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Personal use only; commercial use is strictly prohibited. There is a diverse range of attitudes toward the tantric traditions, ranging from their emic understandings as paths to liberation to the relatively widespread associations of the tantric traditions with sorcery and libertine sexuality. Likewise, tantric traditions are also extremely diverse, which has made it difficult to develop a definition broad enough to cover the various tantric traditions without being overly broad. There have also been many attempts to discern the origins of the tantric traditions. While there is very little evidence supporting the hypothesis that any of the tantric traditions existed before the 5th century ce, there have been attempts to trace back these traditions much earlier, to the time of the Buddha or the ancient Hindu sages, or even back to the Indus Valley civilization. In overviewing various attempts to date these traditions, it appears that the first tantric traditions to emerge in a distinct form almost certainly first emerged in a Hindu context around the mid-first millennium ce. An overview of the history of tantric traditions, then, should begin with a survey the development of the Hindu tantric traditions, from the mid-first millennium ce up to the colonial period, when tantric traditions in South Asia generally entered a period of decline, followed by a renaissance in the 20th century. The historical appearance of Buddhist tantric traditions occurs a few centuries later, during the 7th century. The spread of tantric traditions quickly followed their development in India. Over the course of this millennium Hinduism went through a remarkable series of transformations, transitioning from the ancient Vedic tradition into the classical traditions of Hinduism. This period saw the rise of both the tantric and the Bhakti devotional movements. While the latter drew from the tendency toward monotheism seen in late Vedic literature, Tantrism developed from Vedic ritual traditions as well as from the yogic and meditative traditions that developed both within ancient Hinduism as well as in rival Buddhist and Jain traditions. Hinduism as currently practiced is a product of the intermixture of tantric and devotional approaches to practice that developed during the first millennium ce. But Tantrism, while originating in a Hindu context, is not limited to Hinduism. They also had a less striking but still real impact on Jainism and several other religious traditions. Buddhist tantric traditions, which emerged during the 7th century ce, were rapidly transmitted to Southeast, East, and Central Asia, leading to the establishment of several distinct East Asian and Tibetan traditions. The tantric traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism have been simultaneously infamous as well as poorly understood. The title Tantra Mantra was given to a recent Hindi horror film featuring black magic. As a result they are also diverse, which makes it a significant challenge to come up with an adequate definition, one that is broad enough to be applicable to all of the tantric traditions, but not too broad, including traditions that would identify themselves as tantric, and thus probably should be excluded from this rubric. The tantric traditions have been given several labels, but there is no single label that is accepted by all of these traditions. It is important to note the use of this term in a plural form. Tantric traditions are multiple and also originated as multiple, distinct traditions of both text and practice. This focus on lineage is found throughout the tantric world; originating in India, this emphasis was transmitted to Tibet and East Asia and remains an important concern of contemporary tantric communities. India traditionally knows only texts called Tantras. These texts, moreover, fall far short of covering the entire Tantric literature; nor are only Tantric texts called Tantras. So the presence or absence of tantras cannot be taken as a defining characteristic of these traditions. The scriptures known as tantras, which were transmitted to East Asia, tend to be heavily focused on the description of ritual, meditative, and yogic practices. These traditions tend to be heavily practice-oriented, with the goals of this practice ranging from worldly success to ultimate liberation, however defined. Obviously it would be ideal to define Tantra in terms of a single defining characteristic. Were there a single feature that all tantric traditions shared, this would naturally make it far easier to delineate exactly what the term designates. It is also a somewhat arbitrary definition, as there are also many other elements of tantric practice that are found in most, if not all, tantric traditions. One solution to this problem is

