection. Vigorously exiting from meditative absorption, one will afterwards discourse on the teaching, transforming people, [so that they will have] correct dispositions and correct views. Their thoughts will not give rise to confusion when seeing and hearing, as the signs of the six consciousnesses, feeling, knowing, etc., will correspond to wisdom. This is termed the perfected wisdom. This, then, is your own *nirmānakāya*. Furthermore, this priceless treasure will fulfill all of what one prays for. These *dhāraṇī*-manifested seed syllables [used in the] contemplation method of Mahāyāna reveal themselves as the buddha's expedient means [(Skt. *upāya*, Chin. *fangbian* 方便)]. Without exaggeration, they may be referred to as a thousand pieces of gold. Do not transmit them [lightly]!

This is the so-and-so essential method of constant practice. With all of the four limitless states of mind united, one cultivates the practice of the previous meditative absorption, which is the great wisdom. Next are the four limitless states of mind, which are [expressions of] great compassion. With compassion and wisdom unified, one will quickly obtain the Buddha's way. This, then, is the complete teaching of Mahāyāna.

If one desires to seek the fruits of the Buddha's *sambhogakāya*, it is necessary to have equanimity of one's own inner mind. When the inner and outer mind are both in balance, it is not necessary to attend to the three *buddhakāyas*. Worldly fellows hold on to false liberation and [consequently] sink in the rounds of birth and death, unable to obtain liberation, without which there will be no escape. Therefore, it is important that one gets rid of all *śrāvaka* attachments and the error of emptiness of birth and death in order

20 They are Vairocana surrounded by the four other *dhyāni* buddhas and the four bodhisattvas of the Garbhadhātu *maṇḍala*, also known as the nine worthy ones (Chin. Jiuzun 九尊). FDC, vol. 1, 146ab.

to enter the fruits of emptiness. [If one fails to do so] one destroys forever the unborn, so that one can not obtain the buddha fruit. Hence, it is essential to seek that which is, and not to hold on to empty existence, whereby one will not remove oneself from empty existence, but [instead], will enter the gate of non-duality [(Chin. *ru buer men* 入不二門)]. Even if one remains in *samsāra*, one is not contaminated by worldly phenomena. It is like a lotus flower growing in [muddy] water. Although one obtains liberation, one does not seek extinction.²¹ One does not discard the vow of compassion to exert oneself in benefitting with bliss sentient beings in the future. Hence, one should not hold on to empty existence.

The disciple Faxing's book.

4 Text and Context of S. 6897V^o

Having read the text of the manuscript and accessed the scope of its practice-oriented discourse, let us now proceed to a more detailed analysis of the contents and their implications.

There are a number of salient features in the text that are characteristic of Esoteric Buddhist practice and belief, such as the visualisation of seed syllables, the self-identification with the deity, the ritual destruction of the hells, the non-dual teaching of equanimity, the special three body concept, the manner of defining the Buddhist wisdoms, the ubiquitous use of spells for effectuating the practice, etc. That being said, it is also clear that there are important aspects of Esoteric Buddhist practice that are not present here. They include the absence of any mention of the five Buddha families²² although an altar for fire offering (Skt. *homa*) is referred to, neither its name nor the practice itself occur in the text. Moreover, although spells seem to play an important part in S. 6897V^o, only one *mantra* is actually given in full. Likewise, *mudrās*, a standard element in Esoteric Buddhist ritual practice, are entirely absent from the text. Of course, this could be because everything in the text deals with visualisation practice, but even so, normally *mudrās* are used in tandem with both chanting spells and visualisations in standard Esoteric Buddhist practice as part of the three mysteries (Chin. *sanmi* 三密), that is, the mysteries of

21 On the surface, this seems to contradict basic Buddhist tenets. However, it would appear that this is done in order to stress the bodhisattva ideal, according to which the practitioner foregoes the extinction of *nirvāṇa* in order to remain in, but not of, the world.

22 The Five Buddha families otherwise occur prominently in the Esoteric Buddhist manuscripts from Dunhuang, revealing that much of it derives from the mature dispensation of Chinese Esoteric Buddhism especially that of Amoghavajra. As to why they are not referred to in our text is perhaps because they were taken for granted.

body, speech, and mind. As it is, all of these features appear in other Esoteric Buddhist scriptures from Dunhuang, including the celebrated *Tanfa yize* 壇法儀則 [Altar Methods for Ritual Proceedings (abbreviated title)].²³

Since the manuscript is essentially a meditation text, the main practice of which revolves around a series of visualisations, we need to come to term with these visualisations in order to understand the context from which they derive. The meditation and visualisation process set forth in the text can be broken into the following constituent parts:

- (1) The meditation on the four elements;
- (2) The meditation on the merger with the divinity;
- (3) The visualisation of the four wisdoms;
- (4) The visualisation of the ocean of milk and the cold and hot hells;
- (5) The visualisation of the liberation of the all sentient beings;
- (6) The visualisation of Sukhāvati;
- (7) Accessing the four limitless *samādhis*.

It makes sense to try to pinpoint the immediate textual origins of these practices that occur in the text in the canonical Esoteric Buddhist literature. Indeed, as we shall see, a number of them can readily be traced in that material.

