

SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF THREE TIBETAN LAMAS
AND THEIR ACTIVITIES IN SIKKIM

JAMYANG KHYENTSE CHOKYI LODROE
(’JAM DBYANGS MKHYEN BRTSE CHOS KYI BLO GROS)

TSULTSEM GYATSO ACHARYA
Namgyal Institute of Tibetology

English translation by
Carl Yamamoto

’Jam’ dbyangs mkhyen brtse Chos kyī blo gros—mind embodiment of the Indian paṇḍita Vimalamitra,¹ activity emanation² of ’Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dBang po as prophesied, ecumenical (*ris med*) master and lineage holder of every Tibetan Buddhist tradition—was born in the autumn of the Water Female Snake year of the 15th 60-year cycle (Tibetan king year 2020,³ 1893 C.E.) at Re khe, one of the four regions of mDud in mDo smad, Eastern Tibet, to the father Vajradhara ’Gyur med tshe dbang rgyal po, descendent of the great treasure-revealer

¹ Indian Buddhist saint, known in Tibet as Dri med bshes gnyen, who was invited to Tibet by Dharma King Khri srong de’u btsan in the eighth century. Much respected by the rNying ma pa school as one of the forefathers of the rDzogs chen teachings, especially the *snying thig* teachings, in Tibet.

² In Mahāyāna Buddhism, there are generally considered to be three enlightened bodies (*sku gsum*): (1) the body of absolute reality (*chos sku*), which is naturally pure and free from adventitious defilements; (2) the enjoyment body (*longs sku*), which is visible only to bodhisattvas; and (3) the emanation body (*sprul sku*), which is visible to both bodhisattvas and non-bodhisattvas. The third category, *sprul sku*, is divided into four: (1) emanation body by birth (*skye ba sprul sku*), which includes, for example, human beings and animals; (2) supreme emanation body (*mchog gi sprul sku*), the emanation that performed the 12 Buddha Acts; (3) emanation body in various forms and manners (*sna tshogs sprul sku*); and (4) constructed emanation body (*bzo sprul sku*), which takes the form of inanimate objects such as a statue or a bridge. In Tibetan Buddhist traditions, there are, in addition, five forms—all of them human—which an incarnate lama (*sprul sku*) may take at rebirth: (1) body (*sku*), (2) speech (*gsung*), (3) mind (*thugs*), (4) quality (*yon tan*), and (5) activity (*’phrin las*).

³ The Tibetan king year (*bod rgyal lo*) is calculated according to the *phug lugs*, the system of astrological calculation created by Phug pa lHun grub rgya mtsho, who was born in the Lho kha district in southern Tibet.

bDud 'dul rdo rje, and the mother Tshul khriims mtsho. He was given the name 'Jam dbyangs chos kyi blo gros by his father. At the repeated request of Kaḥ thog Si tu Rin po che, 'Jam mgon blo gros mtha' yas recognised him as the reincarnation of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dBang po.

At the age of seven, he paid a visit to the monastery of Kaḥ thog rdo rje gdan,⁴ where the haircutting ceremony was performed by Kaḥ thog Si tu Rin po che and he was given the name 'Jam dbyangs blo gros rgya mtsho thub bstan bshad sgrub rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po.

At the age of 10, he was ordained as a novice monk and received the additional name of gTsug lag lung rigs nyi ma smra ba'i seng ge. From that age, he received an education in reading, writing, basic religious practice, and grammar from the great scholar Thub bstan rig 'dzin rgya mtsho, tutor to Kaḥ thog Si tu Rin po che.

When he was 15 years old, the head incarnate lama at the monastic seat of rDzong sar died suddenly, and the previous 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse's treasurer, sKal bzang rdo rje, and others urged Kaḥ thog Si tu Rin po che to allow him to proceed to rDzong sar monastery, monastic seat of the Sa ngor tradition of the Sa skya pa school.

He received basic monastic training and empowerments, instructions in the five major and the five minor subjects and the canonical scriptures and commentaries (*bKa' 'gyur* and *bsTan 'gyur*), transmissions and treasure teachings (*bka' gter*) of the rNying ma tradition, empowerments and instructions of the four major and eight minor bKa' brgyud schools, the Path and Its Fruits (*lam 'bras*) teaching, heart of the Sa skya tradition, the tantric teachings and sādhanas of the Sa skya pa, the old and the new teachings of the bKa' gdams pa, including the Kālacakra, the five great treasury teachings, etc., from the following ecumenical (*ris med*) masters:

