

THE ZEN OF TANTRA

TIBETAN GREAT PERFECTION
IN FAHAI LAMA'S CHINESE ZEN MONASTERY

Monica Esposito



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Monica Esposito 莫妮卡 (Photo by the editor, 2008)

Preface

The author of this book, Dr. Monica Esposito 莫妮卡 (1962-2011), first travelled to China as a young student of sinology at the University of Venice. Her first year of study at Fudan University 復旦大學 in Shanghai coincided with the growth of a Qigong 氣功 boom that has been described as “Qigong fever.” Her interest in such practices and their religious and historical background led to twenty-five years of research on Daoism and Buddhism in pre-modern and modern China. In 1988, in the course of investigations that eventually issued in her 1993 doctoral thesis on the dominant Longmen 龍門 tradition of Daoism, she travelled to the Southern Celestial Eye mountain (Nan Tianmushan 南天目山) in Zhejiang province in search of stone inscriptions and the grave of a noted Longmen Daoist master known to have practiced there. She did find the grave and copy its inscriptions; but more importantly, she discovered a thriving Buddhist nunnery led by a master called Fahai Lama 法海喇嘛 who wore the dark red robes of a Tibetan lama yet named his monastery “Chan monastery of the Thousand Buddhas” (Qianfo chansi 千佛禪寺). During her repeated prolonged sojourns at this Chinese Zen (Chan 禪) monastery, Monica learned that Fahai Lama was not only a certified Zen master of the Yunmen 雲門 branch but also a widely known Qigong expert, healer, expert of acupuncture and, above all, a unique Chinese teacher of rDzogs chen (Ch. Dayuanman 大圓滿): the Great Perfection tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. In this book she explains how all of this was connected while describing this man’s life and teachings, daily life at his monastery, the reception of Tibetan Buddhism in China, and Chinese rDzogs chen literature.

Early drafts of some parts were presented in “Una tradizione di rDzogs-chen in Cina. Una nota sul Monastero delle Montagne dell’Occhio Celeste,” *Asiatica Venetiana* 3 (1998): 221-224, and especially in a lengthy paper entitled “A Sino-Tibetan Tradition in China in the Southern Celestial-Eye Mountains: A First Comparison between Great Perfection (rDzogs chen) and Taoist Techniques of Light” at the Conference on “Tantra and Daoism: The Globalization of Religion and Its Experience” (Boston University, April 19-22, 2002). In 2006 and 2007, the author dedicated much of her time to the edition of two magnificent volumes ultimately inspired by her encounter with Fahai Lama: *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 2008). These volumes contain not only her English translations of articles by Chinese and Japanese authors but also her contribution entitled “rDzogs chen in China: From Chan to ‘Tibetan Tantrism’ in Fahai Lama’s (1920-1991) Footsteps” (vol. 2: 473-548). The present book is a revised, slightly augmented, and indexed version of the last-mentioned article with an added bibliography of all adduced and cited sources and some additional photos, images, and a map. Appendix 2 contains an annotated repertory of manuscript (Section A) and printed (Section B) Chinese sources on rDzogs chen.

For Chinese (abbreviated as Ch.), the Pinyin system of alphabetic transcription is used, for Japanese (abbreviated as Jap.) the Hepburn system, and for Tibetan (abbreviated as Tib.) the Wylie system with capitalized radical letters. For commonly used Sanskrit (abbreviated as Skt.) terms such as Mahayana, Hinayana, prajna, and sutra that are listed in major English dictionaries, diacritics are omitted.

February 2013, Padova (Italy)

Urs App, editor