

The Development of Mantra in Esoteric Buddhism within Mahāyāna and Varayāna Buddhism

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Abstract

This paper (1) examined the development of mantra recitation in Esoteric Buddhism within Mahāyāna and Varayāna Buddhism, (2) briefly analysed the essence and historical development of Esoteric Buddhism from India to China and other regions, (3) examined the current and future development of mantras in Esoteric Buddhism, and (4) examines the benefit of the application of two mantras from Varayāna Buddhism, the Six-syllable Mantra (Om Mani Padme Hum) and the Energy Mantra, in improvement of one's spiritual, physical health and mental health.

Keywords: Development of Esoteric Buddhism; Development of Buddhist Mantra; Energy Mantra; Six-Syllable Mantra; Om Mani Padme Hum

Introduction

The word “esoteric (Ch. *Mi* 密)”, according to Orzech (2006), originated from the Greek word *ἑσωτερικός*, which means “what is interior and therefore out of sight or hidden” as opposed to doctrines that are “exoteric (Ch. *Xian* 显)” which are those that are openly known and understood by the general people (p.39). The term “Esoteric Buddhism (Ch. *Mi zong*/*Mi jiao* 密宗/密教)” was first used by Alfred Percy Sinnett (1840-1921), an English theosophist, referring to Buddhist doctrines that have more mystical, spiritual nature that were passed down by Buddhist masters with supernatural powers including having clairvoyance (Ch. *Shengtong* 神通) (Sinnett, 1887).

Generally, a mantra can be a chosen word, phrase or sound such as *Om* and has been widely used in many Eastern cultures for centuries, recited repeatedly with specific purposes such as protection, help in concentration and healing. They can be recited with or without music, and alone or collectively with people. In Buddhism, they are believed to be created and transmitted by highly enlightened beings, practised in Mahāyāna mostly in the language of Sanskrit and in Vajrayāna traditions. Mantras are also known as *Dhāraṇīs* (Ch. *Zhenyan* 真言), and are found in most Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna sutras and tantras. The literal meaning of mantras are often unknown, whilst those that are known could be used for contemplation and reflections.

Vocalisation of the sound is a common practice, whilst higher level practitioners might recite silently in their mind. When recited repeatedly, they create resonance and positive effect on one's mind and body. In contemporary times, mantras have also been used as a form of well-being practice such as in secular and well-being driven meditation practices and yoga exercises.

Motivation, Objectives and Method of the Research

In name and in practice, since 2005, the researcher has been an Esoteric Buddhist practitioner when I first met my current spiritual teacher, His Holiness Yisie Vorle, a Vajrayāna Buddhist master based in Singapore. Yet, rather embarrassingly, his understanding and knowledge about the historical development and current positioning of this tradition is very limited. As such, he decided to embark on this research and writing journey to examine the development of Esoteric Buddhism in Mahāyāna Buddhism. This is a vast topic, so the researcher has scoped it to explore the following three areas: (1) examined the development of mantra recitation in Esoteric Buddhism within Mahāyāna and Varayāna Buddhism, (2) briefly analysed the essence and historical development of Esoteric Buddhism from India to China and other regions, (3) examined the current and future development of mantras in Esoteric Buddhism, and (4) examines the benefit of the application of two mantras from Varayāna Buddhism, the Six-syllable Mantra (Om Mani Padme Hum) and the Energy Mantra, in improvement of one's spiritual, physical health and mental health.

Origins and Development of Esoteric Buddhism from India to China

According to Mark (2021), mantra can either be a sound, a word or a phrase that is “recited to clear and protect the mind from illusion”. In other words, it is a form of “mind protector”, whilst tantra literally means ‘continuum’, referring to a manual or handbook of secret teachings to guide practitioners to spiritually progress. *Buswell and Lopez (2014)* defined Mantrayāna as a specific form of Esoteric/Vajrayāna Buddhism that emphasises on mantra recitation and a wide range of practices tailored to “transform the ordinary practitioner into a deity and his ordinary world into a MANDALA” (pp.529-530). This could include the use of mudras, visualisation of deities, the offering mandalas, fire, prostration or tantra/sutra/mantra-recitation pujas, officiating the ceremonies of empowerment or *Abhisheka* (Ch. *Guangding* 灌顶) and the oral or mind-to-mind transmission of secret teachings from a spiritual teacher to a student.