⁴ In the rNying ma tradition, there are six Great Mother Monasteries: (1) rDo rje brag, in the upper region of Tibet, founded in 1632 by rDo brag rig 'dzin chen po Ngag gi dbang po (1580-1639); (2) sMin grol gling, in the upper region of Tibet, founded in 1675-76 by sMin gling gter bdag gling pa 'Gyur med rdo rje (1646-1714); (3) Zhe chen, in the middle of Tibet, founded in 1734-35 by the 2nd Zhe chen rab 'byams chos rje 'Gyur med kun bzang rnam rgyal (1713-1769); (4) rDzogs chen, in the middle of Tibet, founded in 1684-85 by Grub dbang rdzogs chen pa Padma rig 'dzin (1625-1697); (5) dPal yul, in the lower part of Tibet, founded in 1664-65 by Rig 'dzin chen po Kun bzang shes rab (1636-1698); and (6) Kaḥ thog, in the lower part of Tibet, founded in 1159 by Kaḥ thog pa dam pa bDe gshegs shes rab seng ge (1122-1192).

rNying ma:

Kaḥ thog Si tu paṅ chen Dharma sā ra
 Zhe chen rab 'byams 'Gyur med kun bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma
 Zhe chen rgyal tshab 'Gyur med padma rnam rgyal
 A 'dzom 'brug pa 'Gro 'dul dpa' bo rdo rje
 rDo grub gsum pa 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma
 gTer chen Las rab gling pa
 Grub dbang rdzogs chen lnga pa Thub bstan chos kyi rdo rje
 rDzogs chen drug pa 'Jigs bral byang chub rdo rje
 sMin gling khri rabs bcu pa 'Gyur med don grub dbang rgyal
 mKhan chen Kun bzang dpal ldan
 sKyabs rje bDud 'joms rin po che 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje
 sKyabs rje Bya bral Sangs rgyas rdo rje, etc.

Sa skya:

Thar rtse'i dpon slob rin po che 'Jam dbyangs blo gter dbang po
 Thar rtse mkhan chen Byams pa kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan
 Ngor mkhan chen rDo rje 'chang don dpal zhabs
 Shar chen klu lding pa rgyal sras 'Jam dpal chos kyi nyi ma
 Zhabs drung rin po che bKra shis rgya mtsho
 sGa ston rdo rje 'chang Ngag dbang legs pa
 mKhan po bSam gtan blo gros
 sDe gzhung mchog sprul Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, etc.

bKa' brgyud:

Byams mgon si tu sku phreng bcu gcig pa Padma dbang mchog
 rgyal po
 rGyal sras 'Jam mgon mchog sprul
 mKhas dbang bKra shis chos 'phel
 Zur mang gTer drung rnam gnyis
 Sangs rgyas mnyan sprul dgu pa Karma bshad sgrub bstan pa'i nyi
 ma, etc.

dGe lugs:

Gong sa lha mi'i rnam 'dren rgyal mchog thams cad mkhyen pa
 Thub bstan rgya mtsho
 Gong sa skyabs mgon sku phreng bcu bzhi pa chen po mchog
 mKhas pa'i dbang phyug dge bshes 'Jam dpal rol pa'i blo gros, etc.

These are just a few examples of his teachers. He received teachings from over 80 qualified ecumenical (*ris med*) masters. Having received and mastered these teachings, he meditated on them without mixing the philosophical views of the different schools. Because his special focus was on contemplative practice, he gained a reputation as a great meditator.

In 1918, at the age of 25, starting with 50 ordained monks, he established a monastic university called bShad sgrub dar rgyas gling at Khams kyi bye ma thang, just below the monastic seat of rDzong sar bkra shis lha rtse. In addition, he founded meditation centres at sDe dge lHun grub steng and Rong rme dkar mo stag tshang, performed renovations of the Kaḥ thog tantric centre, gave advice and made donations to many small monasteries for the establishment of monastic schools and tantric centres, and constructed (1) gold and copper statues of gods and goddesses at rDzong sar, Kaḥ thog, Khams bye monastic university, and the meditation centre of sTag tshang; (2) relief statues of the tantric deities of the old and the new traditions; (3) scroll paintings of his predecessor 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dBang po and of scenes from the stories of the Buddha's successive lives; and (4) woodblock prints of the collected works of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dBang po in thirteen volumes and the collected works of Mi pham, and, at Kaḥ thog, rDzong sar and Zhe chen, woodblock prints of scriptures, etc. In this way, he contributed many of the three main shrine objects (*rten gsum*) to these monasteries.

At the age of 26, he received the full-ordination vows of the Lower Vinaya (*smad 'dul*) tradition from mKhan chen Padma blo gsal at the Tshe ring ljongs hermitage of rDzogs chen o rgyan bsam gtan chos gling monastery. From the above-mentioned kind masters, he received the bodhisattva vows of both Nāgārjuna's and Asanga's traditions. Having been given various tantric empowerments, he also received the tantric vows, and thus became a master of the three vows (*sum ldan rdo rje 'dzin pa*).

