

Thunder Among the Pines: Defining a Pan-Asian Soma[†]

Frederick Dannaway*

Abstract—Many ancient cultures and religions engaged in various techniques and used various substances to instigate religious experience and to alter perception. These techniques of psycho-sexual drug yoga reached an unparalleled level of sophistication that arose and was often cloaked in practical terms of alchemy and metallurgy. The Vedic tradition describes this plant-based ritualism as *soma*, which has been identified by Gordon Wasson as the mushroom *Amanita muscaria*. This article traces these *soma*-influenced sects of esoteric Buddhism that exerted influences from India, China and Tibet to Japan. Some of the key components, practices and symbolism are retained despite numerous cultural filters. Japan's tradition of esoteric Buddhism can thus be seen to have preserved and incorporated the *soma/amrita* mushroom lore into its own traditions of mountain ascetic mystics.

Keywords—*Amanita muscaria*, esoteric Buddhism/Tantra, Japanese ethnomycology, *soma*

The works of Joseph Needham on Silk Road transmissions of science, civilization and religion are the starting point for this theory of a common, ancient entheogenic legacy that survived into Medieval Japan in the form of Tantric esoteric Buddhism. Needham's evidence, with a few notable exceptions (Spess 2000), has not been specifically treated by scholars of entheogenic studies. This fact is surprising as his work on alchemy combines arguments of early transmissions of religious practices that included sexual yoga, entheogens, and "macrobiotics" as core doctrines that spread from the dawn of civilization across the ancient world. Needham (1974) writes of some points that need to be addressed:

The idea of a herb of immortality was not at all a new invention of Indo-Iranian cultures, for we can find it already in the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh, datable before 2000 B.C.E. What relation that legend had to hallucinogenic mushrooms or

other plants remains completely in the dark, but an extrapolation backwards would make such a connection not at all implausible.

His discussion then draws upon the investigations of Wasson and Michel Strickmann (1966) whose research does suggest a Taoist cult of entheogenic mushrooms. A most interesting supposition, especially for the theory of a continued Japanese *soma*, comes from Dubs (1947;1961 as quoted by Needham) who suggests that the "Indo-Iranian *soma-haoma* was the trigger for the searches of the First Emperor of the Han Wu Ti, even it was only a stimulus diffusion" (Needham 1974). Anticipating the hopeless task of separating out which geographic group was earliest and most influential, Needham (1974) writes "... whatever news it was that came from Persia or India ... the properties of *Amanita muscaria* or related fungi were indeed known to, and used by ancient Taoists, perhaps also medieval ones, though it will be no easy task to reveal the details, doubtless among the most secret arcane of the Tao Tsang."

The Taoist traditions of China and Japan are fused together in the tales of before Common Era emperors of

[†]Thanks to Victor Mair, Mike Crowley, Mark Hoffmann III, the Delaware Tea Society, and Laura Hoinowski.

*University of Delaware.

Please address correspondence and reprint requests to Frederick R. Dannaway, 10 Pimlico Court, Hockessin, DE 19707.

China who dispatched envoys abroad to find the Isles of the Immortals (Penglai) and to find the source for the "Elixir of Immortality," which Needham surmises is a mushroom. This occurred in the reign of Shih Huang Ti (219 B.C.) who dispatched one Hsu Fu, in Japanese Jofuku; Needham thinks it probable that he and his people settled in Japan as they never returned to China and there is a tomb of Jofuku in Kyoto (Needham 1974). Needham's exhaustive arguments on the blurring of alchemical symbolism with entheogenic *soma-haoma* cults is simply too massive to recount here. But he recounts later legends of these Taoist "plant of immortality" missions, in the text "magic mushrooms that nourish the spirit" (*yang shen chih*), as clearly partaking of this truly ancient heritage (Needham 1974). His works discussing the earlier dates of Tantra, such as the commonly cited origins of seventh century CE (Davidson 2003; Bhattacharyya 1982) and the influence of Taoism on Tantrism are essential to link this "esoteric technology" with an ancient current that persisted into Tibet and Japan.

AMANITA MUSCARIA: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON RITUAL USE

Gordon Wasson's revolutionary identification of the Vedic *soma* plant as *Amanita muscaria* not only founded the discipline of ethnomycology but it also helped change our understanding of the most basic principles of religion. Many see psychoactive plants as inciting the religious impulse in humanity in the earliest forms of primordial shamanism (La Barre 1980; Wasson 1968) and the world's oldest known religious literature, the Vedas, sing devotional hymns to this psychoactive *Soma*. The mushroom has been implicated in rites of Greek mysteries by Ruck (Wasson et al. 1978), as the foundation of Christianity by Allegro (1970), as well as in countless magic, ritual and divination systems the world over (Pendell 2005; Ott in Wasson et al. 1986). Wilson (1999) has traced the "sacred drift" of the Indo-European mushroom cult and found an Irish *soma*, and Heinrich (1995) has traced the symbolism into Grail mythos and European alchemical tradition. Hajicek-Dobberstein (1995) and Crowley (2005) have taken Wasson's foundation of Asian shamanism and Vedic use and traced evidence of continued use in Tibet and China. Spess's (2000) work describes the Indo-Aryan entheogenic cults spread throughout the ancient world while confirming the research of scholars such as Wasson, Ruck and Needham on the symbolic connections with the alchemical traditions that veil the botanical associations (though Spess argues for *Nymphaea* and *Nelumbo*, water lilies and the lotus plant, as the primary candidates). Ruck (2006) has also traced mushrooms to the heart of many fairy tales.

That entheogenic sacraments can be found at the heart of most if not all of the world's major religions and mystery traditions has far reaching implications on the dynamics that mediate and control the religious and ecstatic experience which were, perhaps, not so distinct in the past. The death

of Socrates (which has been possibly related to the revealing of sacred knowledge of entheogenic rituals), the brutal Inquisition (associated with botanical "witchcraft" (Müller-Ebeling, Ratsch & Storl 2003), and the modern War on Drugs indicate just some of the prejudice and persecution facing a plant oriented mysticism (Ruck in Wasson et al. 1986). The observations of the "friction" of entheogens and orthodox Buddhism of the pioneer researcher Dr. Strassman as related in his article *DMT and the Dharma* reveals the complicated relationship between entheogenic explorers and "legitimate" traditions (Badiner 2002).

Alternative candidates for the *soma/haoma* range from metallurgical compounds/alloys (Kalyanaraman 2004) to a revisiting of the "ephedra" argument (Falk 1989) to past arguments presenting such candidates as *Cannabis sativa* (Roy 1939), rhubarb (Stein 1931), *Nelumbo nucifera* (Spess 2000) or even the sun or moon (Hillebrandt 1927). There are too many plants associated with *soma/haoma* to give adequate attention to competing theories but a good synopsis of the discussion can be found in works by O'Flaherty (1968), Emboden (1980), and Flattery and Schwartz (1989).

TANTRIC PSYCHOSEXUAL DRUG YOGA

There is an inherently experimental dimension to much of the Tantric/shamanic heritages that culminated in various religions and related traditions in India and China. As scholars such as Eliade and Needham have exhaustively documented, this mystical technology was expressed and concealed in alchemical and metallurgical language. This esoteric semiotics can be found from ancient India, into China and in the esoteric Islamic Shia and Sufism and thus into the Western "mystery" tradition of Middle Ages elixir alchemy (Needham 1976). These arts came to encompass both internal and external alchemical transmutations of emotions and sexual energy into higher spiritual states and preserve techniques that are remarkably similar between Taoist to Buddhist to Tantrika. They often shared many of the same herbs and similar systems of healing, martial arts, and cosmologies and many followed similar ascetic practices and macrobiotic hygiene as well as a fondness for what Giradot calls a "mystical primitivism" expressed in their fondness for rugged terrains, wilderness and remote mountains. Many of the Taoists and Buddhists culminated into practices of seclusion in dark caves which itself is suggested as producing an entheogenic state comparable to that produced by DMT, as modern investigators such as Terrence McKenna and Taoist teacher Mantak Chia (2006) and others describe. This practice, of self-enclosure in the dark, needs serious scientific inquiry as the implications of an endogenous DMT ritual are quite profound and references to such practices abound in various esoteric traditions but especially in Tantric Buddhism.

The controversies as to the origins of sexual yoga might be laid to rest by a careful reading of Needham's arguments

and observations. He gives examples such as the Mohenjo-Daro civilization, in the third millennium BCE, which created statues of "yogis" and naked yoginis sitting in the lotus position, which Needham suggests "are the predecessors of the Shakti consorts." His evidence continues through instances in the Atharva Veda of sexual yogic priests, the *vratyas*, who used sexual yoga with their prostitute consorts (*pumscales*), which Needham calls the original *devadasis*. Scholars who interpret data through political contexts and full blown crystallizations of doctrine will insist on a seventh century CE date for Tantra. However, Neeham writes that "Tantrism of Asanga flourished at 400 CE and was translated into Chinese as early as 5th century" but says these are based on older texts such as the known Guhya-samaja Tantra ascribed to the third century CE (Needham 1983). Tantra did not just arise in a vacuum nor was it limited in terms of regions.

Entheogenic plant substances have a unique quality in uniting the primordial, "chaotic" associations of creation with contrived and imposed qualities of civilization. These philosophical polarities clearly come into play in the various traditions such as in various levels of Vedic duty, or *dharma*, or in China with its Confucian social order in which the mystic is often in direct conflict with the state even if their particular religion enjoys its protection. Examples range from the wandering, hashish (*charas*) smoking *sadhu* with unkempt locks (*jata*) who shuns worldly matters to build heat (*tapas*) and live off energy (*prana*) to the Taoist hermit cultivating inner spirits and living off *chi* and specifically "avoiding the grains" (*bigu*) of post-agricultural society. Whereas theorists speculate as to the identity of the *soma*, there is no doubt that Chinese Taoists rarely hesitated in consuming "magic mushrooms" and the massive *Science and Civilization in China* by Needham is fairly saturated with their various employments and uses along with other various substances that would produce psychoactive effects, such as the burning of hemp incense in Mao Shan rituals (Robinet 1993; Needham 1974) as well as many other substances and drugs used in the quest for immortality (Akahori 1989).

Buddha himself left his family and became a *sadhu* and no doubt experimented in the techniques of his master the Shaivite Makkhali Gosala (560-484 BCE), who was said to practice "dance and divine drunkenness" (Storl 2004). This Shaivite influence seems to have survived in Buddhism only updated linguistically and cosmologically; many Tantric sects, such as in Nepal, join Shiva and Buddha into one. Buddha was protected by a cobra, the serpent kundalini force coiled at the base of the spine, during his deepest meditation thus linking him clearly with this esoteric technology. The last line of the "hymn of the long haired sages" reads: "The Wind-God churned it, and ground it, then the longhaired one drank the elixir from the vessel, together with Shiva" with the elixir being on par with the *soma* (Hartsuiker 1993). Tantra often calls for the aspirant to venture into uncharted territory or as Bharati writes, "experimenting with one's own mind" (Aldrich 1977).