According to Davidson (2002), even though the use of many Esoteric Buddhist practices such as mantra recitation, offerings of mandalas and fire pujas already existed in India for a long time, the more formalised and unified system of Indian Esoteric Buddhism only began to emerge in the second half of the seventh century. This matured form of Esoteric Buddhism went beyond just an immutable master-disciple bond, and expanded to one that utilised royal acts of consecration, elaborate mandalas, new class of tantric scriptures and sutras, secret mantras, as well as perform specific forms of rituals, in particular, fire pujas.

The emphasis, however, still follows the Mahāyāna way of taking vows to practise and attain the path of *Bodhisattvas*. One important sutra that emerged during this period, around or before 630AD, is the *Āryakāraṇḍavyūhanāmamahāyāna Sūtra* (*Ch. Fo shuo da sheng zhuang yan bao wang jing* 佛說大乘莊嚴寶王經) (Roberts & Yeshe, 2013). Another scholar, Studholme (2002), however, claimed that this sutra was compiled at the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century.

As for the transmission of Esoteric Buddhism into China, in Orzech's (2006) view, this occurred during the eighth century (p.39). The common historical narrative is that the Chinese Esoteric Buddhism (also known as *Ch. Tangmi* 唐密 or *Ch. Hanmi* 汉密) was founded by three Indian Buddhist masters teachers, Śubhākara-siṃha (*Ch. Shanwuwei* 善無畏, 637-735 CE), Vajrabodhi (*Ch. Jingangzhi* 金剛智, 671-741 CE), and Amoghavajra (*Ch. Bukongjingang* 不空金剛, 705-774 CE). Subsequently, it was Amoghavajra's disciple, Huiguo (*Ch. 惠果*, 746-805 CE), who passed these teachings on to the Japanese pilgrim Kūkai (*Ch. 空海*, 779-835 CE), who then returned to Japan in 805 and established the Japanese Esoteric Buddhism, Shingon (*Ch. Zhenyan zong* 真言宗, broadly also known as *Ch. Dongmi* 东密). Although some records said that a few decades after Kūkai left China, Esoteric Buddhism apparently vanished from China, others recorded that there was a second diffusion during the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE), subsequently from Tibetan Buddhism in Yuan dynasty (1271-1368 CE), whilst from Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE) till now esoteric practices and teachings became integrated into other surviving Chinese Buddhist traditions, such as Chan Buddhism and Tian Tai Zong (*Ch. 天台宗*) (Sorensen, 2001). The researcher's understanding, however, has been that many of these practices only sustained the rites and rituals; the essence and wisdoms of *Tangmi* did vanish from China and were transmitted to Japan. There has also since been transmission to other regions with large Chinese populations including Singapore.

According to Goble (2019), it was Amoghavajra who formalised the Chinese Esoteric Buddhism and transmitted and handed down many teachings including the “Diamond Pinnacle Yoga,” “yoga secrets,” the “eighteen assemblies” of the *Diamond Pinnacle Scripture* series, the “thirty-seven worthies” of the *Diamond Maṇḍala*, *Maṇḍala* initiations, visualisation and recitation procedures to a few of his disciples including Huilang 慧朗, Huizhao 慧超, Huican 慧璨, Huihai 慧海, Huijian 慧見, Huijue 慧覺, Huihui 慧暉 and Huiguo 慧果. It was also said that Amoghavajra's Esoteric Buddhism lineage and teachings such as the “Highest Vehicle of Yoga” (*Yu Jie Zui Shang Sheng* 瑜伽最上乘) could be traced back to the times of Buddha Vairocana, from whom Vajrasattva received the teachings, and in turn transmitted to Nāgārjuna, and subsequently to Nāgabodhi, who transmitted to Vajrabodhi and whom in turn transmitted to Amoghavajra.