For the benefit of the teachings and sentient beings, he turned the Wheel of the Dharma in the following ways:

He gave all of the empowerments and oral transmissions of the rNying ma transmissions and treasure teachings (*bka' gter*), the Path and Its Fruits (*lam 'bras*) and other tantric teachings and sādhanas of the Sa skya pa, the *Treasury of Oral Instructions* (*Gdams ngag mdzod*) of the bKa' brgyud pa, and the instructions of the Guhyasamāja, Cakrasamvara, and Vajrabhairava tantric teachings of the dGe lugs pa tradition, giving at least one or two initiations per day throughout the

summer, autumn, and spring. He remained at all times in meditation, without distraction. In the later part of his life, he stayed in strict meditation retreat through most of the winter.

In short, by seeing all of the teachings of the Tibetan traditions as pure visions, by learning, contemplating, and meditating, and by propagating the teachings, he became a learned and accomplished master.

In 1955, he foresaw, through his clairvoyance, the coming dangerous situation in Tibet, and in accordance with secret prophecies, at the age of 63 he left his monastic seat with his few attendants, travelling via Khams nang chen to dBus gtsang, where he made offerings at the main pilgrimage sites, then arriving at Sa skya in upper gTsang. After staying in dBus gtsang for a little over a year, in 1956 (the 19th day of the second ninth month of the Fire Male Monkey year), he finally arrived, by way of Tangku and Lachen, at Gangtok in Sikkim—the hidden land of lHa btsun chen po Nam mkha' 'jigs med, of whom his predecessor 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po was considered an incarnation.

After he made the decision to live in Sikkim, he travelled to the great pilgrimage sites of India, Nepal, and Bhutan, where he made extensive offerings.

He visualised Sikkim especially as an appropriate place for the spread of the teachings, and among the contributions he made at the end of his life are: in 1957, by an auspicious coincidence, he met with the 16th rGyal dbang Karma pa and the Crown Prince of Sikkim at Bkra shis lding in West Sikkim, where he received the clear display of the Karma pa's Black Hat five times, giving rise to powerful devotion, and he said maṇḍala prayers and the seven-branch prayer, and composed a long-life prayer (for the Karma pa). He performed the 'descent of blessings to the land' ritual based on the profound text *mKon mchog spyi 'dus*, which was discovered by Rig 'dzin 'Dza' tshon snying po. He also performed the long-life prayer to the Crown Prince Lama Rin po che by means of the offering of the eight auspicious symbols and the eight auspicious substances. He restrained the demons of the land and appointed them Dharma Protectors.

When he was at Padma yangs rtse monastery, the 21 lamas and monks, led by the head lama of the monastery, bSe sgrub mKha' spyod rin po che Ye shes blo gros dpal ldan bstan pa'i nyi ma, performed the long-life prayer based on the *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub* for his sake. Another time, the same ritual was performed by 17 monks led by mKha' spyod

Rin po che. The Queen Mother of Sikkim, Kun bzang bde chen, sponsored the ritual offering based on the *Thugs sgrub bar chad kun sel*. rDo grub chen Rin po che also performed the long-life prayer based on the *Yum ka* of the *Klong chen snying thig*. In the same year, he gave empowerments and transmissions of the texts of Rig 'dzin 'Dza' tshon snying po at Gangtok.

In short, during his stay in Sikkim of almost three years, he performed medical ritual practices based on the *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub*, the principal teaching of Sikkim, as well as many other extensive sādhanas practices. He travelled to Rum btegs in East Sikkim, Bkra shis ldings, Yug sam, and Padma yangs rtse in West Sikkim, and many other monasteries, sowing the seeds of ultimate happiness through his teachings. During that time, he also assisted in the establishment, in Sikkim, of the Vinaya traditions of restoration of vows and summer retreat. In addition, he had many secret visions in this land—descriptions of which can be found in his inner and secret biographies—that it would not be appropriate to discuss in a public presentation like this.

In 1959, at the age of 66, in the first month of the lunar calendar, when his health had declined a bit, H.H. Sa skya Khri chen, H.H., the 16th rGyal dbang Karma pa, H.H. bDud 'joms Rin po che, H.H. Bya bral Rin po che, H.H. rDo grub chen Rin po che, H.E. Khams sprul Rin po che, H.E. Ngor thar rtse Rin po che, H.E. kLu sding mkhan Rin po che, H.E. gNas brtan mChog gling Rin po che, H.E. bSod rgyal Rin po che, along with H.E. rGya ston Rin po che and H.E. 'Khrul zhig Rin po che, sponsored by the Queen Mother of Sikkim, performed the long-life ceremony and other related rituals and made extensive dedications for his recovery, as a result of which his health improved somewhat. The Crown Prince and the Queen Mother sponsored visits to both modern and traditional doctors, who examined him—taking his pulse, etc.—and when the doctors said there was nothing whatsoever wrong with his health, he looked at the Crown Prince and the Queen Mother and smiled.