Esoteric Buddhism is philosophically more Vedic and Indo-European with a common link being the "cosmic man" (the Sun Buddha of Tibetan and Japanese traditions) who unites the macrocosm, mesocosm and microcosm in a complicated and strenuous process that is best termed "alchemical," consisting of sexual yoga, ritual adoration (*puja*) and herbal-based alchemy. Buddhist alchemy dropped the goal of metal transmutation and, in contrast to "Hindu" schools, became more internalized (*rasayana*) being "quite identical to the Taoist, Mahayana and Hindu hatha yogic techniques of urethral suction and the 'hydraulic' raising of the semen along the spinal column as in the Kundalini tradition. The Yogic tradition of Patanjali states that *ausadhi* 'botanicals' are one of the four means to obtaining *siddhis* or powers" (White 1996). An ancient Buddhist text speaks of five kinds of powers (*riddhi*): those attained by being inborn, by the use of herbs (*oshadhikrita*), by spells, by activities, and by meditation (Aldrich 1977).

Tantric practice bridges these ontological rifts in the mesocosmic aspirant who, through his/her alchemy, unites the microcosmic aspect with the macrocosmic in a process and language that is not typically associated with orthodox Buddhism. But as both schools employ various techniques ranging from simple but intense chanting (*mantra*) to highly ritualized use of "drugs and minerals" to transmute themselves, they are not that different in theory. *Amanita muscaria* is a special example of such drugs, being both a potential entheogen and cited as a medicinal herb in rejuvenating therapy (*rasayana*) with its effects described as hallucinogenic and stimulating the nervous system, invoking "vivid dreams" and "recollections of old memories and supernatural feelings" (Puri 2003, 1977). Tantra, medicine, psychology and alchemy often converge into interdisciplinary practices that aid the adept to cultivate a sound mind and body for longevity, which was an obsession from the earliest Vedic periods to the immortal concerns of Taoists. Tibetan medicine (gSoba Rig-pa), like Ayurveda, incorporates all these aspects into a spiritual and healing Tantra. A work on the subject, *The Tibetan Art of Healing*, which has a forward by the Dalai Lama himself, mentions the use of *Amanita* in alchemical applications and mentions pilgrimage sites in Tibetan borderlands that are brimming with magical plants that "bestow the eight siddhis and cause one to remember past lives" (Baker 1997).

Psychoactive substances, especially ones that engender ecstatic or terrifying, death-like experiences, were used in all aspects of the traditions from medicine to stimulant, sedative, entheogen for meditation, initiation ordeals and perhaps, (as discussed below), to aid in martial arts combat. The rich, ancient heritage of esoteric botany with the continuing mystical associations, especially of spontaneously appearing fungi suddenly there for the adept to use, demonstrate that psychoactive substances played a critical role in the training of devotees. As Aldrich (1977) writes, "Regardless of the preachings of contemporary orthodox

swamis who urge their followers not to use drugs, the tradition of drug yoga is an ancient and honorable one in India, developed to its fullest extent in Tantric practice." These practices also include ascetic practices of strict diets, fasts, yoga and physical exertion, sensory deprivation, the "techniques of ecstasy" as discussed by Eliade (1972), and martial arts. Thus much of esoteric Buddhism, Tantra and Taoism is a systematic, organized shamanic training that conditions the body and mind to be able to experience higher spiritual perceptions, in which entheogens played an important role.

CHINESE MUSHROOM CULTS

Taoist literature makes frequent references to what scholars often translate as "magic mushrooms" (*ling chih*). Despite pop-culture associations with this term it must be understood to literally be magic and capable of producing anything from immortality to visionary states to shamanic journeys. The *soma* was certainly not just one plant or mushroom, as the multitude of descriptions of *soma* in the scriptures attest, but rather a complex of potent plants and healthful, strengthening herbs that served as tonics for physical and spiritual ills (RigVeda X.97.7; see Griffith 1896). Likewise, in China there was a complex of *chih* plants that shared some ritual, entheogenic or medicinal correspondences that, like the *soma*, were described in alchemical terms and possibly even prepared with gold. This no doubt irrevocably linked the plants with alchemical operations and "potable gold." Perhaps it is both the colors of the respective male and female genital fluids (sperm and menstrual blood) and the color of the *Amanita muscaria* of red and white that diffused throughout diverse alchemical traditions (the red/white polarity being the universal color scheme of the alchemical process; Heinrich 1995).

The most potent and sought after *Chih* plant would certainly be mushrooms. As mentioned, both Wasson and Needham suspected entheogenic fungi as one of the highest secrets in Taoism in a tradition already obsessed with immortality and longevity. Health and spirituality are inseparable in Chinese culture. A long life was testament to a life lived in harmony with the Tao as well as providing the necessary life span to complete the lengthy process of alchemy, internal (*nei tan*) or external (*wei tan*). Alchemical language, born of truly archaic metallurgical and proto-tantric cults, would continue to exert a dominant influence on these various religions and cultures by perpetuating a belief in magic plants that were, to paraphrase Needham, passports to heaven and possibly immortality.

Beyond many ancient texts of Taoist urine drinking (Needham 1983) and *chih* plants there is emerging evidence of much earlier contact between Indo-Iranian and Chinese cultures (Mallory & Mair 2000). Needham and Wasson accepted that the Chinese "plant of deathlessness" (*pu ssu chih tshao*) could be the agaric which grew under the "tree

of deathlessness" or birch (*pu ssu chih shu*). Mushrooms, shamanism and sexuality are found very early in Chinese literature, such as the shamanistic invocations in the *Nine Songs* of the third century. Here a "mountain goddess" is invoked by a shaman whose mission is to capture the "thrice-herb" in the mountains for, as Strickmann (1966) writes, "the goddess, his lover"; he records that the commentators state the plant is a mushroom. This little studied aspect of goddess worship and entheogenic mushrooms in China may well be the original source for proto-Tantric and Tantric schools that emerged in the "The Great China" (Mahacina). Needham (1983) describes this current as "religious sexuality" or *cinacara* and as flowering into Tantra, with the important note that much of this philosophy was already present in Chinese mysticism since recorded history. This erotic mysticism which developed into Tantra proper emerged in Buddhism as early as the third century CE and spread through Asia (Payne 2006).

Evidence of mushrooms as hallucinogens and aphrodisiacs are also found in a text from the third century CE involving a certain Chiao-fu and two nymphs of the Blue River (Strickmann 1966). The hero falls in love with the pair and issues forth the following verses of poetry:

I will put in a basket
These pineapples, these oranges,
And entrust them to the waters of the River Han.
Downstream they float. I go along the bank,
I pluck and eat the mushroom;
Thus you know I won't be polite:
I want to ask you for girdle-gems.

At this point the nymphs quote his poetry back to him and vanish after presenting him with their gem laden girdles. Strickmann notes that this story is charged with themes of ancient fertility rites, and it must be mentioned that some descriptions of *soma* have it growing near water (Frawley 2006). Other sexual themes follow mushroom lore in China, such as is found in the the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (Shan Hai Ching), which Strickmann (1966) describes as from an "early and unknown date." Here another nymph, Yao Chi, dies a virgin and is "apotheosized as the Goddess of the Mountain of the Sorcerers. Her spirit became the plant Yao, of which the fruit is the sacred mushroom. The mushroom is described here as a love-charm, enabling its possessor to seduce whomever he wishes. Strickmann's research on Chinese mushroom cults recounts many cultural themes that follow this relationship of goddess worship and sexuality as well as deducing that many Taoist visionary experiences are instigated by hallucinogenic mushrooms.

The syncretic nature of these religions is found in the Tripitaka (*Ta Tsang*) in words of the Buddhist Master Ssu of the Southern Sacred Mountain who was the teacher of Chhen Te-An, founder of the *Tien-Tai* sect of Buddhism. His blending of Taoist alchemical and Buddhist concepts, more fully discussed below,

with magic mushroom lore can be found in the following passage:

"I am now going into the mountains to meditate and practice austerities, repenting of the numerous sins and infractions of the Law which have been so many obstructions to the Tao, both in my present and previous incarnations. I am seeking for the longevity in order to defend the Faith, not in order to enjoy worldly happiness. I pray that all the saints and sages will come to my help, so that I may get some good magic mushrooms, and numinous elixirs (*shen tan*), enabling me to cure all illnesses and to stop both hunger and thirst. In this way I shall be able to practice continually the way of the Sutras and to engage in the several forms of meditations. I shall hope to find a peaceful dwelling in the depths of the mountains, with enough numinous elixirs and medicine to carry out my plans. Thus by the aids of external elixirs (*wai tan*) I shall be able to cultivate the elixir within (*nei tan*)" (Needham 1983).

The eighth century eccentric Buddhist hermit-poet Cold Mountain (Han Shan) writes of his deep retreat in the mountain:

Relaxing below Cold Cliff
the surprises are very special
taking a basket to gather wild plants
bringing it back loaded with fruit
spreading fresh grass for a simple meal
nibbling on magic mushrooms
rinsing my ladle and bowl in a pool
making a stew from scraps
sitting in sunshine wrapped in a robe
reading the poems of the ancients (Porter 2000).

Scholars such as Strickmann and Needham, with the aid of Wasson, note the continued use of psychotropic drugs in ancient Taoist practices that persisted until at least medieval times. The revolutionary alchemists and herbalists of the Mao Shan traditions from the first century BCE produced scriptures which Needham (1974) says were "aided almost certainly by cannabis"; he notes that Lady Wei of the Southern Peak, a founder of Taoist liturgy was "a great teacher of meditation and psychotropic drugs." A sixth century example from the *Wu Tsang Ching* (Needham 1980) says, "If you wish to command demonic apparitions to present themselves you should constantly eat the inflorescences of the hemp plant." Robinet's (1993) work contains constant references to magic mushrooms and magic plants from remote regions that the adept must seek out and consume. Wasson (1968) references an incident of a Chinese official named Lu Yu (1125-1209) who seemed to be against the fungal use of the Manichaeans. As Ott (1995) writes:

The Chinese, as is well known, are hardly mycophobes, and surely there must have been something special about those red mushrooms to have attracted the opprobrium of Lu Yu (Manichaeism was introduced into China in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, and had considerable impact on the Taoists, with their famous icon of the *ling chih*, or the "divine mushroom of immortality").

The strong influence that Chinese traditions exerted on other Asian countries, such as Korea, seems to also have brought much of this esoteric influence. An example is the Jade girls picking magic mushrooms in frescoes of the Koguryo tombs of the sixth and seventh centuries CE. As Needham (1983) records, many Koreans studied in China, bringing back "special pharmaco-sexual techniques of the Silla masters." Likewise in Burma an alchemical tradition persisted to "work with fire" (*aggiya*) which, as again Needham writes, is oriented towards the attainment of *zawgyi* (=siddhi?) *hsien* (supernatural powers) in Chinese, through sexual arts and elixir drugs, such as were cultivated by the Ari monks of Burma.