There seemed to be a different strand of transmission developing separately at *Dianmi* 滇密 Dali Dynasty (937-1253AD), currently known as the Yunnan province of South China. According to Chong, cited in Bentor and Shahar (2017), historians and scholars have no

conclusive evidence about where specifically the *Dianmi*, or also known as “Religion of the Ācāryas” (Azhali jiao 阿吒力教/ Asheli jiao 阿闍梨教) was transmitted from but it emerged in the Seventh Century (pp.389-401). There is a likelihood that there could be different waves of transmissions from India, Song Dynasty China, Tibet, or they might have developed this branch of Esoteric Buddhism on their own. In this tradition, the temples focus a lot on the ritualistic practices to help the sentient beings residing in the Hungry Ghost (*Preta*) realm through the offering of food. It was also found that the “Water and Land Dharma Assembly” (*Ch. Shuilu fahui* 水陸法會) are also practised in *Dianmi*. This possibly reflects the influence from Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism as this is an important puja passed down from Emperor Wu of Liang’s period (464-549 CE). There is evidence that this puja continues to be practised beyond the Dali dynasty in Yunan, during the Ming dynasty.

The detailed development and transmission of Esoteric Buddhism into Tibet and the other regions have been purposefully omitted here, as well as the integration of religious and political control and influences that Esoteric Buddhism play in various regions and eras. This is because these are huge areas that is beyond the scope here to expound on, requiring separate attention and analyses. However, the researcher’s understanding has been that there is a sense that the so-called “downfall” or “decline” of Esoteric Buddhism in a specific region and era is often connected to either the separation of religious and political ties, the loss of royal support or invasion of other dominant cultures or religions. The emergence of Esoteric Buddhism in other regions not long after the decline with one region is perhaps an indicator of Esoteric Buddhist masters’ resilience and foresight for the need to transport and re-establish its base into alternative fertile soil in a different era to prevent the body of knowledge to be lost. This is also evident in the contemporary world where there is a slow emergence of mantra practices and its integration with non-Buddhist and Buddhist practices. Water and Land Dharma Assembly

According to McBride (2004), whether a particular Buddhist doctrine is esoteric or exoteric, this could be depending on the way it describes the teachings, or it also depends on how the learner perceives and interprets it. In the researcher’s view there is often esoteric within exoteric and exoteric within esoteric. Orzech *et al.* (2011, p.4) poignantly observed that the modern study of Esoteric Buddhism tends to fall into the dichotomy of attributing it to the downfall or ending phase of Buddhism in a region from where it started with a more rationalist beginning, or a progress of the most advanced insights of Buddhism in the form of tantric knowledge and practices. They regarded both extreme perspectives to serve specific contemporary agendas, such as the promotion of sectarianism. The researcher sees that both extreme positions are a test to us Buddhists, a temptation to be draw us into a dualistic thinking rather than continuing to hold the middle way. Instead of seeing this as a linear progression or regression, it is more useful to see it as a cyclic existence of Buddhism *changing*



forms to suit the needs of all sentient beings given the dominant states of wisdoms and defilements.

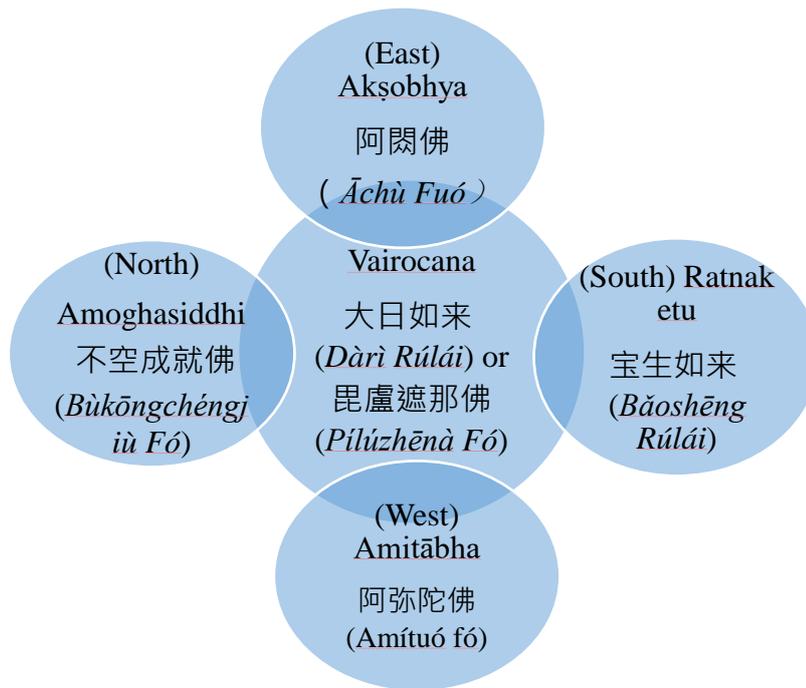
Brief Analysis on the Essence and Development of Mantras in Esoteric Buddhism