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to delineate a range of features that tend to characterize tantric traditions. This definition is quite useful as it indicates the range of ritual and contemplative techniques employed by tantric practitioners in order to achieve magical powers siddhi as well as liberation. Liberation in the Hindu theistic traditions is generally defined as the attainment of union with or proximity to the supreme deity, while it is defined as the achievement of the awakening of a buddha by Buddhists. For both traditions liberation is characterized by both knowledge and freedom. While we might debate which elements of tantric practice might be included in a definition or taxonomy of Tantrism, it should be noted that tantric traditions of all sectarian affiliations, be they Buddhist or Hindu, are characterized by a strong focus on ritual and meditative practice. The Origins of Tantric Traditions The origins of the tantric traditions is an enigma, largely due to the paucity of historical evidence in India from the period when it seems that they first emerged, during the Gupta dynasty c. 400 ce. This paucity of evidence has led to a great deal of unbridled speculation regarding the origin of these traditions. There is no hard evidence for the existence of tantric traditions prior to the mid-first millennium ce. While it is clear that some aspects of the tantric traditions, such as characteristic practices or iconography, considerably predate the historical formation of these traditions, the various attempts to date Tantrism prior to the first millennium ce are based on very flimsy evidence. Some Buddhist tantric traditions claim that their scriptures were taught by timeless cosmic buddhas and then revealed to adepts. To the extent that tantric scriptures discuss their origins, these disclosures tend to be mythical rather than historical. Treating these myths as history is naturally methodologically unsound. Despite these origin claims, however, there is absolutely no evidence that any of the Buddhist tantras originated when the Buddha lived, around the 5th century bce. While attempts to root aspects of tantric traditions in the distant past are speculative at best, there is no doubt that these traditions, as they emerged, were heavily dependent on earlier Indian traditions of thought and practice. One of the biggest influences on tantric traditions was the far older Vedic tradition of Hinduism. Vedic Hinduism featured the priestly class, Brahmins, who had the sacred duty to memorize the oral sacred literature of the tradition, the Vedas, and also learn the complex ritual practices the tradition advocated. This tradition developed circa 1500 bce, reaching its peak right around 600 bce, just prior to rise of the renunciant traditions that would challenge it. Although there was tension between advocates of the Vedic tradition and advocates of some of the tantric traditions, the tantric traditions drew heavily from Vedic ritual practice traditions nonetheless. These include, most notably, renunciation and asceticism as a key requisite for liberation. The practice of meditation and yoga were seen as key practices to develop this realization. Tantric traditions inherited this assumption, and many of the contemplative practices, from earlier renunciant traditions. Buddhist tantric traditions, naturally, accepted the cosmological and philosophical frameworks developed by earlier Buddhist traditions, as well as many of their contemplative practices. The early first millennium ce also saw another important development in Hinduism, namely, the rise of the Bhakti devotional movement. This development occurred around the same time as the rise of the tantric traditions. It was characterized by tendency toward monotheism, in that devotion to a single supreme creator god was seen as the key to salvation. The popularity and explosive growth of devotional Hinduism had a significant effect on the tantric traditions. This may be the case, but while the influence was less, it was not nonexistent. In the Buddhist context devotion is typically limited to the guru, but this is seen as an essential requisite for tantric practice. Thence it spread to other Hindu traditions, as well as to Buddhism; distinctly tantric forms of Buddhism emerged during the 7th century. It is impossible to precisely date the emergence of tantric Hindu traditions due to the poor state of textual preservation in these traditions; no Hindu tantric manuscripts from earlier than the 9th century have been preserved. These were ascetic groups who sought liberation and were also reputed to possess magical powers, and they likely constituted the context in which many practices that later came to characterize the tantric traditions first developed. It was characterized by public rituals performed by priests. The latter was subdivided into works of two genres: Both violent and sexual practices are common in these works. This tradition of practice was widely known as the Kaula tradition. Erotic ritual with a female companion 2. The notion that supernatural powers may be attained through the extraction by yogic means of the vital essences of living beings 4.

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Initiation through the consumption of consecrated liquor 5. The centrality of states of possession 37 The Kaula tradition was clearly established by the 9th century and may have originated a century or so earlier. It developed four well-known subtraditions. From it developed the Trika tradition that focused on a trio of goddesses: Particularly important were the nondual Trika and Krama traditions that see no ultimate distinction between the deity and practitioner. He describes this as follows: The end result was a nondualistic system in which the transgressive elements were internalized and hence rendered less offensive to the orthodox. He was a prolific author who wrote a number of commentaries on major works from the Trika and Krama traditions, as well as works in philosophy and aesthetics. A similar development also occurred in Buddhist traditions; a tendency to neutralize the more transgressive elements of tantric practice, often by transforming the practice from external rituals to completely internalized visualizations. This is because these are clearly overlapping categories. The worship of goddesses was a venerable practice widespread throughout South Asia. These scriptures focus on the worship of goddesses and drew from both older Hindu as well as Buddhist works. This tradition went into decline during the medieval period and is now almost extinct, and very few copies of this work have survived. This was motivated both by the growing South Asian diaspora communities in the West as well as by growing interest in Asian religious traditions among non-Indian Westerners from the 19th century onward. Many of these gurus have been successful in establishing religious communities abroad, serving both diaspora Indian communities as well as converts to Hinduism. This is due to the international Buddhist network that led to the rapid dissemination of new Buddhist works. Many works of Buddhist tantric literature were rapidly translated into Tibetan and Chinese, and the date when a translation was made provides us with terminus ad quem for the respective work. While there are still many lacunae in our understanding of the early history of tantric Buddhist traditions, available evidence points to the mid-7th century as the most likely point at which historically datable traditions began to take shape. These new traditions featured practices advocating union with a deity, and they typically claim to promote a secret method for the rapid achievement of Buddhahood. Within a few decades after their initial composition, early tantric traditions of text and practice were disseminated to East and Southeast Asia. This was facilitated by the active trade and diplomatic exchanges between India and China during the 7th and early 8th centuries, via overland trade routes via Central Asia and also maritime trade routes via South East Asia. Tantric traditions were established in China during the Tang dynasty, and thence disseminated to Korea 76 and Japan. It appears that tantric Buddhist texts and practices were first disseminated to Tibet during the 8th century, shortly after their initial dissemination to East and Southeast Asia. Buddhists traditions view the 7th century as the time when Buddhism first reached Tibet, although there might have been gradual dissemination of Buddhism into the region earlier. Advocates of the new Tibetan traditions based on these scriptures claimed that yogic practices involving the manipulation of the subtle body were requisites to complete awakening. Tibetan Buddhists would later play important roles in the dissemination of Buddhism and associated tantric traditions to China and Mongolia, and eventually throughout the world, with the diaspora of Tibetan lamas in the 20th century following the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet in 1959. Influence on Other Religious Traditions Tantric Hindu and Buddhist traditions influenced a number of other religious traditions, both within South Asia as well as in other areas of the world. Because tantric traditions first emerged in South Asia, their impact there is naturally the most significant. The South Asian traditions that were influenced by the tantric traditions to some degree include Jainism, Islam, and Sikhism. Generally speaking, many Jains were interested in tantric practices, although given the Jain focus on nonviolence as well as strict celibacy for monks and nuns, Jain tantric texts did not advocate any of the transgressive ritual practices involving sex or violence.

Chapter 3 : List of Buddhists - Wikipedia

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