Needham's research also documents the extensive influence of Chinese alchemy on the Arabs. Beyond mundane science and proto-chemical influences there is curious mention of "laughing mad stones" from China that the Arabs called *al-bahit*, which shows up in the Jabirian Corpus of alchemical scripts. This links in with Shia esoteric cults, as Jabir's master was the sixth Shia Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad and Jabir even has a whole book dedicated to the subject, the Book of the Surprising (*Kitab al-Bahit*). Needham (1980) traces these legends back to a Chinese source that describes a hallucinogenic mushroom that incites uncontrollable laughter and even death with excessive doses. Clearly these associations with alchemists and mushrooms or similar entheogenic compounds and elixirs fairly saturated the region continuing into Western alchemical traditions, which also are linked with mushrooms (Heinrich 2002).

Chinese herbalists no doubt experimented with entheogenic plants from the earliest times. Taoist alchemists like Ko Hung, in works perhaps based on alchemical treatises from Nagarjuna, describe many plants and their expected effects on the adept (Ware 1984). Dr. Li (1978) discusses the literature of hallucinogenic plants in their diverse contexts and uses among Taoists and sorcerers and the history of the inclusion of mind-altering plants in Chinese herbals. A continued use of such plants, such as evidenced above, provides ample possibilities for a continued use of entheogenic mushrooms in regions infused with cults that retained the influence of the *soma/haomo/chih* plants.

BUDDHISM AND ENTHEOGENS: ESTABLISHING A CONTEXT

The father of ethnomycology Gordon Wasson has proposed the most reasonable suggestion of species for the famed *soma* of the Vedic traditions with the mushroom *Amanita muscaria*. Though the debate as to what exact plant was used or substituted will no doubt rage on, the most important aspect of Wasson's work lies in the expressed possibility of an entheogenic plant ritual at the foundation of the world's earliest revealed religions, though opponents seem a bit overzealous and indeed personal in their attacks on this theory. Focusing on the movements of various cults

across the ancient lands reveals a vast network of influence from India to Greece with common themes emerging in support of Wasson's theories. Indo-European nomads brought specific doctrines, such as the *soma* or *haoma*, that were absorbed by and merged with local indigenous traditions of shamanism and animism. The result was an often tenuous syncretism, such as is found in the Rig Veda and Avesta, which became entwined in the local cosmologies and practices until doctrinal evaluations formalized these into elitist legalism and obsession with elaborate ritual.

This period, after the Upanishads, coincides with the revision and assimilation of the various competing pantheons into an Aryan framework adjusting their status as the godly Brahmins. The relatively simple rites of the hearth then became the *homa* or *agnihotra* ritual that spread all through Asia. According to Wasson, the *soma* cult seems to have diminished with the migrations of the Aryans towards the Indus Valley. While this theory, and the "political reality" affecting such movements, may indeed be a chief cause of the "cultural amnesia" as to what was the original *soma* plant, another alternative could be that the cult went underground to evade various suppressions and persecutions at the hands of that old familiar state-caste based orthodoxy. It is clear that these fire rituals, entheogenic plants, and complex philosophies became firmly established in the context of metallurgy. The mastery of fire and the shaman have long been poetically and mythically intertwined. The obvious metaphors of the metallurgical refining process from gross ore to useful metal would give all such endeavors a spiritual dimension. The pressures of agricultural or cattle herding-based authorities link metals with security, survival and religion and would further contribute to the mystery of "smithing." As the technology became more widespread the specific fire rituals evolved an intentional esoteric complexity to perhaps satiate the need for an esoteric doctrine in which to contextualize the entheogenic rites (Eliade 1962). The diffusion of fire rites, metallurgical/shamans/smiths and cremation rites that arise in the twilight of Copper/Bronze Age enshrine and link these associations with the purification of ores, potentially poisonous or dangerous medicines, and impurities in the deceased on the funeral pyre.

Some Indian scholars, in the course of the deep study of their own traditions such as the Rig Veda, have suggested that the *soma* itself was the metal electrum, which is a gold and silver alloy. Alchemy of a metallic and plant nature is intimately linked with the various Vedic and Tantric spiritual sciences that spread amongst various cults (Kalyanaraman 2004; Kazanas 2002; Jaggi 1973). A type of *soma* was used in the incessant fire mentioned in the Khila Sukta of the Rig Veda, which Dr. Kalyanaraman links to a metallurgical process that was of, as its inclusion in the Rig Veda attests, religious devotion. The theory of Wasson can be combined with this alchemical symbolism to give the ritual considerations many dimensions from which to draw. The actual smelting and combining of metals and incessant fires has

obvious implications to a mystic. The clay, earthenware pot of the Mahavira vessel filled with Putika plants and water over a fire begins to take on alchemical metaphors of the elements. The fragrance of the fire—the way the gods enjoy their sacrifice—wafts like incense in the perpetual prayer in the fire of the Soma sacrifice. The inner *homa* is an offering of all the impediments and obstacles to the peace of enlightenment.

The Buddha himself is implicated (though this is contested) with both mushrooms and metal-smiths. As Wasson notes, the Pali canon of Buddhist texts records the last meal of the Buddha as a mushroom served to him by the metal-worker Cunda. Wasson's deductions follow many years of academic debate as to whether the final substance was pork or a fungus as the Pali and other South Asian canons maintain. As to the noted objections that the mushroom account does not appear in the (to paraphrase Kornfield's comments) "mainstream" canonical literature this must be understood as a clear example of enforced orthodoxy. The Buddhist convocations mirror the Christian-Roman hybridization under Constantine and the subsequent councils to define doctrine. The suspected vegetarianism of Buddha would suggest some deeper esoteric symbolism (Wasson et al. 1986). But the early Pali Canon (D.ii.7) links Kassapa Buddha (the last of the Buddhas that proceed the historical Buddha) with *soma* in various legends that involve quaffing a beverage the moment before enlightenment. Just like Shakyamuni, Kassapa takes a bit of milk/rice gruel before his enlightenment, which is served to Kassapa by his wife and an attendant named Soma.

The so-called "silence" of the Buddha, a religious and social reformer, has always been linked with certain early Buddhist sects with an esoteric doctrine. This foundation of esoteric Buddhism, allegedly entrusted to Kashyapa, then seems to have taken a radically different course from the prevailing, basically "mirror-polishing" exoteric teaching. If this esoteric Buddhism was a purified Hinduism—one without class distinctions, animal-sacrifice and "distilled rituals"—then the esoteric doctrine begins to take shape. The acknowledged master of expounding this Buddhist silence is the legendary Nagarjuna who is still famed in India today as an alchemist and wizard and personifies the erotico-mystical side of Tantric Buddhism, and whose writings feature debates between Hindus and Buddhist, as well as transmutational alchemy (White 1996).

Though his existence and authorship of certain texts are problematic to some academics, the significance of the clear associations connected with Nagarjuna betrays an esoteric hermeneutics. The secrets of myth and folklore are in a sense more "true" in their capturing of the prevailing spirits of sympathy these traditions were connected with in constantly linking Nagarjuna to occult arts. So popular legend concerning the wizard and alchemist adept of plants and herbs does give added dimension to his numerous writings on subjects as broad as philosophy and Tantra. His allusions to the

"*amrita*" or ambrosia or nectar, as it is translated, would then follow the deliberate semantic shift that the Buddha himself established as a precedent in rejecting the caste system. This subtle shift from *soma* to *amrita* may also indicate a growing sense of sophistication in understanding what is still today advanced neurochemistry. Indian medical systems connect the *amrita*, the "nectar of immortality" with the third eye and pineal gland. As other scholars have already connected the *amrita* with the *soma* and Nagarjuna there is no need to repeat this (Crowley 2005). What is important is to note the link of philosophical and ontological orientation back through esoteric Buddhism as reformed Hinduism that was based on the *soma-agni-hotra-homa* ritual and metallurgy.

Nagarjuna, like Cunda who served Buddha's meal, was said to be an alchemist who knew the secrets of the *amrita* and thus of immortality. Yet a further link is the legendary be-heading of Nagarjuna from a bow of Kusa Grass in the popular folklore. As Kramrish demonstrates in the paper subtitled "The Secret of the Cut-Off Heads," this symbolism is intimately connected with the *soma* and Mahavira vessel, the descriptions of which match the pot or cup of elixir in Nagarjuna's hand in popular iconography (Wasson et al. 1986). With the numerous connections of esoteric teachings, symbolism, folklore and literal and symbolic allusions it is hard to ignore all of the evidence (Crowley 2005). There are many of these legendary adepts that define these interrelated influences of immortality plants, such as the Tantric South Indian *Siddhar* Bogar or Bhogar (third century CE), born of goldsmiths, of whom it is said that he brought the *siddha* science into China. He was said to have come from China and joined the Saivite lineage of the Nathas. As Needham's research shows, there would have already been a thriving indigenous tradition ready to receive it. Indeed, Bogar in some accounts is said to have been Chinese himself, as some also say of his guru Kālāngi Nāthar. This lineage describes a system of healing and attaining power from "kaya kalpa herbs" (literally "*kaya*=body *kalpa*=immortal") in a poem that mixes alchemical, botanical macrobiotics, and magic together:

With great care and patience I made the (kaya kalpa) tablet
and then swallowed it:
Not waiting for fools and skeptics who would not appreciate
its hidden meaning and importance.
Steadily I lived in the land of the parangis (foreigners) For
twelve thousand years, my fellow!
I lived for a long time and fed on the vital ojas
With the ojas vindhu I received the name, Bhogar:
The body developed the golden color of the pill:
Now I am living in a world of gold (Ramaiah 1979).

Given the social, political and religious climate of India, even well before the Buddha, it would seem there was "the syndrome of the secret" (Urban 2005a, b, 2003). This atmosphere of secrecy in religious or occult practices is one of the very foundations of the power over lower castes. To have knowledge of something, the name of a god or demon—to

have its "true" name—was to be able to control and bind it to one's will. Who can fathom the secrecy necessitated by internal strife and external "cult" strife, diminishing supply of the plant(s), regime changes, etc. while operating on the cherished notion that the more discretion employed the better? Written, and even oral, discourses were already suspect by the time of Buddha as witnessed in his radical rejection of all "expert testimony" which indeed is the very foundation of all Hindu religion, and therefore, society.

Writers who focus on the more "occult" aspects of these traditions, such as some of the accusations made against those linking Buddhism and entheogens, neglect the radical social implications that would topple the whole social structure of Hinduism/India should it be fully realized. This very fact alone renders these mystics subversives first and foremost. The men who shunned society in ascetic autonomy merely reinforced and validated its existence by giving such attention. Compound this with the "sharing the secret" of "ecstatic technology" with the masses, which may have been the undoing of Socrates, and no wonder Buddhism withered in India. This hostility from society may have shaped a gradually more militant resistance of warrior monks/initiatory brotherhoods that may have been modeled on ancient metallurgical guilds (Giradot 1983).