Beginning with the first visualisation, one of the earliest, if not the earliest, occurrence of meditation on the four elements in one's own body within the context of Esoteric Buddhist practice is found in the *Mahāvairocanasūtra* (T. 848.18). The short verse in question reads:

The mantrin [(Chin. *zhenyanzhe* 真言者)] first places the complete altar in his own body;²⁴

[Proceeding] from the feet up to the navel, it constitutes the great disk of *vajras*;

From there, and reaching the heart, he should visualise a water disk;

23 This is an abbreviation of an otherwise hopelessly elaborate and lengthy title. Hou Chong (侯冲) prepared an authoritative, modern edition in ZWF 11, 17–231. For a study of this important text, see Amanda K. Goodman, “The Ritual Instructions for Altar Methods (*Tanfa yize*): Prolegomenon to the Study of a Chinese Esoteric Buddhist Ritual Compendium from Late-Medieval Dunhuang,” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2013). See also, Hou Chong, “Mijiao zhongguo hua de jingdian fenxi: Yi Dunhuang ben Jingangding yingqing yi, Jingangding xiuxi yujia yi, he Tanfa yize wei qieru dian 密教中國化的經典分析: 以敦煌本金剛頂迎請儀, 金剛頂修習瑜伽儀, 和 壇法儀則 為切入點 [A Discussion of Esoteric Buddhism with Chinese Characteristics based on Esoteric Buddhist Manuscripts found in Dunhuang such as the *Jingangding yingqing yi*, the *Jingangding xiuxi yujia yi* and the *Tanfa yize*],” *Yuanguang foxuexuebao* 圓光佛學學報 [Journal of Yuanguang Buddhist Studies] 19 (2012): 149–153.

24 These are the internalised *maṇḍala*-altars of the elements generated in the meditation practice.

Above the water disk, there is a fire disk, and above it a wind disk.

Next, he should consider the supporting ground and draw the host of images [for the *maṇḍala*].²⁵

This brief instruction on visualisation of the elements in one's body is, of course, much more rudimentary and simplistic than the lengthy and elaborate instructions found in the text of the manuscript. However, in the context of the *Mahāvairocanasūtra*, this is simply a template for visualising the elements, and as such, is a standard ritual feature that can be shifted and used in different ritual settings.²⁶ Note that the short verse above does not mention five elements (Chin. *wuda* 五大, Skt. *pañca mahābhūtāni*),²⁷ which constitute a standard group in mature Esoteric Buddhism, but only four, as is also the case in S. 6897V^o.

A later and somewhat obscure work, the *Jingangding putixin lun lüejì* 金剛頂菩提心論略記 [Abbreviated Record of the Treatise on Bodhicitta according to the *Vajrasekhara*], features a discussion of the four elements and the four wisdoms as the unfolding of Vairocana's self-enlightenment, and states: "These four letters [(i.e., the seed syllables)] are the holy wisdoms deriving from Vairocana Buddha's self-enlightenment" (ZZ 777.46, 199c).²⁸ However, this source does not mention the elements' relationship with the Buddha's three bodies. One can not, therefore, argue that this scripture in itself could have inspired the visualisation text. What it does show, however, is that some of the

- 25 T. 848.18, 31a:
 真言者圓壇 先置於自體
 自足而至臍 成大金剛輪
 從此而至心 當思惟水輪
 水輪上火輪 火輪上風輪
 次應念持地 而圖眾形像。

My translation differs on various points from that found in Rolf Giebel's translation. Cf. *The Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi Sutra*, trans. Rolf W. Giebel (Berkeley: Numata Center, 2005), 144.

- 26 Visualisation as used here means 'seeing with the inner eye', i.e., imagining or constructing a mental image in one's mind. Something which is at the core of almost all meditation practices in Esoteric Buddhism. Whether the mental vision is something one actually sees, or imagines to be there, is in fact irrelevant to the ritual's function and process. An inner image is created with which the meditator/practitioner relates and interacts.
- 27 For the five elements in Esoteric Buddhism, see FDC, vol. 2, 1056b–1057a.
- 28 It is said to have been transmitted by the monk Bianman (d.u., 遍滿), about whom little is otherwise known, and has only come down to us through a Japanese transmission. A colophon placed at the end of the scripture shows that it was in circulation in Japan during the late Heian Period (794–1185, 平安時代) (ZZ 777.46). In any case, it appears to be of a later date than the Dunhuang manuscript.

doctrinal and practice-related concepts that constitute the conceptual underpinning of the meditation process given in our manuscript were expounded in other Esoteric Buddhist contexts in East Asia during the same period or slightly after.

The visualisation practices involving the so-called seed syllables appear prominently in the *Mahāvairocanasūtra* (T. 848.18: 31a, 34b, 35b, 48c, etc.) and in the corpus of related scriptures and commentaries. The instructions on the visualisation of the letter *A* (Chin. *a zi men* 阿字門) may be especially important in this regard.²⁹ An extended discussion of seed syllable meditation, including on the letter *A*, is found in the *Tae Piroch'ana kyōng kongyang ch'adung pōp so* (*Da Piluzhena jing gongyang cidengfa shu*) 大毘盧遮那經供養次第法疏 [Outline of the Progressive Methods for Making Offerings According to the *Mahāvairocanasūtra*] (T. 1797.39: 799a–800a), authored by the Unified Silla (668–936, 新羅) monk Pulga Saui (fl. first half of 8th c., 不可思議), who was one of Śubhākarasiṃha's (637–735) Korean disciples.³⁰ Again, this reveals that this type of visualisation was central to mature Esoteric Buddhism in China and East Asia from the 8th century onwards. Moreover, the inherited lore surrounding both the Vajradhātu and Garbhadhātu *maṇḍalas* feature entire *maṇḍalas* made up of seed syllables only, indicating the exceptionally close relationship between divinity and the concept of sound that characterises this stage in the development of Esoteric Buddhism.³¹