According to Orzech et al. (2011), the Esoteric Buddhism that strived in the 7th and 8th centuries evolved in India from the beginning of Mahāyāna Buddhism in the first few centuries of the Common Era and is closely connected to the practice of mantra or *Dhāraṇī* practices found in many Mahāyāna sutras. In fact, they argued that Esoteric Buddhist practices including mantra recitation are part and parcel of Mahāyāna Buddhism, so separating them out as a unique Mahāyāna School could be misleading and attributed this to the highly sectarian circumstances of Tibet and Japan. The researcher would extend the argument to state esoteric practices exist even during and before Sakyamuni Buddha's times, and if any Mahāyāna Buddhist practitioners doubt this would risk questioning the truths recorded in Mahāyāna Buddhist texts. For example, in the *Arśaprasāmana Sūtra* (Ch. *Liao Zhi Bing Jing* 疗痔病经) and *Original Vows of the Seven Medicine-Master Buddhas of Lapis Light* (Ch. *Yao Shi Liu Li Guang Qi Fo Ben Yuan Gong De Jing* 药师琉璃光七佛本愿功德经), both translated by Yijing (Ch. 义净) (635-713 CE) in 700-712 CE and 707-711 CE, the Buddha encouraged his disciples to recite two or more specific mantras that have healing effect on specific physical illnesses, and for the latter sutra, the mantras were transmitted by other historical Buddhas before Sakyamuni Buddha's times such as from the Medicine Buddha. Furthermore, other major Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist schools such as the Pureland Buddhism (Ch. *Jing tu zong* 净土宗) practise the recitation of the Amitabha's name *Namo Amitabha* (Ch. 南无阿弥陀佛), which can be considered a form of mantra recitation as well. As such, in the researcher's view, it is perhaps more helpful to regard all forms of Mahāyāna Buddhist schools to have both exoteric and esoteric components but perhaps the Esoteric Buddhist school has a higher proportion of esoteric than exoteric aspects.

It was mentioned in the earlier section that mantra is being used vastly in China in the "Water and Land Dharma Assembly" way before the 7th and 8th century. It was compiled during Emperor Wu of Liang's period in the late 4th and early 5th century with the main text being written by Shi Liang Zhi et al (n.d.). In fact, the text also explained the meaning and function of mantras, in particular a long mantra, the 'Infinite Virtuous Light and Holy Mystic Power Dharani' was being cited, "The form of all dharmas consists three virtues. If one is guided by the right body and mind, it will encapsulate everything, from as big as the great vast ocean of shrines, to as small as dust. Regardless of being in the past, in the present or in the future, a thought will occur within a split second. Even so, the form of the three virtues, is omnipresent. What are these three virtues? They are Dharma body, *Prajñā* and liberation. Each of them comprises eternal happiness and self-purification, and this is how they are regarded as virtues. The dharma body cannot exist as a standalone entity and must always have *Prajñā*

and liberation. *Prajñā* and liberation are mutually supportive. A ‘circular’ person with a single-pointed mind, possesses these three virtues. Neither vertical nor horizontal, thus metaphorically described as ‘circular’. As they exist everywhere, they are seen as a secret dharma treasury. Great indeed is the totality of its Dharma nature. How extraordinary. Vast is the discourse of the Tathagata Shakyamuni’s Dharma teachings on nourishment giving. If you devote yourself to recite mindfully the ‘Infinite Virtuous Light and Holy Mystic Power Dharani’ to bless food, what is created is immeasurable. This mantra is considered the secret dharma treasury of these three virtues. Whoever holds this mantra will hold the three secret treasury virtues. This secret treasury encapsulates every Dharma. As such, it can flow endlessly without exhaustion. The virtue of self-mastery is the virtue of liberation. A person who is radiant with light, possesses the virtue of *Prajñā*. A sacred and wondrous person, possesses the Dharma body. A person with mental strength is one who utilises the three virtues. A *Dharani* person is one who practises *Dharani* recitation in a continuous way. Continuous upholding of the three virtues requires a single-pointed mind. A single-pointed mind and the three virtues embody the Dharma accordingly. Therefore *Dharani* is inseparable from the single-pointed mind and it is also a form of Dharma nourishment giving. All are united by the three virtues as their essence. Likewise, all are in common by their utilisation of the three virtues. With now the understanding of the secret treasury of the three virtues encapsulates all Dharmas, all phenomena share the essence of the three virtues, I can fully employ it in what I am presently entrusted with.” (pp.3-4) Although this paragraph specifically refer to one particular *Dharani* (mantra) which originated from the "Sutra of Golden Light" (金光明经), it highlighted that mantra recitation is an important part of the Chinese *Mahāyāna* rites and it is very much related to the three virtues and considered a form of nourishment giving to all sentient beings who could benefit from the recitation.