WHY DID BODHIDHARMA COME TO CHINA?

The ancient world's many mystery traditions and cults nearly all betray some ecstatic technology, be it in the form of a potion, magic or ritual endeavor. The practice of self-enclosure, from Zalmoxis and Pythagoras to the Egyptian tomb ascetics in the cult of the dead, employs practices that could mimic DMT in the brain. The evidence can be found throughout China and India as well as in a strain of Indo-European religions from the already mentioned Zalmoxis to the cave rites of Mithras (Ulansey 1991; Eliade 1970). The cave revelations of the many prophets of Semitic extraction also would seem to some to retain some aspect of this "chthonic shamanism." The lengths of time are astounding, ranging from three days such as in the case of Christ, to three-year intervals with Zalmoxis. Others extend up to a quarter of a decade or more, and Tibetan oral lore from the Lamas themselves record examples of whole lifetimes spent in such dark meditations. The practice seems to have been a very important element in Chinese mysticism as enclosing oneself in dark caves, gourds (a symbolic mystical retreat for Chinese mystics), and grottos is a constant topic in various literatures (Robinet 1993; Giradot 1983) This common heritage seems to emerge with the metallurgical brotherhoods that came with various waves of Scythians and Thracians. No doubt comfort and protection was sought in caves since prehistory, but the evolution to a mystic practice may stem from observing animals that hibernate only to be reborn after a symbolic death in winter (as many of the martial arts systems are said to have been derived from the movements of animals).

Suddenly the travels of the Bodhidharma might make more sense. Perhaps in fleeing a hopeless and hostile political situation he went to the land of the Taoists of China, who in their turn viewed teachings of the Buddha as stemming from a reincarnation of Lao-tzu who went to the land of the "barbarians" to teach the Way. It is possible that the lack of or restriction of *soma* or *soma*-substitutes may have prompted scores of esoteric Buddhists to wander to the land of the Immortals whose scriptures contained countless references to plants that matched the descriptions of their amrita. While Bodhidharma (Damo as he is known in China) might seem the quintessential no nonsense monk, his lineage back to Nagarjuna cast him in a slightly more esoteric shadow. His seclusion in a cave, for seven years no less, would then indicate some bold ego-death ritual to behold pure mind in the incessant flow of pure cognition. The seven years could indicate an actual increment or just an extended period (though it should be noted seven days in darkness will have a person experiencing DMT-like effects).

Once a distinction is granted between substances—as in education that elaborates the differences in effects of a mushroom verses a "potion"—then the discussion can relax enough to consider the correlative reactions in the brain. This is not to render the entire, for lack of a better word, "mystical" situation to a chemical reductionism (Goodman 2002). The implications of drinking a hallucinogenic brew being identical in chemical experience and structure to "sober" Buddhist cave meditations opens the discussion as to the full possibilities kinetically present in the tryptamines/amrita of the pineal gland/third eye. While Bodhidharma remains secluded in his cave, the legendary associations as the founder of martial arts, especially the Pure Land Shaolin Buddhists, linger on.

THE THUNDER

One critically insurmountable paradox of understanding intentionally deceptive esoterica will cloud any inquiry into these or any other admittedly esoteric schools. This investigative double-bind will taint every conclusion with the real possibility that the groups in question did possess a very real and practical knowledge that would then be guarded and protected with the utmost religious fervor. The cult's skillful dissimulation and semiotic abstractions would nearly render any inferences hopelessly lost in a stream of blinds and bluffs even if not further marred by intentional and accidental mistranslations. It is literally amazing that so much consistent imagery is still found littered and scattered across space and time despite attempts by various states and religious institutions to obliterate them from the historical record (as in the Taoist changing of their sacred mushroom from *Amanita* to the *ling-chi*, suggested by Wasson as discussed below). The oral nature of the teachings gives the consistency an almost miraculous ability to survive intact in foreign cultures. However, a form of spiritual sterilization

by institutions in power may lead to oblivion or worse: appropriation by the institution in claiming the "rebel-heretic" in death as their own.

By the time Buddhism arrived in China, Taoism and other loosely associated mystical schools of alchemy were already embroiled in a struggle of cosmological proportions. An encroaching legalism and the institutionalization of Taoism cast all heterodox plants, persons and rituals as being in sympathy with a chaos (Hun-Tun) that by its very nature was against the orthodoxy (Robinet 1993; Giradot 1983). The synergy of Taoism and esoteric Buddhism/Hinduism may have indeed shared a distinct cultural exchange from ancient times as witnessed in the confluence of practices and theories (White 1996). The gradual revealing of the core doctrines of esoteric Buddhism continued through the elucidations of the various Mahayana schools that gained popularity among the rural and the poor. The practices and teachings were not necessarily created outside the line of Dharma transmission, as the other schools insist, but were rather a refinement in the approach of dissemination. As the exoteric doctrines of all the faiths mostly centered on morality and meditation, they differed little in the mundane contexts of the diverse state traditions that, in turn, differ very little, from Vedic injunctions to the Confucian ethics or Buddhist precepts.

The esoteric aspects of the Mahayana are sometimes rationalized as symbolic concessions to animist and "savage" indigenous cultures such as the Bon shamans of Tibet. While there is no doubt an assured blend and assimilation from "gods" to "bodhisattvas," the natures of the rituals seem similar enough to suggest a collective merging of technologies rather than a hostile tactic of missionaries. The basically shamanic fire rites of the old *homa* would find a kindred spirit in native fire rituals that seemed to have a special inclination for herbal supplements. "Tantra" has an etymological root meaning "to expand" and it is in this context that Mahayana esoteric philosophy was taken to its theoretical and practical conclusion. The resulting hyper-path is a thunderous distillation of rapid and sudden enlightenment known as the Vajrayana.

The Vajrayana or "thunderbolt" vehicle is the pure unadulterated essence of Mahayana Buddhism, which is to some extent a purified Hinduism (Crowley 2005). The relationship and associations with mushrooms and thunder are nearly universal in scope, attesting to the relationship with precipitation and fungal appearance. *Soma* was always associated with Indra, as the *Soma Pavanana* of the Rig Veda attests with verse 15: (Griffith 1896) "Over the cleansing sieve have flowed the Soma, blent with curdled milk, Effused for Indra Thunder-armed." As the research of Wasson and others shows, the mushroom is always connected with the thunderous "suddenness" of both the storm and the subsequent seemingly instantaneous appearance of the mushroom. This is a perfect metaphor for sudden enlightenment, even if the mushrooms did not expedite the situation with instan-

taneous stages of experience that "thunder" down the path towards "enlightenment."

Wasson's (1986) research introduces the confusion of alternative species and substitutions of "thunder plants" that link the *soma*/thunder connections to the Chinese "divine mushroom of immortality" or *ling chi*. Wasson notes its alternative names is *lei zhi* or "thunder mushroom" as well as recording later epithets of "thunder aroused mushroom, thunderbolt mushroom" etc. in his groundbreaking chapter in *Persephone's Quest* entitled "Lightningbolt and Mushrooms." This *ling zhi* would then transfer its immortal connotations to the *reishi* mushroom of Japan. He records the Indian traditions of "thunder mushrooms" and certain *putka* mushrooms of the genus *Phallus*, which is clearly indicative of the shape of the hood. Interestingly enough, the Tantric science of *Vajrayana* would then conceal multiple meanings as thunderbolt and mushroom with the added sexual dimension of the word *vajra*, which can also mean a penis (Heinrich 2002).

The accrued similarities became more and more defined as Mahayana and Vajrayana permeated China. There was a mixing and blending of esoteric discourses from the mountains of Mao Shan Temples to the *yantra* shaped monasteries of Tibetan Lamas. Jin Dynasty era transmissions from Tibet, India and Mongolia managed to maintain key concepts such as the retention of specific ritual formulas and symbolism to an astonishing degree of consistency, even or especially in the cases where some "adepts" did not know the meaning of the Sanskrit letters. Later during the Tang Dynasty esoteric Buddhism reached a peak of influence, with open dissemination of the esoteric Dharma conducted, in some cases, under the auspices of the court. The Chinese esoteric Buddhism best known as the school of *Sanlun* also had a much more informal following of wanderers and vagabond mystics who would probably purposely avoid both attention and arbitrary designations let alone the dogmatic adherence of a school. Esoteric Buddhism is thought to have fizzled away like an unattended *homa* fire. While this may be the case—that it just vanished due to lack of interest—it is more likely and less often said that it may have just remained.

The adherents of the Prajnaparamita literature in China distilled its fundamentals to understand the immediacy of the possibility of Buddhahood in one's lifetime. The Tibetan rejection of establishments (*Rdzogs-chen*) and the maverick yogis (*Rnying-ma*) had a particular attraction to the mad hermits of Taoism and shamans who were influenced and influencing the stream of defecting Buddhists from India into the churning ontological ocean of China. Various institutional and governmental restrictions seem to have limited the degree to which the full scope of the esoteric teachings could be safely revealed. Their influence in Tibet seems to logically have allowed them more public breadth in terms of open teaching, whereas in China the climate was not that conducive to such doctrines. The demise of esoteric Buddhism in China can be seen as a nationalistic reaction to

the foreign influence of Buddhism, which was all the more pronounced in occult sects with the retention of the Hindu pantheon and Sanskrit languages. The Chinese ruling family would then support Taoism, "related" as they were to Lao Tzu, or even Hinayana Buddhism as more moderate in theory, practice and expectations. As scholars note, it was the melding of Confucian ethics with Buddhism during the Tang Dynasty that was responsible for the more decisive "support." The Tang dynasties' influence faded with these positive sentiments, as witnessed in overall trends but exemplified in acts such as the anti-Buddhist persecutions of the year 845.

It is perhaps strange to posit a radical, even militant, Buddhism but the history of martial arts indeed stems, in legend, from Bodhidharma. The refinements in the Pure Land temples of Shaolin, which contained esoteric practices (Chinese: *Mi Tsung*, Japanese: *Miyko*) and exoteric martial arts, further link fighting techniques with militant autonomy in popular Chinese lore. Bodhidharma's alleged movements formed the basis for a martial art tradition that appears in various forms all over Asia. One must consider the Indian tradition of Vajramushti which is a brutal hand to hand art practiced by the warrior class, the Kshatriya, to which Bodhidharma belonged as providing a context for his teachings. Tibetan warrior monks retain traditions of Shakyamuni Buddha, a kshatriya or Warrior-Caste Hindu, trained in The Five Arts of the Warrior Kshatriyas in a style practiced today called Simhavikridatta (Lion's Skill) of the Vajramushti Diamond-Thunderbolt Fist Martial Art (Goldstein 1964). Likewise, in Tamil there is the Kalaripayattu style of martial arts, which though perhaps of a later date, certainly had more ancient precedents in the area. This semi-wildman/sage with supreme martial arts and esoteric knowledge is a very common theme that links much of this lore together, such the Tibetan Guru Padmasambhava—The Lotus Born, "The Lion Roaring Guru"—who introduced Tantric Buddhism into Tibet circa 750 CE. These masters seem to be the model for the holders of the Japanese *soma*, the Yamabushi, who are associated with the Shugendo, which are a sect of the Shingon linked to the enigmatic En-no-Gyoja of the seventh century CE, who practiced an ingenious and secretive synthesis of Shinto, Zen and Tantric Buddhism. They are known as the *tengu* or crowman and later become associated with the *shinobi* or ninja.