None of the works mentioned above actually offers a close textual match with our text. However, there is one Esoteric Buddhist work that is very similar in its discussion and treatment of almost all the same major topics. This is the *Foding zunsheng xin po diyu lun yechang chu sanjie bimi sanshen foguo sanzhang*

29 The concerned visualisation practice is described in the *Mahāvairocanasūtra* (T. 848.18, 19bc). For more specific and detailed instructions, see Yixing's (673–727, 一行) *Wuwei sanzang chan yao* 無畏三藏禪要 [Tripiṭaka Master Śubhākarasiṃha's Meditation Essentials] (T. 917.18). For meditation on the seed syllable *A* in Japanese context, including a discussion of its Chinese background, see Richard K. Payne, "Ajikan: Ritual and Meditation in the Shingon Tradition," in *Re-visioning Kamakura Buddhism*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 219–248.

30 For further details, see Henrik H. Sørensen, "Early Esoteric Buddhism in Korea," in EBTEA, ed. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Richard K. Payne (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 575–592 (esp. 585–589).

31 For examples of such *bija maṇḍalas* from early pre-modern Japan, see Shingon: *Die Kunst des Geheimen Buddhismus in Japan*, ed. Roger Goepfer (Cologne: Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst der Stadt Köln, 1988), 156–157. No extant paintings of this kind have been identified so far in China, but *maṇḍalas* and spell disks consisting of Sanskrit seed syllables are known from both prints and stone carving, the former from Dunhuang and the latter from Fangshan (房山) in Hebei province.

xidi zhenyan yigui 佛頂尊勝心破地獄轉業障出三界祕密三身佛果三種悉地真言儀軌 [Ritual Proceedings of the Budoṣṇīṣavijaya's Heart for Destroying the Hells, Overturning Karmic Obstructions, and Escaping the Three-fold Worlds, the Secret Three Bodies' Buddha Fruits of Three Kinds of Siddhis with Mantras] (T. 906.18).³² It is attributed to Śubhākarasiṃha (637–735, Chin. Shanwuwei 善無畏), but it is doubtful that he actually had anything to do with it. It is a ritual text like S. 6897V^o that features a soteriological discourse on the elements—in this case, we have five of them, which is characteristic of mature Esoteric Buddhism's fully developed five buddhas template—including their respective seed syllables, their visualisation in a meditation, the wisdoms, the three bodies, etc. Furthermore, it also addresses the destruction of the hells and the metaphor of the divine sea of milk, although in a different manner than S. 6897V^o. We can, therefore, say that while it retains the feel of an orthodox text, perhaps one that is more systematic in a formal sense, it is, nevertheless, a ritual text with a similarly oblique history and pedigree.

There are a number of other manuscripts from the Buddhist milieu of Dunhuang that feature seed syllable meditation and visualisation. A noteworthy one is the *Jingangzang pusa sanzī guanxiang* 金剛藏菩薩三字觀想 [Vajragarbha Bodhisattva's Contemplation of the Three Syllables], (P. 3835V^o).³³ Vajragarbha's meditation text, or rather, a shortened version of it, is also included in the important Esoteric Buddhist ritual compendium, the *Altar Methods for Ritual Proceedings*, mentioned previously.³⁴ Another

32 Three closely related but variant versions of this ritual work exist (T. 905–907.18). However, they have all come down to us through Japanese copies. It is, therefore, difficult to verify whether Śubhākarasiṃha was indeed the author. He was probably not, as all three versions invoke the *Mahāvairocanasūtra* and the *Vajrasekhara*, which makes it more likely that the text was composed towards the end of the 8th century, rather than during the first quarter of that century.

33 For a detailed study of the *Vajragarbha Bodhisattva's Contemplation of the Three Syllables*, refer to Amanda Goodman's chapter in this volume. The prevalence of the cult of Vajragarbha in Dunhuang is explored briefly in Ueyama Daishuin 上山大峻, "Tonkō shutsudo Chibetto bun mahāyōga bunken Kongōsatta mondō wayaku 敦煌出土チベット文マハーヨーガ 文献『金剛薩埵問答』和訳 [The Excavated Textual Material of the Mahāyōga Text, Vajrasattvas' Questions and Answers]," in *Zengaku kenkyū no shosō: Tanaka Ryōshō hakase koki kinen ronshū* 禅学研究の諸相: 田中良昭博士古稀記念論集 [Aspects of Zen Studies: Commemorative Volume of Essays for Professor Tanaka Ryōshō], ed. Tanaka Ryōshō hakase koki kinen ronshū kankō-kai 田中良昭博士古稀記念論集刊行会 (Tokyo: Daito shuppansa, 2003), 3–22.

34 Cf. ZWF 11, 135–136. In the course of her research on the *Altar Methods for Ritual Proceedings*, Goodman also came across a greatly abbreviated version of the text, and realised that it was a separate, but essentially unrelated, meditation text belonging to Esoteric Buddhism that had been grafted onto the compendium. Goodman, "The Ritual

Dunhuang manuscript featuring *bīja* visualisation is the *Dasheng si wuliang anxin rudao fayao lue* 大乘四無量安心入道法要略 [Abbreviated Dharma Essentials of the Four Immeasurable Calming States of the Mahāyāna for Entering the Way] (S. 522).