Another important aspect of Esoteric Buddhism that is connected to mantra recitation is the practice of mandala. As such, it is important to mention briefly the Womb Realm (Sk. *Garbhakośadhātu*, Ch. *Tāizāngjiè* 胎藏界) and the Diamond Realm (Sk. *Vajradhātu*, Ch. *Jīngāngjiè* 金刚界), which are very important aspects of Esoteric Buddhism. In the original *Tangmi*, whilst Amoghavajra translated and transmitted Vajrasekhara Sutra (Ch. 金刚顶经 *Jin gang ding jing*) in which the Diamond Womb was described at length, Śubhākara-siṃha, translated the Vairocana-bhisambodhi Sutra (Ch. *Da ri jing* 大日经), where the Womb Realm was described in-depth. Śubhākara-siṃha is also considered the person who transmitted the Womb Realm from India into China when he was at a very old age of 80 (Baruah, 2000 & Giebel, 2005). Both the Womb Realm and the Diamond Realm depicts the metaphysical space inhabited by the five Buddhas of great compassion and wisdom (Giebel, 2005). Below is a visual representation of the five Buddhas (Baruah, 2000) (see diagram below).



Mantras are important aspects of the Womb and Diamond mandala practices including being used as part of the empowerment/ *Abhiṣeka* (*Ch. Guangding 灌顶*). For instance, the Vairocanabhisambodhi Sutra, which expounds on the Womb Realm, has no fewer than 297 mantras (Woodward, 2004). In the sutra, the Vajrapāṇi Bodhisattva (*Ch. 金剛手菩薩 Jīngāngshǒu Púsà*) asked Vairocana Buddha to explain the Womb Realm. Vairocana explained, “What is an illusion? It is just as when, through the art of magic and the power of drugs, various visible images, both those creating [other illusions] and those created, deceive one’s eyes so that one sees remarkable things that produce one another in succession, coming and going in the ten directions, and yet they neither go nor do they not go. Why? Because their original nature is pure. In the same way illusions [produced by] mantras are able to produce anything through success in recitation...with the analogy of a reflection one comprehends how mantras are able to produce siddhi. Just as a face in dependence on a mirror manifests an image of the face, so too should one understand siddhi [produced by] mantras...with the analogy of an echo one comprehends the sound of mantras. Just as an echo exists in dependence on sound, so too should the mantrin understand [mantras].” (Giebel, 2005, pp.15-16) Vairocana further elaborated on the details of the mandala practice, within which he emphasized the power of mantras, “Of future ages and of the present abide in bringing benefit to beings. These worthy ones understand the wondrous method of mantras...The power of mantras is without compare, and [with it] the Lion of the Sakyas, savior of the world, was able to destroy the very strong and extremely wrathful army of Marā and expedient means perform [rites of] accomplishment so that you obtain [*Jnāna*].” (Giebel, 2005)

As the use of mantra in Esoteric Buddhism is vast, the next segment will only focus on analysing the essence of it, as well as the development of a specific mantra, the Six-syllable Mantra.

Alongside mudras, mandalas, visualisation practices, mantra recitation is considered an important aspect of Esoteric Buddhism. Although mantra recitation can be considered the essence of Esoteric Buddhism, it is not a practice that many people truly believe in or even emphasises in their daily practices in contemporary times. Kalu Rinpoche (1995) wrote that this is especially so in the case of non-Buddhist Westerners. In the researcher's view, this is even true for many Buddhists in the East. This is very unfortunate as from the Esoteric Buddhism perspective, Buddhist mantras are very precious and powerful as only sound, words and phrases created by the Buddha and eight-stage or higher level *Mahāsattva* are considered mantras. Only the minds of such enlightened beings have reached such high levels with no regression, such as possessing at least ten masteries on life span and states of meditative absorption, including the mastery over the meaning of words.