The physical defenses and combinations of mudra and ritual techniques would then seem to date back to Vedic India with the system known as *Simhanada Vajramushti*. Certainly a noble tradition of Buddhist warrior-monks (*Ldab Ldob*), with a complicated martial arts, exist in this very precise system of Tantric Buddhism. They employ a similar cosmology, pantheon, ritual, liturgical language (in many cases) as well as a long history of heated and violent internal conflicts from remote castles. As modern scholars have demonstrated, there is a strong possibility that *Amanita* mushrooms were used in the alchemical process in the Buddhist Tantric traditions

of Tibet which may then be in line with the *soma* of India in a reformed Buddhist context (Kalyanaraman 2004; Hajicek-Dobberstein 1995). A startling bit of information is the connection of the Tibetan martial system of "wild wisdom" with the mythological Yeti of the Himalayas. It will prove extraordinarily relevant that there should be a martially adept "wild-demon creature" associated with Tantric Buddhist warrior-monks, *Amanita* mushroom alchemy, and the furious defense of their autonomy. I suggest that the Yeti, connected in the Tibetan martial arts with a certain "style," were these very same Buddhist monks, wild like their Indian founder Padmasambhava, in the skins of wild animals roaming their territories like agitated demons. This Indo-Tibetan-Chinese martial art then finds an esoteric counterpart in the so-called Bodhisattva warriors of certain sects. Contrary to the unified picture of most publications on Tibetan Buddhism, there is a very violent history between the different sects who have skirmished and fought for power since their inceptions under the (translated) designations that are variously: the yellow, the red and the black "hats." Yet all these groups retain and share these very distinct ritual systems.

At this point, I would pause to present yet a further dimension of the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom, which was presented in a PBS documentary that hypothesized the use of the fungi in the "Day of the Zulu" (Knight 2002). The victory of the Zulu against such odds has prompted scholars like Knight and botanist Ben-Erik van Wyk of Rand Afrikaans University in Johannesburg, South Africa to suggest psychoactive species at play in stimulating the warriors to battle. "Warriors who consumed those mushrooms, researchers speculate, might have been utterly without fear, believing themselves impervious to British bullets" (Knight 2002). The documentary followed the presentation of this theory with two martial artists previously equally matched in combat who were then each given a substance: one a placebo, one the preparation of the mushroom. The placebo martial artists stuck to his trained form while his opponent, under the influence of the mushroom, erupted with a ferocity that easily defeated his opponent. The results were startling in showing the martial applications of the fungus, which now is not only ritual entheogen and medicine but also a potentially deadly weapon in a fighter's arsenal. Spess (2000) notes, "Indra, the man god who drinks soma, becomes stimulated for battle after drinking soma" (see Rig Veda 9.44.3; 9.97.37; 5.44.13) and it is possible that *Amanita* based lycanthropy is the instigation for wolfmen in fairytales as well as of the marauding Berserkers. Ruck's recent book (2007) revisits mushroom lore and the Berserkers as well as other associations of lycanthropic mushroom use.

The Tantric ritual implements include the symbolic *vajra* or thunderbolt (Tibetan: *dorje*) and bell with the dagger familiar in most magical ceremonies the world over. The cup or *kalapa* from the Sanskrit is always best if from the upper cranial area, nearest the pineal gland, of a human skull. That same militant Tibetan Padmasambhava is commonly

depicted holding such a bowl filled with the nectar of immortality in Tibetan art. The other curved "chopper" style knife is suggested by most as a symbolic weapon that defends the Dharma and severs the bonds of attachment. This is certainly correct on one level, but given the known *homa/soma* influences and the sudden organization into near military fraternities this might indicate a deeper ritual meaning. The curved dagger might then be a stylized pestle to the mortar of the skull in a more Tantric updating of the *soma/haoma* (literally "to pound" as in extracting the juice of the rehydrated mushroom) of the shared Indo-European heritage. If the Tibetans were indeed using *Amanita* then they would have possibly managed to retain the essence of the *homa/soma* (*homa* is *agnihotra*, a fire ritual, and not to become confused with the *haoma* entheogen of the Mazdeans and Zoroastrians though they are related) with the fire rite. The Tibetan offering of the *Zho-zan* or *shozen*, which is a sweet dairy mixture, may function as the ritual offering of the *soma*, which after pounding would have been imbibed, perhaps, in such a liquid (Tulku & Perott 1987).

The eighth century CE was an important one for Tantric *Vajrayana*. Like a sudden storm it rained forth an eruption of translations and doctrines, usually associated with some semilegendary wild-man, upon all of Asia. The similarities and consistencies of these documents in Tibet, China and Japan attest to the supreme organizational skills, dissemination techniques, and kinetic energy of the Tantric message. The complete sophistication of such an exact esoteric doctrine speaks to the level of refinement of the exoteric Mahayana with its diamond in the rough counterpart of *Vajrayana*. The ability of the Tantra to mesh with indigenous shamanism may have been equal parts tactic and conscious willingness for technological appropriation and assimilation. As writers such as Ott (1996) and others maintain, the shamans were simply the psychopharmacologists of the ancient tribal worlds. The Tantrikas then showed extreme discretion and intelligence towards the local gods and customs as representative of the prevailing animist landscape. As the plants were thought of as gods themselves, the foods or abodes of the gods or their offerings, the plants would then partake of theocentric relationships to the particular area's divinities. This would include Taoist personas in the Chinese material as well as Bon and Shinto in the Tibetan and Japan traditions respectively.

Whatever the specific routes of transmission, the full expression of Tantra in the encountered society would depend on the state sentiment. The vast, chaotic and competing landscape of China had three main versions of religions in Taoism, Confucian and Buddhism, too many to even permit, despite the brief period with the Tang, any real flowering of esoteric Buddhism. The nearly parallel unfolding of esoteric Buddhism with the possible fusion of martial arts and entheogens in Japan and Tibet, again, suggests the coherent nature of the transmission that maintained a core set of distinct features. The mentioned ritual connections are

as present in Japan as they are in Tibet, with both beginning to display some new, yet similar, characteristics. The essentially anarchist nature of Buddhism, as in Buddha's rejection of his dharma (duty) to his caste and family as rulers for the Buddha-Dharma, would have natural implications for what amounts to its political stance. Its various guises, exoteric and esoteric, still often retain a disdain for this world of mundane concerns. This anarchist sentiment can suddenly turn utopian, nearly reminiscent of Plato's *Republic* and the philosopher-king, with what amounts to a golden "Buddhocratic" society. It was either the smiles of the "lord of the world," or clever missionary activity that suddenly transformed both Tibet and Japan (however briefly) into state-sanctioned esoteric Buddhist centers. The Japanese Kukai's triumphant return led him to a complete autonomy, secure in a mountain stronghold, in no more than two years time. The subsequent campaigns and military struggles are too well known to need treatment. Suffice to say that the violence may very well indicate the conclusions of rituals of empowerment in a cultural and political vacuum like Japan during this most bloody time. The Japanese Shingon sect (literally "true word" from the Sanskrit *Mantrayana*) arrived on the island via the aristocratic Kukai. His well known story has him besting all the Chinese natives in his understanding of the esoteric practices in the Tang capital of Chang-an.

His Chinese master, Hui-kuo, initiated him into the highest levels of the cult, even passing his mantle of authority shortly before his death. This secret teaching (Japanese *Mikkyo*) then comes from India through China (Hakeda 1972). The mentioned entheogenic connections with India, and subsequently in Tibet, will also find relation to the already touched upon "thunder" connections noted in China by Wasson. The works of Taoist scholars as Giradot, Robinet, Saso and especially the encyclopedic work of Joseph Needham, as stated, reveal literally hundreds of episodes and anecdotes related to magic plants more often than not identified as mushrooms. The Tantrikas pouring in from various directions could not have failed to notice the nearly exact relation of the terminology of their native traditions with that of native cultures. It is folly to think these esoteric Buddhists would have divorced themselves from their entheogenic heritage.

These consistencies in China are better documented due to the sophisticated record keeping of many of the traditions and schools treated. Ancient pharmacopeias (Chinese *pen-tsao*) and Asiatic shamanic heritages literally guarantee a fertile substrate for mycological alchemy to fruit. As Dr. Li (1978) writes of ancient Chinese ethnobotany "Plants with hallucinogenic effects were recorded in the earliest herbals nearly two thousand years ago." There was also the appearance of certainly entheogenic Manichaeans (Chinese *Ming-chiao* or Religion of Light) which had spread to China at an early date, eventually getting banned as a secret society in 732 AD (Ruck, Staples & Heinrich 2001). They were,

like the Buddhists, vegetarian and held strange occult rituals all night in "vegetarian halls" (*chai-tang*) where they were reported to "dabble in magic and unseemly rites and had the reputations for extraordinary shamans . . ."; as to the ban: "but it continued underground, often resurfacing with quasi-legal acceptance" (Ruck, Staples & Heinrich 2001). Like the Tantrics, they were using entheogenic and sexual technology from a common Indo-European heritage of secret societies and what nearly amounted to fraternal military organizations. They were "repeatedly associated with fomenting revolutionary unrest" and were called "vegetarian demon worshipers" (*ch'ih-ts'ai shihmo*) an allegation that could be and was leveled at the Tantrikas as well (Ruck, Staples & Heinrich 2001). They were associated with "drug induced ecstasy," as the prophet Mani himself was often associated with fungus. Wasson (1986) notes that the *ling chi* was "a small plant, not woody" that had become scarce, much to the dismay of the necromancers. Wasson suggests, with some persuasion, that there was a conscious religious furor to replace the popular designation in art, poetry and iconography of the "not woody" *zhi*, the soft mushroom (*A. Muscaria*) known to the Taoists through the shamanic Nivkhi, with the very "woody" *ling chi* (*Ganoderma lucida*) in a brilliant ploy to secure the supply for the elite. This would seem the fate of the mushroom from India to Japan as the Shingon tradition made specific "connected" progress and was allowed to flourish under the sponsorship of a powerful aristocracy.