Another salient feature of mature Esoteric Buddhism is the practice of self-identification with the deity, in this case, Vairocana, as part of the process of effectuating universal salvation. Identification with the deity is found in several important Esoteric Buddhist scriptures, and again, the *Mahāvairocanasūtra* is probably the most important source for this. The *sūtra*'s twelfth chapter explains the results of the visualisation practice, which culminates in the union of the practitioner and Vairocana as the apex of Esoteric Buddhist cultivation and transcendence (T. 848.18: 31a). The model for the merger between practitioner and deity is found in a variety of ritual and meditation practices throughout mature Esoteric Buddhist Tang literature, and of course, after the 8th century, it appears in the practice of evocations (Skt. *sādhana*) of fully developed Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, where it is a standard element.³⁵

Concepts from the Pure Land tradition abound in the text, which places its discourse of salvation in late medieval Chinese Buddhism. In this connection, mention can be made of the vision of the Pure Land Triad—Amitābha Buddha and the bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta—and the transformed beings born from lotuses in Sukhāvātī's ponds. All of this imagery clearly originated in the cycle of scriptures focusing on Amitābha Buddha's Western Pure Land.³⁶ Moreover, the only buddhas who actually appear in the text are Vairocana and Amitābha. Hence, it is clear that whoever composed the text had a good understanding of the Pure Land tradition in its own right. In spite of these features, the text should, in my view, only partly be taken as an example of Esoteric Buddhist and Pure Land integration. Although it does construct a soteriological discourse involving both forms of Buddhism,

Instructions for Altar Methods," 73–76. However, she has failed to understand its relationship with the longer version of P. 2649V^o or its place within local Esoteric Buddhism. For a discussion and translation of both texts, as they are found in the *Altar Methods for Ritual Proceedings*, see Henrik H. Sørensen, "The Meeting and Conflation of Chán and Esoteric Buddhism during the Táng," in *Chán Buddhism in the Northwestern Region—Dunhuang and Beyond: Manuscripts, Texts, and Contexts*, ed. Christoph Anderl and Christian Wittern (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019), 329–362.

35 See Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 130, 184, 240–242, etc. Note that Snellgrove mainly relies on material that post-dates the 8th, and even 9th, centuries.

36 See *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light—Sanskrit and Chinese Versions of the Sukhāvātīvyūhasūtras*, intro. and trans. Luis O. Gomez (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996).

this essentially takes place under the doctrinal conceptions and practices of Esoteric Buddhism.

The text's description of the liberation of beings suffering in the hells represents a reduction of more developed scenarios into a conceptual formula or template, involving essentially the hot and cold hells only. The often-graphic descriptions of the suffering of the Buddhist hells that one encounters in many other sources from Dunhuang are largely absent. This abbreviated treatment of an otherwise popular topic in the Dunhuang material corresponds to the visualisation process described in the text. Hence, the whole idea of the divine ocean of milk discussed above, which alternately heats and cools the hells, is carefully matched with the process of salvation of beings in the hot and cold hells. Since the hot and cold hells stand centrally in the visualisation practice set forth in the text, it is clear that the hell theme is important to its overall conceptualisation.³⁷ On a more general level, the concept of liberating those suffering in hell relates to the same ideas as the literature on breaking (Chin. *po* 破) or emptying the hells (Chin. *kong diyu* 空地獄).³⁸ This text also has certain conceptual similarities with the various ritual texts for making food offerings (Chin. *shishi* 施食), including the *Foshuo jiuba yankou e'gui tuoluoni jing* 佛說救拔焰口餓鬼陀羅尼經 [Buddha Speaks the Scripture of the Dhāraṇī for Liberating the Burning Mouth Hungry Ghosts] (T. 1313.21), the *Shi zhu e'gui*

37 This is evident in numerous studies from the last three decades and earlier. See, for example, Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture of the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: Koruda Institute and University of Hawai'i Press, 1994); Françoise Wang-Toutain, *Le Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha en Chine du Ve au XIII^e Siècle* (Paris: Presses de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1998); and more recently, Costantino Moretti, "The Thirty-six Categories of 'Hungry Ghosts' Described in the Sūtra of the Foundations of Mindfulness of the True Law," in *Fantômes dans l'Extrême-Orient d'hier et d'aujourd'hui. Ghosts in the Far East in the Past and Present*, ed. Vincent Durand-Dastès (Paris: INALCO, 2017), 43–69; and Costantino Moretti, "Picturing the Buddhist Hells in Dunhuang Murals: Iconic and Descriptive Scenes of the Netherworld in Sūtra Representations," unpublished paper given at the Dunhuang Studies Conference in Cambridge, April, 2019. For a discussion of the origins of the medieval concept of the netherworld in the Chinese cultural milieu, see Henrik H. Sørensen, "The Meeting of Daoist and Buddhist Spatial Imagination: The Construction of the Netherworld in Medieval China," in *Locating Religions: Contact, Diversity and Translocality*, ed. Reinhold F. Gleis and Nikolas Jaspert (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), 234–292.