Kalu Rinpoche also explained that all sentient beings with mind and body are composed of five elements, the earth, water, fire, air and space. Human beings are said to possess a six-fold *Vajra* body, because we have an additional sixth element animals lack, which is the primordial awareness (Sk. *Jnana*). This primordial awareness allow us to express ourselves through the use of speech and sound, and help us to understand and reflect meaning, as well as gather and analyse information to gain knowledge. In addition, according to the Tibetan Tantric texts, the human body contains 72,000 subtle channels (*Tb. Nadis*); the further points of these channels are in the form of letters, specifically the sixteen vowels and thirty consonants of the Sanskrit language. As such, when we recite mantras created by the enlightened beings as described above, winds (*Tb. Lung, Sk. Prana, Ch. Qi*) passing through these channels will be influenced by these forms.

Kalu Rinpoche's explanation may seem too abstract for us to fully comprehend. However, he drew a parallel closer to our day to day understanding. He gave a helpful way to illustrate this, "Words are neither sharp nor cutting but they can cut the heart of a human being." (p.111) We have all experienced or witnessed the reaction from people when they receive praises and criticisms from others. If words expressed by ordinary people have such great impact, it is not hard to imagine the power of mantras which come from enlightened beings. He also gave the reasoning of why mantras recited are not literally translated, as they will lose the spiritual power inherent in the Sanskrit resonance.

Kalu Rinpoche's viewpoint connects well with what was already summarised in the literature review of what Jigme Lingpa *et al.*(2006) and D'Angelo (2000); Jigme Lingpa *et al.* regarded Buddhist mantra recitation as a form of enlightened speech that not only purifies one's mind and generates wisdom and compassion for others, but also form a path to one's liberation from karma and disturbing emotions, and higher levels of practice incorporates visualization of deities which requires empowerment and specific guidance from one's spiritual teachers. As for D'Angelo, he explained sound can exist in many different levels of consciousness and at a deep state of meditation; the cosmological existence of life is an ocean

of sound vibration that has resonance that could bring our attention beyond physical pain and emotional suffering to an inner state of tranquillity and ease.

Although mantra recitation is not formally regarded as a Theravada Buddhism practice, there are some exceptions, for instance it was recorded in the biography of Zen Master Baiyun (Ch. 白云禅师) that he received *Gu Fan Mi* (Ch. 古梵密) from an esoteric practicing monk in Thailand, Peoples (2011, p.4) found a series of verses in the Anguttara-Nikaya translated by Edward M. Hare (2006) in which the word “mantra” appeared thrice in a story the Buddha told about a teacher long ago by the name of Wheel-Wright who taught his hundreds of disciples the following doctrine, “Short is the life of man, O Brahman, insignificant, trifling, fraught with much ill, with much trouble. By mantras awaken (the people)! Do good! Live the godly life! For the born there is no immortality.” (pp.91-93) Two more similar verses repeated this same line and are all referring to the impermanence of a human’s life span. The Buddha ended by advising the monks, for both teachers and students, the practise of compassion and diligence is needed to face such impermanence, “the work to be done by a teacher for his disciples, seeking their good, by compassion, because of compassion, that has been done for you by me...be not slothful! Let there be no occasion for you to reproach yourselves afterwards! This is our command to you.” The mantras referred here are likely to be of Brahmin origins but in my view, the significance here is that the Buddha taught his disciples that mantras have the power to awaken people and stated it requires compassion and diligence for such a practice, which indeed are the important qualities of mantra recitation in Esoteric practices.

Based on what is gathered from the above literature so far, the practice of mantra recitation, which need as little time as just a few seconds or minutes a day, can be considered a form of expedient means that brings convenience especially to people of the contemporary society when we are already overwhelmed with work/education stress and attached to the social media, such that the commitment to long and tedious practices Buddhist rituals might be more of a deterrence. Mantra recitation as a healing tool can be traced back to ancient Buddhist traditions, and even other Indian traditions, tapping on the resonance of sound vibration with different levels of consciousness to regulate our emotional states; the theory and practice of specific Buddhist mantra recitations require specific instructions, guidance and support from qualified Buddhist teachers. The communication via the body and the speech of a person with another is influenced by what occurs within each person’s mind, and this can be cultivated through mantra recitation to increase one’s mental well-being and mindfulness.