No one would suggest that these highly secretive cults would out and out reveal the basis of their power. Wasson (1986) takes the above example all the way to the Taoist veneration of the mushroom in what he calls a "remarkable and successful 'public relations ploy'" to secure their supply. Even in a safe climate the esoteric nature of the highest truths would be heavily guarded and protected. The city where Kukai landed, Chang-an, was a veritable cultural center of Asia. It was known to have contained, in addition to the many Buddhist and Taoist temples, at least three or more known foreign temples, definitely including those of Manichaeans, Zoroastrians and Nestorian Christians. This hot-bed of cultural and religious transmission then has a rather potent entheogenic foundation in the various cults, all of which display marked "ecstatic technologies" at their core doctrines. Kukai's critical catechism of esoteric Buddhism even phrases the exoteric oversights of other Buddhist sects in terms of a magical herb "on the roadside that passed unnoticed." He even makes a subtle allusion to plants and alchemical metallurgy, combining the metaphors as missed gems/plants in the ore or road in his various commentaries on the Lotus Sutra. His works on the arguments of the Taoists suggest his rather deep knowledge of their doctrines, especially the ones concerned with magic herbs, flying elixirs and fungus (Abe 1999).

The theoretical dualism of Taoism and Manichaeism would not satisfy the fervently "unified vision" of Kukai. But some doctrines, such as the light of Mani and the Great Sun

or Mahavairocana (Japanese *dainichi*) would no doubt find a common solar accordance in the concept of the Sun Buddha. This in turn would find a common theme in the Shinto Sun Goddess Amaterasu who would eventually become the avatar of Dainichi Nyorai (Thathagata) or the Ryobu Shinto, even further illustrating the cross-influences and the ease of which the symbolism is transferred and re-expressed (Abe 1999). It is no doubt this solar devotion, especially linked with dawn and sunset *agnihotra/homa/goma* fire rituals, that binds these cults across the broader Asiatic and Indo-European expanse.

Kukai, fresh off his discussion of the elixirs and fungi of the Taoists, then proceeds to relate an extended parable to illustrate the "Argument of Kamei-Kotsuji" (Buddhist) which, as scholars note, is apparently largely autobiographical of his own wanderings as an "unordained monk" (*Abishido*). The conversation with the Buddhist explains the attainment of the golden and silver pavilions in the Buddhist tradition using the term for the "deathlessness" achieved with the consistent offering of the "ambrosial nectars" linking them again with this Tantric tradition. Even one of the most central mantras to Shingon, "Om *amrita* teje hara hum" (emphasis added) is basically an invocation to the revised soma/bliss discussed from the Vedic times through Nagarjuna and now into the Japanese sects. The various Tantric rites of empowerment (*kaji*) and sacrifice together illustrate the core doctrines to invoke the gods by means of ritualentheogens.

Japan's warrior monks (*sohei*), the Yamabushi (those who lay down in mountains), like their Tantric Tibetan counterparts, are associated with esoteric Buddhism. Like the Tibetans who are associated with the yeti, the Yamabushi are clearly linked with the tengu "goblins" of Japan. The mysterious synthesis of Taoism, Buddhism and Shinto of the Shugendo reveals the synthetic nature of the various occult groups of Japan. The relationship between the mountain ascetic Yamabushi, the tengu and these sects of esoteric Buddhism are well attested to in the wealth of legends in popular Japanese folklore dating from at least the seventh century CE. The relationship may well be found in the bird-like masks and feathered fans (*hauchiwa*) used by the Yamabushi that might, with their wild antics, have given them a demonic if not terrifying appearance. Explanations for these accounts, like the those dealing with the yeti, would then indicate a conscious defense technique of the monks to scare away unwanted intrusions into their Tantric utopia. It is rather a striking find to have two Tantric Buddhist sects have such a marked commonality in these goblin-warrior monks with inner-alchemical mystic teachings and fire rituals. Their "wild man" antics and military prowess recall the above descriptions of Bodhidharma and Padmasambhava, with the Yamabushi retiring in a similar manner to caves for long cave meditations. The religious influences exerted on Japan include indigenous shamanism, influxes of mystical traditions via China and Korea of Buddhism and the Tao, both in the form of Shinto or with the hermit *Senin* who were

like the magician/Taoists of China (*fang-shi*) in their fabled powers. These cave dwellers generated their power (*Ki*) by consorting with the spirits of the forest (*kama*). Wasson (1986), in *Persephone's Quest*, has a subchapter entitled *The Chinese and the Nivkhi*, describing a shamanic tribe said to be an "important cultural contact" with the Taoists and of course, using *Amanita muscaria* as their entheogen of choice, at least until recently under the influx of modern culture.

This seclusion, in Japanese called *komori*, resonates with the sentiments expressed by the Japanese authority Origuchi Shinobu. He writes "Sacred power is often manifested in Japan . . . in a sealed vessel. In the darkness of this vessel it gestates and grows, until eventually it bursts its covering and emerges into the world" (Blacker 1986). Similarities to this language are found the world over but with a special distinct flavor as found in the traditions of China (as discussed in the works of Giradot and Robinet). The former's work on early Taoism elaborates the extensive language of enclosing of a master in gourds for long periods, as does the works of Needham and Eliade. In Japan this supernatural principle is known as *utsubo*. This association is used to designate certain gourds and fruits as *utsubo* vessels. Blacker (1986) writes:

Likewise the ascetic who wishes to acquire sacred power undergoes a gestation in the nearest he can find to an *utsubo* vessel, a cave or darkened room. In this womb-like stillness he undergoes his fasts and recites his words of power, emerging only to stand under a waterfall.

This descent into the womb-world mandala or *Taizokai* is a supreme initiation into the highest mysteries of Tantra in Shingon. It may even be that Yamabushi or *kamigakushi* actually would kidnap unsuspecting youth and take them to their lairs for possible induction into the sects. As Blacker records, this is particularly a masculine phenomenon which hold the consistent elements: "magical flight to strange places, the weird sights the boy witnesses, elixir, herb or jewel that are occasionally bestowed upon him . . ." which lends a certain entheogenic charm to the legends. The links of the Yamabushi, the *tengu* and Shingon or Tendai esoteric Buddhism are well known in scholarly and religious literature. The subtle hints of the *tengu* as guardians of huge trees might prompt speculation as to their exact relationship with all these groups that seamlessly incorporated ancient Shinto lore into their ever expanding literal and metaphysical arsenal. Considering the overall associations of Tantric Buddhism and Hindu Soma to the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom then it is all the more telling that one of the principle chemicals in the mushroom is ibotenic acid that takes its name from these same *Tengu*. In fact, the entheogenic *Amanita* mushrooms are actually known under a variety of names in Japan, the most common of which might be "*beni-tengutake*" literally "scarlet Tengu mushroom (Ott 1996). The *tengu*, described as licentious, are always associated with mushrooms and

are said to get "drunk from eating mushrooms" (Strickmann 2002; Imazeki 1973).

The *Tengu* as guardians of the forest suddenly have a much more conciseentheogenic context. Their avowed link with the Shingon sect of Kukai and the Yamabushi strains of this specific Thunder Tantra further establish concrete relationships with the scholarship of mushrooms and *soma*. I suggest that the esoteric Buddhists of Japan practiced the switching of the identity of their precious *Amanita muscaria* in the manner of the Taoists to protect its identity, though instead of switching to *ling-chi* (Japanese *Reishi*) the species was *Hericum erinaceus* or, as its still called in Japan, the Yamabushitake, a gourmet and medicinal mushroom much sought after.

The fire rituals of the *homa*, called the *saito-goma* by the Yamabushi, retain similar symbolism. The texts of the Japanese *Goma* ceremony, such as translated by Saso, retains the same language for the *soma* oil in the fire offering, illustrating that even in the exoteric rituals the *soma* is at least symbolically present (Snodgrass 1997). The examples in these different, yet spiritually linked, cultures shed light on a dynamic mystical system that to various degrees came to be expressed with the mentioned symbolism. These include the metallurgical, often martial, fire-tenders who operated under a paradigm that was saturated with mushroom, herb, or plant elixirs of bliss, immortality or both. The warrior-monks of both Tibet and Japan become clearly linked with mushrooms and ascetic mountain practices as well as cryptozoological creatures that are associated with wild mystics in popular legend. The *tengu*, again associated particularly with the Shingon sect of Kukai and the related Yamabushi, lend their name to the mushroom which they are said to eat in a forest clearing in "convivial parties" to get drunk and carouse (Imazeki 1973).

HOLY MYCOPHILIA AND SACRED METALLURGY

Teetotalers
Must be afraid of it
The *tengudake*
It would be nice to make
The straw-boss
Eat the big laughing mushroom (Ott 1996)

Alchemy, with its symbolic language of fusing and transmuting, is the perfect system to encode these specific esoteric teachings, which seem to emerge everywhere there is an alchemical tradition. When diffused through Indo-European sources, partial as they were for metal weapons, sun, fire rituals and psychotropic substances, there are clear sacred associations that are to unite in the "cosmic man/Budha/Imam/Microcosm" depending on the group, sect or cult. Indeed, the Sufis use the same language of alchemy and "the Way" which some have conjectured was passed via a Sufi philosopher al-Simnani who founded the *whadat al-shuhud* or Unity of Vision school (Needham 1983). The constant

symbolism, first connected to fungal cults by Wasson, of "one-eyed/one-legged" creatures and metallurgy seems to be a very specific ancient tradition, with the one leg aspect clearly representing the mushroom stem. Indian alchemical materia medica, or *rasayana*, lists *Amanita muscaria* as *Som Ras*, as used in medicinal and rejuvenative therapies; it is found as well in Tibetan medical texts that also clearly deal with both a physical and spiritual alchemy (Puri 2003.)

Ruck's research in particular connects this ancient fungal/metallurgical cult with such people as the "Telchines, magic metallurgists with a reputation for sorcery and drugs" who partake of a very specific ancient and widespread tradition that reached from Ireland to the furthest points of Asia. The descriptions always remain strikingly consistent, as we will see with the following:

The one-eyed Arimaspeans, who . . . were either just another name for the Hyperboreans or, as a separate people, were the first intermediaries in the transmission of the subterranean gold that was mined by the griffins, are a personification of one of the attributes of Soma as the "single eye." These one-eyed creatures are a variant of another attribute of Soma as the figure with a single foot, a characteristic of a supposed race of people called the Shade-foots . . . just as his Titanic brother in the east, Prometheus, when presented as a Shade-foot, impersonates the sacred plant as a "parasol," . . . which is the Sanskrit word for "mushroom." (Ruck in Wasson et al. 1986; see also Figure 1).

Perhaps, as Wasson suggested, the world is composed of cultures that embrace the spored kingdom of fungi while others loathe and fear it. In any case, the Japanese culture has a long history of decidedly mycophilic reverence for mushrooms, some of which are the most medicinal in the world. Their folklore and vast, descriptive nomenclature exhibit a familiarity extending from the culinary delights of the kitchen to their apparent use as entheogens in temples and mountains. Incidentally, Wasson confessed he never approached entheogenic heights with *Amanita muscaria*, especially compared to the psilocybin mushrooms he experimented with in Mexico. There is a story that a member of one of his parties, a Japanese fellow, became "drunk" from the *Amanita*, which might have indicated to Wasson a genetic predisposition to that sensation.

