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Demons, Wicked Ones and Those Who Violate the *Samayas*: Dharma Against the Enemy in Tantric Buddhism

ALEKSANDRA WENTA

IN GENERAL, THE development of ‘mature’ Buddhist tantra in India in the beginning of the seventh century is seen as a result of complex interactions with a rival religious group, the tantric Śaivas, who were successful in attempts to secure royal patronage in this period. This chapter analyses the ways in which tantric Buddhists represent the religious other, i.e. tantric Śaivas, or specifically the main deity of their cult, Śiva-Maheśvara, in texts that consolidate the image of Maheśvara as both a ‘demon’ and ‘wicked’. Against the theory that Buddhist tantras that propagated violence emerged as a response to some perceived social crisis, this chapter demonstrates that tantric Buddhist conceptions of evil that include in its borders also the religious other were formulated through the distinctive adoption of the magical technology of wrathful rites (*abhicāruka/abhicāra*) that intend harm to some designated target.¹ These were creatively reconfigured to include a moral dimension, thus becoming what I here call ‘dharma against the enemy’. Such rituals were motivated by a vision of moral reform that included in its borders both non-Buddhist and Buddhist practitioners who strayed from their path, and not a response to inter-religious conflict, as scholars who adhere to an ‘agonistic view’ of inter-religious relations in this context want us to believe. Moreover, the adoption of the term *duṣṭa* – ‘wicked’ – in reference to targets of aggressive magic, and its intertextual resonance in both Śaiva and Buddhist tantras, reflects the tendency for both traditions to align their discourse to legal imaginaries prevalent in India in the latter centuries of the first millennium.

¹ For the definition and overview of *abhicāra*, see Türistig 1985 and Goudriaan 1978.