Current and Future Development of Mantras in Esoteric Buddhism

Having elaborated on the historical development and essence of Esoteric Buddhism and mantra recitation, this naturally comes to a point to examine the current and

future development of Esoteric Buddhism, in particular, in relations to impact on one's well-being through the practice of mantras recitation.

The Six-syllable Mantra has been expounded clearly in the *Āyakāraṇḍavyūhanāmamahāyāna Sūtra*, a sutra believed to be written as early as in the fifth century in India and translated into Chinese in 983 CE by T'ien His-tsai (Roberts & Yeshe, 2013, Introduction line i.2) to be a mantra the Buddha expounded that this mantra was transmitted by the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva eons ago when Buddha Śākyamuni in search for it after meeting trillions of buddhas, and finally met Buddha Ratnottama who directed him to Buddha Padmottama, who was in search for it for a long time too and only found it when he went to Buddha Amitābha, who instructed Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva to give the mantra to Buddha Ratnottama. His Holiness Yisie Vorle stated that, "According to the Kangyur of the Zhangzhung Buddhist Canon, you are able to liberate the sentient beings of the six realms with a million recitations of the Six-syllable Mantra, and included among these sentient beings are your karmic creditors, ancestors, and former kin...When we are unburdened by our karmic debts, we are free to choose which Pureland to seek rebirth in... I have devoted over 20 years of my life building a magnetic field at the Vipassana Giri Monastery [in Indonesia] through the collective power of the Six-syllable Mantra. ...Now that the magnetic field has been well established and most devotees are well grounded in their practices involving the chanting of the Six-syllable Mantra, we are at this stage similar to the pre-launching of a rocket. All that remains for the launch is ignition, and the torch of ignition is none other than the sacred name of Amitabha. Thus far we have accumulated over a hundred million counts of the Six-syllable Mantra. Henceforth, I will lead devotees in the recitation of Namō Amitabha and during this new phase, I will make necessary adjustments, if any, based on my observations of future developments. This practice is an integrated method combining esoteric practices with that of the Pureland School. This method aims to provide everyone with a viable means to seek rebirth in Dewachen, within this lifetime, through the recitation of Namō Amitabha."

With regard to Chinese Mahāyāna rites, mantra recitation continue to be a common practice with specific mantras used in monks' daily chanting. It is also a crucial aspect of the "Water and Land Dharma Assembly", which is still practised in contemporary times and considered the most grand and effective form of puja in Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism. For example, His Holiness has led over 70 devotees to participate in this rite at Changzhou Tian Ning Temple annually over the past 20 years.

Six-syllable Mantra, Om Mani Padme Hum, is the most commonly known and recited mantra in Tibetan Buddhism and is highly promoted by HH. In recent decades, there have been many research about mantra recitation as a healing tool. Pereira (2016a) conducted two studies on 26 snails, comparing those in an induced hypothermia-stress situation with those in the same situation but also with audio recording of the Six-syllable Mantra by Tibetan Incantations (Nascente) being played aloud. The study concluded that the vibration generated

by this mantra enhanced and improved the cognitive abilities and behavioural responses of the snails to recover from such state of stress. In another study, Pereira (2016b) examined the frequencies of each of the syllable in the Six-syllable Mantra. Based on the audio recording of this mantra by Tibetan Incantations (Nascente), it was found that each syllable generate powerful vibrations when recited that create healing resonance with the body and mind. For example, the frequency 170.66 Hz that was generated by the sound Om, is close to the 174 Hz which is part of an ancient Solfeggio scale used to reduce physical pain, and the frequency 623.3 Hz generated by the sound Ma, is close to 639 Hz, also a part of the Solfeggio scale which is used to enhance interpersonal relationships and tranquillity. As the sound Om is universal, it was also examined by Gurjar *et al.* (2009), from the Hindu tradition, through an algorithm analysis and had similar findings for it to have a calming effect to the human's nervous system.