The drinking of urine, an ancient medical therapy known in India as *shivambu*, was of interest to many of these mystical groups and a key component in Wasson's *Amanita* deductions concerning the Vedic hymns which recount drinking urine, a practice also used in recycling the "drug" among Siberian and American shamans. Crowley (2005) has also focused on the drinking of urine as indicative of the survival of these cults. Needham describes in great detail Chinese fascination with urine in medical and alchemical rites, in the forming of a complex "proto-endocrinology" and the associations of "urine with sexual activity" and longevity techniques; he also noted that "urine therapy" as demonstrated by Krebs is a continuous tradition

FIGURE 1
Scan from the Matrix and Diamond World Mandala Showing a Parasol Mushroom



The most ancient and common metaphor in Sanskrit (for mushrooms) is "umbrella," or "parasol" (chattr(ka), chattrika; Morgenstierne 1957). The small size of this parasol in the context of Buddhist scriptures speaking of *amrita* and invoking gods is suggestive.

in Western culture. Of interest in his exposition of these intricate matters is mention of a Japanese scroll from the thirteenth century entitled *Mabutsu Ichinyo Ekotoba* which illustrates the famous Buddhist priest Ippen, founder of the Jishu sect, using nuns to distribute his urine from a bamboo tube to "kneeling believers with that assurance that it would cure gastro-intestinal ailments and blindness." Needham (1983) retreats to footnotes to voice his hunches on this scroll and "cannot refrain from recalling here, in a kind of *arriere-pensee*, the fact mentioned in Vol.5 . . . that certain psychotropic substances pass out in the urine unchanged. But probably in this case the intent was purely medicinal." In light of the present research, one wonders if he would be swayed to embrace his suspicions on what is occurring in the scroll, a Japanese ritual taking of urine that echoes part of the key evidence on Wasson's identification of the *soma*.

Japanese designations for entheogenic mushrooms range from the *Amanita* related *beni-tengu-take* or *ibo-tengu-take* to the *o-warai-take*, or *warai-take*, which is the "big laughing mushroom" mentioned in the poem beginning this section. The rich, ancient Japanese folklore and varied nomenclature for psychoactive mushrooms indicates a very ancient, familiar popular and religious association with entheogenic fungi. Wasson and Sanford both bring to light the curious episode of Buddhist nuns and woodcutters who meet in the forest as the nuns, tellingly reminiscent of the various ascetics of those lofty regions, descend from a remote mountain pass. The name for the *maitake* or dancing mushroom

as the chemically inactive but culinary and medical favorite may well indicate a possible misnomer as to species in the popular retelling. Ott, in discussing the context of the account, relates that several contemporary Chinese sources related to the collection of tales, the *Konjaku Monogatari*, describe a *Hsiao-ch'un* or "laughing mushroom." He describes this as "doubtless the Japanese psilocybin species" which he identifies as the same species as the "food of the gods" or *teonanacatl* of Mexico or hallucinogenic *Panaeolus campanulatus*. Another entheogenic species is the *shibire-take* or "benumbing mushroom" which is *Psilocybe venenata* (Ott 1996) and is another candidate for folk-religious use in Japan.

The woodcutters, as the story goes, are scared and hungry in the wild, goblin infested mountain terrain when they decide to eat mushrooms, at which point they dance and sing around in intoxicated bliss (Sanford 1972). The Buddhist nuns, like the *tengu* and *Yamabushi* are first thought to be demons or goblins (*tengu*) by the frightened woodcutters in a scene that seems to blend a variety of traditions into one central myth that was later adopted into an official version of stories. The old cult of female Shinto shamans, the *miko*, seem to have been blended with Buddhist and ethnomycological lore to form this popular story that then might be seen to have a deeper meaning, perhaps reflecting a strange relationship with the lay community of woodcutters and craftsmen that support the shamans and temples. Shinto colors are red and white, like the *Amanita* mushroom, and the architecture and even hats of that period quite often were mushroom shaped.

The Japanese word for mushroom, *take*, has a colloquial association with bamboo, that starts with "to grow" to "grow high", "to attain full growth", "to become furious", "to roar", "to excel" etc. *Take* as a designation of mushroom in popular Japan is usually used in combinations such as *tengu-take*, *matsu-take*, or *mai-take*, which mean goblin-mushroom, pine-mushroom or laughing mushroom, respectively. The *Amanita* seems to retain some of its "fly agaric" connotations from its near universal use as a fly-catcher, with the names *haitori(-goke)*, *haitori-take* given to it due to its fly stunning chemicals (Imazeki 1973).

Wasson was the first to link the "one-footed" and "one-eyed" beings that haunt and inhabit folklore from many sources from the Cyclops to the *soma* itself (which in Sanskrit is *Aja Ekapad*, literally "not-born single-foot") to the mushroom. The mushroom is "not-born" in its sudden and mature appearance, associated with the thunder or Vajra, and is "one-footed" with its singular base or foot. The associations with metallurgy and "one-eyed" creatures is familiar from the Cyclops that forged, of all things, "lightening-bolts" for Zeus in his war with the Titans. They retain this metallurgical connection as then becoming the aids to the metal-smith of the god Hephaestus. Interestingly these Cyclops were three in number and named Brontes (thunder), Steropes (lightening), and Argos (light), all of which are associated with mushroom lore. This clear Indo-European tradition has precedents starting with the one-eyed Odin which probably spread from Asiatic and Oriental sources related to the "all-seeing eye" that was brought by Thracian blacksmiths who had a "sun" painted over their third-eye spot on the forehead.

The relationship of mystical metallurgy/entheogens with the bellows and flames of the blacksmiths would find expression in their reverence for fire, and fire rites are associated with the *soma* rituals. The added dimension of refining and/or transmuting ore to workable and useable metal would have obvious spiritual associations with alchemy. The associations of smiths would have further connections in the weapons (practical and ritual), magical tools, mandalas, yantra, statues, etc. they produced and the copper fire pits which are mostly used in the various *homa* rituals.

Wasson and Ruck (1986) catalyzed the search for these specific associations which seem to have spread via the tenacious nomadic wanderings of proto-Indo and Indo-European races that then extended through India, Tibet and China. The connection with metallurgy and herbal magic is known from the dangerous Telechines to the one-eyed Arimaspeans (which is, as Ruck notes, just another designation for those bemushroomed travelers "of beyond the northern winds," the Hyperboreans). This technologically advanced culture seems, based on recent archeological finds, to have penetrated from Asia to Ireland, perhaps bringing with it a mushroom cult rendered all the more occult in its use of "alchemical metaphors" for working with fire and ore (Malory & Mair 2000). Herodotus records the tale of a Scythian

tribe that followed a fantastic trade route that concluded with a strange group of metal-smiths. These are the Arimaspi, literally one-eyed, who are said to, interestingly, steal gold from "griffins" and are associated with wild "goat-footed" Hyperboreans who march to the sea. Solar-birds of mythical and sometimes terrible descriptions seemed to have some deep heritage in Persia. The Pahlavi text of the Bundahis, which is based on archaic sources, mentions solar birds of creation as do Chinese sources with the Luan, which have quite similar descriptions. Giradot (1983) links this bird with the *hun-tun* chaos of primordial creation also discussed by Needham and Granet as partaking in the theme of "legendary rebels" who are always linked with "archaic religio-cultural traditions of metallurgy and totemic shamanism."

The logical designation of the sun as a solar bird that flies to light the sky coincides with the *agnithotra* lighting of the *homa* pit at sunrise and sunset. The Luan bird of China functions as a symbol for life and passing in a variety of rather complex associations and symbols that Giradot notes are rather strange. He concludes that the Luan bird is a metallurgical "solar symbol for death" which blends the mystical births and rebirths with a certain metaphorical potency. He also notes that wild bird-men, possibly bringing this specific mushroom cult lore and metallurgical technology, as foreigners were derided as "barbarian" and "not Chinese." He further notes it is these foreigners, possibly these same mentioned mycophilic smiths, brought with them the solar egg myth of their ancestors. Giradot (1983) writes:

There are many traces of the Thunder-egg type of mythology here that directly suggest the deluge and cosmic egg cycles of mythology linked with *hun-tun* theme in Taoism. Furthermore, Kaltenmark has shown the influence of these factors of these in the development of the Taoist ideas of the feathered immortal (*hsien*) and the metallurgical techniques of transformation practiced by the fang-shih magicians of Chi'.

The Japanese bird-like mystics and feathered goblins associated with the Tantric Yamabushi and mushroom *Tengu* must be compared to mushroom and phoenix correspondences that abound in alchemical traditions (Heinrich 2002). Needham (1974) connects the very concept of the immortal, *hsien*, to bird-shaman, and the pictograph of *hsien* is of a man's body with wings who flies to a country of deathless, feathered people. The legends of supernatural birds and one-eyed monsters in Japan may find their filtered source in southern and central China with the foot-bellows of the legendary one-legged ghost bird. The "one-eyed one-legged" connections between these mushrooms and metallurgy may have some ones with the mentioned considerations of the fungi as well as with the logical deductions of an eyepatch (one-eye) at the forge with "one-foot" on the bellows, as the bellows were pumped with by pressing one foot. Needham notes that clearly these techniques of metallurgy and mystical herbology—especially elixir alchemy—traveled to Japan, but the lack of Japanese alchemical gold traditions

proper he explains as stemming from the situation that Japan was not as interested in the idea of transmuting gold, as their own supply of real gold was sufficient (Needham 1976). Needham states the Japanese enthusiastically embraced "chemo-therapeutic" elements of Chinese alchemy and spagyric arts, with the attendant legends of immortals deep in the mountains, flying through the air, and abstaining from cereal foods. Needham mentions the Yamabushi in this continuing connection of Taoist adepts and mountain monks who he remarks were ascetic and yet had an "almost Tantric valuation of sex which made it right for *yamabushi* to marry (often shamanesses) and to be Shinto priests as well." Needham recounts many instances of exchanged traditions of "potable gold" and prescriptions for things like numinous mushrooms and sweet flag, with Chinese adepts showing up at Japanese courts paying tribute with Taoists medicines of immortality (*Pai shu*).