38 For a discussion of the salvation of the hungry ghosts in the Esoteric Buddhist tradition of the Tang, see Charles D. Orzech, "Esoteric Buddhism and the Shishi in China," in *The Esoteric Buddhist Tradition. Selected Papers from the 1989 SBS Conference*, ed. Henrik H. Sørensen (Copenhagen, Aarhus: Seminar for Buddhist Studies, 1994), 51–72.

yinshi ji shuifa 施諸餓鬼飲食及水法 [Water Method for Providing All Hungry Ghosts Drink and Food] (T. 1315.21), and Amoghavajra's seminal *Yuqie ji jiu Anan tuoluoni yankou guiyi jing* 瑜伽集救阿難陀羅尼焰口軌儀經 [Scripture on the Ritual Proceedings of the Yoga for Saving Ānanda with the Dhāraṇī for the Burning Mouths] (T. 1318.21), all texts which typologically presage the later important Water and Land (Chin. *shuilu* 水陸) manuals of the Song Dynasty (960–1279, 宋).³⁹ It so happens that the *Water Method for Providing All Hungry Ghosts Drink and Food* appears among the Dunhuang manuscripts in a slightly variant form, under the title *Shi e'gui shi bing shui zhenyan yin fa* 施餓鬼食并水真言印法 [Method with Mantra and Mudrās for Feeding the Hungry Ghosts and [Giving them] Water] (S. 6897 (5), S. 2685, etc.).⁴⁰

In terms of the specific doctrinal aspects of the text, it sets forth a relatively elaborate and integrated three bodies doctrine, which, as I read it, is a clear address to the Amoghavajra tradition of Esoteric Buddhism. The same is true for the theory of the four elements and the four wisdoms, mentioned above. All of these reflect developments in mature Esoteric Buddhism under the mid-Tang.

Although not of direct relevance to Buddhism in Dunhuang, the reference in the text to the painting of Vairocana in the Western Great Temple at Beiting is noteworthy information that adds to our knowledge of Uyghur Buddhism. This temple is located in present-day Jimsar county (吉木萨尔县) in present-day Northern Xinjiang and formed part of the Uyghur royal town of Beš Balık (Beiting), which was built at the site of an earlier Chinese settlement, the Beiting protectorate (北庭都護府), set up in Tingzhou during the

39 In recent years, scholarly attention has extended to the visual aspects of the rituals for water and land (Chin. *shuilu zhai* 水陸齋). For a masterful treatment of the subject, see Phillip E. Bloom, "Descent of the Deities: The Water-Land Retreat and the Transformation of the Visual Culture of Song-Dynasty (960–1279) Buddhism" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013). Bloom's study also includes a lengthy review of the history of this ritual and the related literature.

40 For a detailed textual study of this material, see Wang Sanqing 王三慶, "Tonkō bunkan tōsō hon 7677 (夜 98): Ju shishi ichi mennen segaki inshi sui nō kenkyū 敦煌文獻北圖藏本 7677 (夜 98): 咒食施一切面然餓鬼飲食水法の研究 [A Study of Beijing Library Number 7677 (夜 98): The Method for Empowering the Food Offerings for all the Burning Faces Preta-s so that they May Eat the Food and Drink the Water]," in *Tōhō gaku kenkyū ronshū—Takata Tokio kyōju taikyū kinen* 東方學研究論集—高田時雄教授退休紀念 [East Asian Studies: Festschrift in Honor of the Retirement of Professor Takata Tokio], ed. Tōhō gaku kenkyū ronshū kankai 東方學研究論集刊行會 [Editorial Committee for Publishing Tōhō gaku kenkyū ronshū] (Kyoto: Seisaku rinsen shoten, 2014), 272–282.

reign of Empress Wu Zetian (685–704, 武則天).⁴¹ The Western Great Temple at Beiting is documented in various historical records and appears to have been established when the Turfan region was still under Tang control, prior to the Uyghurs' arrival in the course of the 9th century.⁴² The present ruins of the temple still feature remains of wall paintings that date from the time of the Western Uyghur Kingdom (second half 9th c. to 13th c.). A number of Buddhist painted clay images have also been found, most severely degraded by weathering. It is, of course, not possible to establish the date of the Vairocana wall painting mentioned in the S. 6897V^o manuscript, but I am inclined to see it as having been made under the Uyghurs, given that all the extant Buddhist paintings *in situ* derive from their presence in the region.⁴³ The Dunhuang manuscript's reference to a major Buddhist temple and its religious art in the Western Uyghur Kingdom underscores the close relationship that existed between these two cultural centres. As such, it indirectly indicates that knowledge of religious art in other Central Asian regions and cultural nodes was commonly transferred between nodes along the Silk Road, in this case, knowledge regarding iconographical models and themes.

A final element of the text that relates to Esoteric Buddhist practice is the reference to a triangular altar (Chin. *sanjie tan* 三角壇). Altars of this kind are normally used for fire offerings, especially those of the destructive type (Skt. *ābhicāraka*), and in this case, it is visualised as part of the meditation process.⁴⁴ Although the text does not mention fire offerings *per se*, the reference

41 See *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 [Old Book of the Tang Dynasty], accessed April 15, 2020. <https://web.archive.org/web/20050428130141/http://www.njmuseum.com/zh/book/esss/jiutangshu/044.html>.

42 The extant ruins reveal that this was a major temple of an impressive size. Today, the main structure of the temple has been placed under roof. The site of the Western Great Temple was first identified during the 1980s, and excavation got under way as late as the 1990s. It was only opened to the public in recent years. Unfortunately, there are no traces of the wall painting of Vairocana, as mentioned in the text. For a useful overview of the heavily restored site as it appears today, see “Beiting Xida si—Jimusaer xian—Xinjiang siyuan 北庭西大寺—吉木萨尔县—新疆寺院 [The Western Great Temple of Beiting—Jimsar County—Xinjiang's Temples and Monasteries],” compiled by Baolian Chan Temple 宝莲禅寺 (2013), accessed April 15, 2020. <http://www.fjdh.cn/ffzt/fjhy/ahsy2013/04/123341223666.html>.