In 2022, the researcher (Teh, 2024) piloted a narrative-mantra multi-clinician group, an approach that integrated narrative therapy with the recitation of Energy Mantra, a Vajrayana mantra transmitted in 2005 by His Holiness Yisie Vorle to mental health clinicians who completed the staff well-being group shared that participation in the group enabled them to feel much more anchored and grounded in the present moment. They noticed they felt more relaxed and less busy in starting the rest of the working day after attending the group. They felt the quality of the connection that the space facilitates for them as colleagues with one another. Hearing and understanding complexity of stories and reflect personally and professionally together, they were able to draw on those experiences for their work with service users, and support colleagues and recognise the connection between them as colleagues in a deeper way. Overall, the qualitative and quantitative results showed slight improvement in the participants' family relationships and well-being over the pilot period. A separate mixed methods study by Mahatthanadull and Kraichak (2022) shared similar usefulness in the benefit of using Buddhism by imparting some basic Buddhist teachings and found this helped reduce emotional vulnerability and effectively strength the emotion of nurses.

The above findings are aligned with what was found in two other literatures summarised earlier in Chapter Two; Verma & Araya (2010) measured the psychological distress of Tibetan meditation practising monks and nuns in living in Dharamshala, India and concluded that the longer and more advanced the meditation practice, the fewer signs of psychological distress was identified, and Bernardi *et al.* (2001) tested physiological changes to a non-clinical sample of 23 adults when they recited 150 times of Ave Maria with the use of rosary for counting, and separately the Buddhist Six-syllable Mantra, as compared to when they were talking freely. It was found that both forms of mantra recitation, as compared to free talking, reduced the participants' respiratory rate more regularly and increased in their arterial

baroreflexes, a heart reflex that provides continuous buffering of acute fluctuations in blood pressure.

There is still a lack of research studies in the contemporary times to evaluate the effectiveness of Buddhist mantra recitation on people's well-being. However, based on the few research analysed above, the results are promising. One way for the continuation and survival of Esoteric Buddhism worldwide could possibly be through integrating mantra recitation, one of the key essence of its practice, with the Western forms of psychotherapy, similar to the way Buddhist meditation has now been secularised and integrated as mindfulness practices for general well-being and within psychotherapy. This perhaps suggests that Buddhist methods can offer holistic help to human life in more than one way, just as how Mahatthanadull & Mahatthanadul (2019) proposed in their conceptual model that when one lead a balanced livelihood according to what is expounded in Buddhist psychology, one could acquire holistic well-being in four aspects, i.e. physical health, moral well-being, mental health and intellectual well-being (p.138).

New Body of Knowledge

This research contributes to the following advantages as follows:

1. Acquisition of the body of knowledge about the historical development of mantra in Esoteric Buddhism from India to China, and from the ancient to the contemporary times.
2. Acquisition of the body of knowledge about the essence and development of mantra recitation in Esoteric Buddhism
3. Acquisition of the body of knowledge in the current and future development of mantra recitation in Esoteric Buddhism, in particular, the application of two mantras from Varayāna Buddhism, the Six-syllable Mantra (Om Mani Padme Hum) and the Energy Mantra, in improvement of one's spiritual, physical health and mental health.

Conclusion

The researcher believes that Esoteric Buddhism is one of the 84,000 Dharmas expounded by Buddhas from beginningless times; as such there will be times when it falls into the background or is concealed as *Termas* (Ch. 伏藏) and there will be times when it strives and become the dominant Buddhist practice. The researcher also believes that the use of mantra already existed during the multiple past buddhas' times and will continue to be a part of Buddhist practice in our modern world together with other co-existing components of it including visualisation practices, mandalas and mudras, especially where Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna Buddhism strives.

Based on the existing literatures examined in this paper, the use of Esoteric Buddhist mantras to help with one's spiritual health has been a practice for many centuries across Asia and even in many other Buddha lands. There are some evidence of improvement in physical

and mental health of humans with their use but owing to the small samples, the findings are yet generalisable, thus requiring further clinical research to ascertain.

This journey has helped the researcher to acquire more understanding and development about Esoteric Buddhism. However, the sea of knowledge is boundless, there are still a lot more the researcher has yet unravelled and understood. As such, this is definitely just the beginning of a pursuit for further discovery and exploration. It is important also to continue to ponder over both the empty nature and the interdependent relationship between knowledge and the learner.

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