Mystical and martial wild men haunting the forests in perpetual meditation preserve fire rituals and plant designations across an astounding span of time and space. The retention of languages, symbolism, techniques and technology proves the infectious and powerful nature of the teachings that ingeniously adopted and transformed local shamanism with a deliberate and sophisticated method. The Japanese Ainu and Shinto exhibit markedly shamanic heritages, the latter's colors are the familiar red and white of *Amanita* and *soma*, that clearly merged seamlessly with the most esoteric aspects of Tantric Buddhism when it arrived in Japan. It was this synthesis of various traditions that produced the finest example of the powerful and even dangerous Buddhist-shaman-warriors known as the Yamabushi and *Tengu* who continue to this day to guard the Dharma with the noble Bodhisattva warriors.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS IN THE FIELD OF ETHNOMYCOLOGY

The debate as to the identity of the sacred *Soma* will likely continue unabated as each theory satisfies a certain criterion, often elegantly, only to fail to answer for some other descriptions in the various scriptures. Like alchemy, or the Philosopher's Stone itself, no single or simple reduction presents itself as fulfilling all of the various specific details ranging from descriptions or effects. Falk (1989) rather dismissively asserts of Wasson's theory: "The only half-serious reason to expect hallucination as an effect of Soma-drinking in an Indian context is the well-known Labasukta, RV 10.119. There it is said that some winged

creature, after consumption of Soma, touches sky and earth with its wings." Geldner discusses the *soma* in Indic tradition as a ritual beverage that is *drunk* and is an intoxicant or hallucinogenic (*madira*) (Watkins 1978; Geldner 1951). But even staunch critics of Wasson (Brough 1971) admitted that partaking of *soma* can induce "an ecstatic stupor." This brings up a point made by Houben (2003), who writes an interesting article on the various identification controversies, and his agreement with Brough's chief objection to Wasson, which should be quoted in its entirety:

(Brough) made an important observation. Quoting from Wasson's evidence on the consumption of fly-agaric among tribes in North-East Siberia, Brough points out that there are repeated references to coma induced by the fly-agaric. Those who consume the mushroom attain "an ecstatic stupor" or are transported into "a state of unconsciousness". Being "in a stupor from three sun-dried agarics" the hero of one of Wasson's sources "is unable to respond to the call to arms. But time passes and the urgency grows, and when the messengers press their appeal to throw off his stupor he finally calls for his arms." Brough rightly observes: "Here, it would seem, is a plant whose effects are totally unsuitable to stimulate Indra and human warriors for battle.

Wasson's own response was of the nature that Brough was ignorant of chemistry and of the use of wine as a sacrament, but space precludes a proper digression into these debates. Falk's (1989) conclusion in favor of ephedra as the *soma* also uses this argument in ruling out *Amanita muscaria* for "Indra in his knightly combat." But this article's considerations of a martial application of *Amanita muscaria* would answer these objections by expanding the role of this extraordinary mushroom from entheogen, medicine and aphrodisiac to a military application inspiring a combative fury in the warrior. This article is a humble attempt to instigate far more qualified experts to investigate and decipher a definitive *soma* symbolism linked with mushrooms that runs like a mycelial network underground coming to fruition in various traditions of alchemy and Tantra. Primary sources and the richly symbolic artwork of Tantric and alchemical groups in the region will no doubt yield even more evidence of an enduring legacy that cherished *Amanita muscaria* as a most holy sacrament. Finally, I suggest, and hope to explore further in a future article, that tea became a ritual substitute in the *soma/amrita* rituals that spread with Buddhism into Korea, Japan and Tibet from China. The most popular shape of Puerh tea in Tibet is pressed into the shape of a mushroom.

REFERENCES

- Abe, R. 1999. *The Weaving of Mantra*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Aldrich, M. 1977. Tantric cannabis use in India. *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* 9 (3): 227-33.
- Akashori, A. 1989. Drug taking and immortality. In: L. Kohn (Ed.) *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Allegro, J. 1970. *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Badiner, A.H. (Ed.) 2002. *Zig Zag Zen*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
- Baker, I. 1997. *The Tibetan Art of Healing*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
- Bhattacharyya, N.N. 1983. *History of the Tantric Religion: A Historical, Ritualistic and Philosophical Study*. Delhi: South Asia Books.
- Blacker, C. 1986. *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practice in Japan*. Boston: George Allen & Unwin.
- Brough, J. 1971. Soma and Amanita Muscaria. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 34 (2): 331-62.
- Chia, M. 2006. *The Maximal Activation of the Pineal*. Available at http://www.universal-tao.com/dark_room/maximal.html
- Crowley, M. 2005. *When Gods Drank Urine: The Riddle of Soma*. Presented at Entheogenesis conference.
- Davidson, R. 2003. *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Eliade, M. 1972. *Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Eliade, M. 1970. *Zalmoxis: The Vanishing God*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Eliade, M. 1962. *The Forge and the Crucible*. New York: Harper and Brothers.
- Emboden, W. 1980. *Narcotic Plants*. New York: Macmillan Pub Co.
- Falk, H. 1989. Soma I and II. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 52: 77-90.
- Flattery, D.S. & Schwartz, M. 1989. *Haoma and Harmaline. The Botanical Identity of the Indo-Iranian Sacred Hallucinogen "Soma" and its Legacy in Religion, Language and Middle Eastern Folklore*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Frawley, D. 2006. Personal communication.
- Geldner, K.F. 1951. *Der Rig-Veda III*. Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 35. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Girardot, N.J. 1983. *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Goldstein, M.C. 1964. A Study of the Ldab Ldob. *Central Asiatic Journal* 9 (2): 125-41.
- Goodman, N. 2002. The serotonergic system and mysticism: Could LSD and the nondrug-induced mystical experience share common neural mechanisms? *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 34 (3): 263-72.
- Griffith, R. 1896. *Hymns of the Rigveda: Translated in English with a Popular Commentary*. Delhi: Motilal.
- Hajicek-Dobberstein, S. 1995. Soma siddhas and alchemical enlightenment: Psychedelic mushrooms in Buddhist tradition. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 48 (2): 99-118.
- Hakeda, Y. 1972. *Kūkai: Major Works. Translated, with an Account of his Life and a Study of his Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hartsuiker, D. 1993. *Sadhus: India's Mystic Holy Men*. Vermont: Inner Traditions Press.
- Heinrich, C. 2002. *Magic Mushrooms in Religion and Alchemy*. Rochester: Park Street Press.
- Heinrich, C. 1995. *Strange Fruit, Alchemy, Religion and Magical Goods, A Speculative History*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Hillebrandt, A. 1927. *Vedische Mythologie*. Breslau: M. & H. Markus.
- Houben, J.E.M. 2003. The Soma-Haoma problem: Introductory overview and observations on the discussion. *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 9 (1a). Available at www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com/ejvs0901/ejvs0901a.txt
- Imazeki, R. 1973. Japanese mushroom names. *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan, Third Series* 2: 6-80.
- Jaggi, O.P. 1973. *Yogic and Tantric Medicine*. Delhi: Atma Ram and Sons.
- Kalyanaraman, S. 2004. *Indian Alchemy: Soma in the Veda*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
- Kazanas, N. 2002. Indigenous Indo-Aryans and the 'Rigveda'. *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 30 (3&4): 275-334.
- Knight, I. 2006. *Secrets of the Dead: Day of the Zulu*. Accessed at www.pbs.org/wnet/secrets/case_zulu/clues.html
- La Barre, W. 1980. Soma: The three-and-one-half millennia mystery. In: W. La Barre *Culture in Context: Selected Writings of Weston La Barre*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Li, H.-L. 1978. Hallucinogenic plants in Chinese herbals. *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* 10: (1): 17-26.
- Mallory, J.P. & Mair, V. 2000. *The Tarim Mummies*. New York: Thames and Hudson.
- Morgenstierne, G. 1957. 'Mushroom' and 'toadstool' in Indo-Iranian. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 20 (1/3): 451-57.
- Müller-Ebeling, C.; Ratsch, C. & Storl, W. 2003. *Witchcraft Medicine: Healing Arts, Shamanic Practices, and Forbidden Plants*. Rochester: Inner Traditions.
- Needham, J. 1983. *Science and Civilization in China, Vol. 5, pt. 5*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Needham, J. 1980. *Science and Civilization in China, Vol. 5, pt. 4*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Needham, J. 1976. *Science and Civilization in China, Vol. 5, pt. 3*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Needham, J. 1974. *Science and Civilization in China, Vol. 5, pt. 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Flaherty, W.D. 1968. The post-Vedic history of the soma plant. In: E.W. Wasson (Ed.) *Soma: The Divine Mushroom of Immortality*. Ethnomycological Studies, no. 1. The Hague: Mouton and Co.
- Ott, J. 1996. *Pharmactheon*. Kennewick, WA: Natural Products, Inc..
- Ott, J. 1995. *The Age of Entheogens & The Angels' Dictionary*. Kennewick, WA: Natural Products Co.
- Payne, R.K. (Ed.) 2006. *Tantric Buddhism in East Asia*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Pendell, D. 2005. *Pharmako Gnosis*. San Francisco: Mercury House.
- Porter, Bill (RedPine) 2000. *The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press.
- Puri, H.S. 2003. *Rasayana*. New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Puri, H.S. 1977. *Medicinal Plants of India*. Chandigarh: Punjab State University Text Book Board.
- Ramaiah, Yogi S.A.A. 1979. *Bhogar's Oceanic Life Story*. Tamil Nadu.
- Roy, J.C. 1939. The soma plant. *Indian Historical Quarterly* 15: 197-207.
- Robinet, I. 1993. *Taoist Meditation*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Ruck, C.A.P. 2007. *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press.
- Ruck, C.A.P.; Staples, B.D. & Heinrich, C. 2001. *The Apples of Apollo, Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press.
- Sanford, J.H. 1972. Japan's laughing mushroom. *Economic Botany* 26 (2): 174-81.
- Snodgrass, A. 1997. *The Matrix and Diamond World Mandalas in Shingon Buddhism*. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture.
- Spess, D.L. 2000. *Soma: The Divine Hallucinogen*. Rochester: Park Street Press.
- Stein, A. 1931. On the ephedra, the Húm plant, and the Soma. *Bulletin of the School for Oriental and African Studies* 6: 501-14.
- Storl, W.-D. 2004. *Shiva: The Wild God of Power and Ecstasy*. Vermont: Inner Traditions.
- Strickmann, M. 2002. *Chinese Magical Medicine*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Strickmann, M. 1966. Notes on mushroom cults in ancient China. Unpublished manuscript, Rijksuniversiteit Gent.
- Tulku, S. & Perott, M. 1987. *A Manual of Ritual Fire Offerings*. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
- Ulansey, D. 1991. *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA.

- Urban, H. 2005a. *Ecstasy: Tantra, Secrecy, and Power in Colonial Bengal*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Urban, H. 2005b. *Tantra*. Jawahar Nagar Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Urban, H. 2003. *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Ware, J. 1984. *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion in the China of A.D. 30*. London: Dover Books.
- Wasson, G. 1968. *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Wasson, G.; Kramrisch, S.; Ruck, C. & Ott, J. 1986. *Persephone's Quest*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Wasson, G; Hoffman, A.; Ruck, C. & P. Webster, P. 1978. *The Road to Eleusis*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.
- Watkins, C. 1978. Let us now praise famous grains. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 122 (1): 9-17.
- White, D.G. 1996. *The Alchemical Body*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilson, P.L. 2001. *Ploughing the Clouds: The Search for the Irish Soma*. San Francisco: City Lights Publishers.