43 Thanks to Hou Haoran for indicating the correct reading in this part of the manuscript and pointing out the significance of this reference. Personal communication, March 2020.

44 A plethora of examples of these destructive rites are described in considerable detail in the important ritual compendium, the *Susiddhikaramahātantra-sādhanaopāyikapāṭalasūtra* (T. 893.18) or *Two Esoteric Sutras*, trans. Rolf W. Giebel (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2001), 185–189, 309–310, etc.

to a triangular altar does indicate that altars of this kind were familiar to the Buddhist practitioners of Dunhuang during the late medieval period.

S. 6897V^o (6) features a number of metaphors and tropes that link it with scriptures belonging to mature Esoteric Buddhism. I will not deal with all of these tropes and metaphors here, but will focus on a few of the most important ones. First, there is the ocean of milk, which occurs in a variety of discourses and contexts, most notably in the cycle of scriptures associated with the *Vajraśekharaśūtra* (or *Tattvasaṃgraha*), the primary source on Vairocana and the *vajra* realm (Skt. *vajradhātu*), which derives from mature Esoteric Buddhism in the mid-Tang.⁴⁵ In spite of this metaphor's relatively frequent appearance in *Vajraśekharaśūtra*, none of those contexts match how it is used in S. 6897V^o (6) (or P. 2649V^o).

5 Conclusion

It should be clear that S. 6897V^o represents a point in the development of Esoteric Buddhist discourse and practice when the topic of universal salvation occupied an important position. Although the text in this case deals entirely with what may be called 'internal practice', it may be read as reflecting developments towards the later important Shuilu rituals that came to dominate Buddhist and Daoist rituals during the middle and later parts of the Song Dynasty.

S. 6897V^o also represents a unique piece of Chinese Esoteric Buddhist literature. It bridges the categories of ritual performance and meditation, and belongs to a special category of ritual texts that have a strong meditative element and share many of the same soteriological and eschatological features,

45 Visualisation of the ocean of milk as an element in the meditative process is found in a number of Esoteric Buddhist scriptures in the Chinese canons from the first half of the 8th century up to the early 11th century, including the *Advayasasamatāvijayakalparāja* (T. 887.18, 515a, etc.), 金剛頂經瑜伽觀自在王如來修行法 (T. 932.19, 78a), the *Jingangding yuqie qingjing da bei wang Guanzizai niansong yigui* 金剛頂經瑜伽青頸大悲王觀自在念誦儀軌 [Ritual Proceedings for the Invocation of the Yoga of the Blue-Necked, Great, Compassionate King Avalokiteśvara according to the *Vajraśekhara*] (T. 1112.20, 494b), and the *Yanluo wang gong xingfa cideng* 焰羅王供行法次第 [Methods of Making Offerings to King Yama, etc.] (T. 1290.21, 375c). In the lengthy *Shiyi mian Guanzizai pusa xinmi yan yigui jing* 十一面觀自在菩薩心密言儀軌經 [Scripture on the Ritual Proceedings Regarding Ekādaśamukhāvalokiteśvara Heart Mantras], attributed to Amoghavajra, the visualised *maṇḍala* transforms into the ocean of milk (T. 1069.20, 144b).

including the attainment of buddhahood, the emptying or destruction of the hells, universal salvation, and rebirth in the Pure Land of Sukhāvātī. As the text prominently features the themes of ‘emptying the hells’ and ‘destroying the hells’ (Chin. *po diyu* 破地獄), it has a certain connection with the *shishi* and *yankou* literature of medieval Chinese Buddhism, on the conceptual level at least. As such, it links up rather well with a number of the central scriptures translated or produced by Amoghavajra.

Regarding the text’s relationship with Esoteric Buddhist practice in Dunhuang, it is clear that, although no identical copies of the text have been found, there are a fair number of similar or related texts. Thus, it is an example of a particular type of Buddhist ritual text of salvation. Here, I am primarily thinking of the numerous and varied ritual texts that have so far been identified in the manuscript hoard. It is not unlikely that this text was produced locally and that salient parts of it could, in principle, derive from other texts and scriptures. In other words, it may easily be seen as part of the large body of hybrid scriptures found at Dunhuang, many of which were composed of material lifted from other texts.

Given that there is no identical text in any of the Chinese canons available today, and the fact that, so far, this is the only known copy, one could speculate on the degree of its local importance. What is clear, however, is that S. 6897V^o (or the original it was copied from) was the personal copy of a practitioner of Esoteric Buddhism, and that it most likely served as a guide to that person’s practice of meditation. Moreover, while it cannot be said to be fully representative of Amoghavajra’s tradition, it contains enough elements to point to mature Esoteric Buddhism of the Tang as its most likely inspiration.

The internal reference to Uyghur Buddhism at Beš Balık indicates that whoever compiled or wrote the text was reasonably knowledgeable of Buddhist developments in the regions to the west of Dunhuang during the 10th century. This also excludes the possibility that the type of meditation discussed in the manuscript originated in the context of Tibetan Buddhism or otherwise bears any direct references to it.

Finally, S. 6897V^o gives an indication of the extent to which many important Buddhist scriptures were lost in the transition from manuscript culture to printed book culture around the turn of the 10th–11th centuries. While this uniforming development had a lasting impact on Buddhist scriptures in China, including the rich apocryphal literature, it is no exaggeration to see this as having had the most severe consequences for the transmission of ritual manuals and Esoteric Buddhist arcana more broadly defined, such as is represented by this text and other non-canonical Esoteric Buddhist scriptures and compilations from Dunhuang.

Appendix: Chinese Text (S. 6897V^o)⁴⁶

- (01) 若欲安置三千大千世界及十方世界者. 先入大乘无相⁴⁷
 (02) 相三摩地, 舉凡作聖四大.⁴⁸ 即於靜夜, 夜半三更. 睡足便起
 (03) 端身正坐. 收攝六根, 六識. 唯留意識. 即此意識名妙觀
 (04) 察智. 向下直看見虛空轉輪, 上安訶字為種子. 放黑
 (05) 色, 黑光變成毗藍猛風. 廣量無數. 厚十六落叉. 即此風
 (06) 輪上想水輪. 中安縛字為種子. 白色, 白光變成水
 (07) 輪. 深十一億二万逾繕那. 下留八落叉水. 餘成金輪. 金輪
 (08) 中安阿字. 黃色, 黃光. 變成金輪. 金輪上至自身坐處
 (09) 想自身坐金輪上, 自身坐地. 安置唵字為種子. 變成火
 (10) 聚焚燒不淨四大. 剎那之間變成灰 [火] 燼一把淨 [骨]. 若見
 (11) 自身, 身骨, 即念苦空常, 无我四行想. 觀見苦諦燒
 (12) 四大時. 心識不須滅. 若滅心識, 妙觀察智慧亦隨滅.
 (13) 識性滅故无能觀慧, 作事不成. 但如无色界. 有情
 (14) 劫盡燒時, 火不能燒. 汝之心識亦復如是. 火中不
 (15) 燒成所作事, 即此灰骨上安阿字為種子. 即此阿字
 (16) 及自灰燼變成清淨法身毗盧遮那无想之體.
 (17) 從是至膝安阿字為種子. 變成地大黃色, 黃光.
 (18) 從膝至腰安縛字為種子. 變成水大白色白光.
 (19) 從腰至肩安唵字為種子變成火大赤色, 赤光. 當
 (20) 面至髮安娑縛二合字為種子. 變成風大紫
 (21) 色, 紫光. 頂上安訶字為種子. 變成空大黑色, 黑光.
 (22) 即此四大, 聖四大也. 大日世尊毗盧遮那法身之體
 (23) 是也. 從此從頂至足支支, 節節皆安阿字為種子. 皆以
 (24) 陀羅尼加持安置. 應云: 南无娑漫⁴⁹ 陁暮喃.⁵⁰ 阿
 (25) 安至汝頂上成. 即頂髮及至足亦尔. 又自頂上用一切

46 The text of the manuscript features a number of minor oddities and what seem to be misspellings or mistakes. However, it is not entirely certain that this is really the case. One of the most common 'errors' is the use of *xiang* (相), i.e., mark or symbol, for *xiang* (想), 'to think, imagine, conceptualise,' etc., or, as the intent is here, 'visualisation.' Cf., e.g., the compound *xiangkan* (想看). One could well imagine that this apparent mix up was actually meant as shorthand and that the copyist knew very well what was intended in the text. That this was the case, seems confirmed by the fact that, towards the beginning of the manuscript, the formally correct character is actually used.

47 This is a duplication caused by scribal error.

48 P. 2649V^o has this term inverted.

49 This is an abbreviated form of *man* (謾), which actually should be *man* (慢).

50 As a whole, the spell appears to be a corrupted form of *Namo samanta buddhanam* (南莫三滿多沒馱喃).

- (26) 如來心陀羅尼加持. 即此身成法也. 陀羅尼曰:[...]⁵¹
- (27) 以此陀羅尼加持頂上及兩肩各誦一遍. 又觀自身
- (28) 在廣圓滿月輪中坐. 月輪即是汝大圓鏡智. 即是
- (29) 照見三千大千世界在汝身中. 從頂至胸是色界二十八天.
- (30) 從胸至小腹想六欲天. 須彌山. 大海. 四洲. 從此至
- (31) 足想三惡道眾生也. 此北庭西寺壁上畫盧舍那
- (32) 那⁵²佛等无有異. 三千大千世界安置已了. 即時
- (33) 心念口語. 應云:阿字莊嚴身故. 支支. 節節一切
- (34) 分身變成阿字為身. 阿字為體. 阿字為命.
- (35) 並持一切如來心加持力. 故吾今此身即是常
- (36) 身. 體同法界. 與諸佛法身等无有異. 煉八識成
- (37) 四智. 四智成三身清淨法身毗盧遮那无相⁵³之體.
- (38) 光遍十方世界. 此定名首楞嚴三摩地. 報身
- (39) 住處. 在此定時. 若欲加福. 起四无量心. 光小腹想⁵⁴
- (40) 一乳海. 海中想一阿字為種子. 從阿字想一金蓮花
- (41) 至臍.⁵⁵ 花中亦安阿字為圓滿壇. 壇安白色縛字
- (42) 為種子變. 成月輪大毗楞迦寶珠. 從月輪寶
- (43) 珠放千道清淨光注入乳海. 及注霜雪流入
- (44) 入乳海. 乳海即冷. 其冷乳六注八熱地獄炎火. 皆
- (45) 滅盡. 其乳又注入諸罪人口內. 其人悉皆飽
- (46) 滿. 一切苦具悉皆解脫. 又想⁵⁶從身放千万道光. 照
- (47) 罪人身. 一切業障悉皆滅盡. 又一一光中想⁵⁷一一
- (48) 化其罪人. 各各見一化人. 見此化人皆稱阿彌陀名.
- (49) 其人念佛力故. 從此捨命至彌陀國. 想⁵⁸地獄皆
- (50) 空. 又心中想⁵⁹一乳海. 海中想⁶⁰一阿字為種子. 從阿
- (51) 字想⁶¹出一金蓮花. 花中亦[想]⁶²一阿字為種子. 三角
- (52) 壇. 壇中想⁶³一囉字為種子. 作成日輪寶珠. 從日輪寶

51 The text of the spell is missing from the text. It is also missing from P. 2649V^o. This fact points to a relatively close relationship between the two manuscripts.

52 The character is duplicated.

53 The text incorrectly reads *xiang* (想).

54 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).

55 The text has *qi* (齊) instead of *qi* (臍).

56 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).

57 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).

58 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).

59 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).

60 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).

61 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).

62 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).

63 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).

- (53) 珠想⁶⁴千万道光照此海乳即熱. 其熱乳降注八寒地
 (54) 獄. 地獄冰山悉皆消盡. 又想⁶⁵熱乳流注罪人口內. 一切
 (55) 罪人悉皆飽滿. 離寒冰苦. 又放千道光照罪人身.
 (56) 其光中各想一一化佛. 其眾多罪人, 各各見此化佛.
 (57) 口稱阿彌陀. 各念佛力, 故皆往生極樂世界. 想⁶⁶此
 (58) 地獄悉皆空盡. 又其乳想⁶⁷人道中流注至王, 臣,
 (59) 下至貧富庶民等. 悉皆飽滿. 又放千万道光照貧富等
 (60) 離苦解脫生極樂國. 想⁶⁸人道遠道行人及重病. 見
 (61) 口中亦放乳令飽滿. 病苦疼除生極樂國. 又 [想]⁶⁹畜
 (62) 生道中上至獅子,⁷⁰ 虎, 狼, 吸, 血虫, 獸, 牛, 驢, 馬等, 及蛇, 蝎,
 (63) 蚊, 虻, 蟻子, 等類. 口中悉皆放乳飽滿. 又放千万道
 (64) 光. 一一光中各一化人各度一一眾生樂. 生極樂國入
 (65) 四无量定. 光頂上想⁷¹一阿字. 想⁷²菩提樹. 樹中想西方
 (66) 極樂世界想⁷³阿彌陀佛. 想⁷⁴觀音勢至菩薩⁷⁵及千万
 (67) 菩薩眾又池水中想⁷⁶千万蓮花. 蓮花中想⁷⁷千万化生童子.
 (68) 汝自身亦化中. 想⁷⁸目視阿彌陀佛. 後入四无量定也.
 (69) 又配三千大千世界. 謂化身鏡智上所見名小千世界.
 (70) 報身圓鏡智所見名中千世界. 若法身毗盧遮那
 (71) 一大圓鏡智體上所見大千世界乃至東南西北四
 (72) 維上下一切十方三千大千世界盡遍照之. 故名毗盧
 (73) 遮那佛是梵音. 漢云: 遍照. 謂大圓鏡. 體郭周法界. 故
 (74) 无所不照, 无所不遍. 後二身照而不遍也. 第三法身能
 (75) 照能遍也. 若至捨位即住平等性智. 體有三平等.
 (76) 一見生死際平等, 不入不出. 二見九聖平等, 无高无
 (77) 下. 三見苦樂平等无取无捨. 即此平等性智體是汝自
 (78) 他受用二種報身. 即如上所說定中意識名妙

-
- 64 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).
 65 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).
 66 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).
 67 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).
 68 The text has *xiang* (相) instead of *xiang* (想).
 69 A character is missing.
 70 This is consistently written *shi* (師) throughout the manuscript.
 71 The text has *xiang* (相), which is a mistake for *xiang* (想).
 72 The text has *xiang* (相), which is a mistake.
 73 The text has *xiang* (相), which is a mistake.
 74 The text has *xiang* (相), which is a mistake.
 75 The original has an abbreviated character for 'bodhisattva.'
 76 The text has *xiang* (相), which is a mistake.
 77 The text has *xiang* (相), which is a mistake.
 78 The text has *xiang* (相), which is a mistake.

- (79) 觀察智. 堅出定後說法化人等. 正心正見. 意所起不
 (80) 亂見聞覺智菩薩, 六識相應慧⁷⁹名成所作智. 即
 (81) 是汝化身也. 此第是无價寶. 滿汝所願. 是
 (82) 陀羅尼布種子字大乘觀門. 現身作佛方便. 勿使
 (83) 說浪千金莫傳. 此是某甲常行要門也. 以四无
 (84) 量心共合⁸⁰修行前定是大智. 次四无量心是大悲
 (85) 也. 悲智雙運急得佛道. 即是圓教大乘也.
 (86) 若欲求佛果報身. 要奉平等自內心. 內心外心
 (87) 俱平等更不要他三佛身也. 凡夫執有失涅槃.⁸¹ 沉
 (88) 輪生死不得解脫无有出期. 故有空就聲聞
 (89) [執]. 空失生死入空涅槃⁸²界. 永滅无生不得佛果.
 (90) 故要就有等不執空有. 亦不離空有. 入不二門. 雖
 (91) 在生死不染世法. 如蓮花處水. 雖得解而不求滅.
 (92) 不捨悲願盡未來際利樂有情. 所以並不執空
 (93) 有. 。 。 弟子法興

79 The original has *hui* (惠) for *hui* (慧).

80 This appears to be a mistake for *gonghe* (共和) (?).

81 The text uses the abbreviated character *ban* (𨾏).

82 The text uses the abbreviated character *ban* (𨾏).