At last, because of the poor merit of his disciples, sponsors, and devotees, on the evening of the sixth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar in 1959, at the Royal Palace of Sikkim, after taking a little bit of the black tea, nectar of barley beer, and milk that was offered to him—which put his mind at ease—during the ox period of the later part of the night (2 a.m.), while reciting a few of the eternal syllables of the mantra, he passed away and entered into the primordial ultimate sphere.

Then, for three days, his death was kept secret. On the ninth day of the lunar calendar, many old- and new-school lamas, abbots, and incarnate lamas, led by Sa skya Bdag chen rin po che, performed the master offering ritual, or *gurupūjā*, along with entreaties to arise from the meditative state, at which time the secret was made public. His grand funeral feast offering was performed before the body for seven weeks by H.E. Ngor mkhan po and H.E. Ngor Zhabs drung, led by H.H. Sa skya Khri 'dzin sGrol ma pho brang and H.H. Sa skya Phun tshogs pho brang. Other rituals of the various traditions were performed by H.E. rGya ston Rin po che and his disciples, H.E. Si tu Rin po che, H.E. gNas brtan mChog gling Rin po che and his disciples, H.H. rDo grub Rin po che, the Reverend Lady (*rje btsun ma*) of Sa skya, H.E. rDzong sar mnga' ri sprul sku, H.E. mKhar mdo khang gsar zhabs drung, H.E. g.Yon ru gter sras bla ma, H.E. Ngor thar rtse Rin po che, H.E. gNam mtsho do skya sprul sku, H.H. Dil mgo mkhyen brtse Rin po che, H.E. Khams sprul Rin po che, etc., as well as many other abbots, incarnate lamas, and ordained monks of the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism. From the Sikkim side, during the funeral feast offering, the government of Sikkim sponsored the *tshogs 'bum* ritual based on the *rDor sems*, the head lamas and monks of Padma yangs rtse monastery in West Sikkim performed the offering based on the *bDe gshegs kun 'dus*, and the monks of dBen monastery in East Sikkim, led by Ling rtogs sgom chen, performed the offering based on the *sMin gling rdor sems*.

At the time the cremation site was being discussed, some suggested Bodh Gaya, it being the holiest site, but 'Khrul zhig Rin po che argued that the cremation and stūpa should be at Bkra shis lding, the centre of this land, because (1) it would be a very auspicious fulfillment of the aspirations of the late lama and his predecessor, lHa btsun chen po, (2) the Buddha's teachings would spread and last for a long time throughout the world by the example of Sikkim, (3) it would be a great benefit for all living beings, and (4) the late lama himself had said, when he was on pilgrimage there, 'In a very clear dream I saw again and again the place where my body would rest. When I came to Bkra shis lding, I recognised it as the place I saw in my dream.' For these reasons, during the first part of the 11th month of the lunar calendar, the body was respectfully taken to Bkra shis lding, the centre of this hidden land.

At Bkra shis lding, H.E. Ngor thar rtse mkhan po, H.E. gNas brtan mchog gling Rin po che, H.H. Dil mgo mkhyen brtse Rin po che, and

H.H. rDo grub chen Rin po che, etc., performed the cremation rites based on the five different ritual texts of their respective schools, and the *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub* maṇḍala ritual was performed by the monks of Padma yangs rtse monastery, led by H.E. mKha' spyod Rin po che and H.E. bSe sgrub gdung 'dzin dpal 'byor lhun grub Rin po che. After three days, the cremation chamber was opened and the bone-and-ash-collection ritual was performed, a stūpa was built, and the relics that had appeared were installed in the stūpa accompanied by the performance of rituals. After the completion of the stūpa, the monks, abbots, and high incarnate lamas of the old and new schools performed consecrations along with many feast offerings.

It is said that the place where the late lama passed away exists as a natural pure land of self-manifesting wisdom, and out of strong confidence in this, and to honor and fulfill the intentions of the late lama and create a field for sentient beings to accumulate merit, the late lama's consort, mKha' 'gro Tshe ring chos sgron, built two stūpas as indoor monuments within the residence of the late lama—one made of gold and copper that was the same height as the late lama, and one that was taller than the length of an arrow—and filled them with mantras written on pieces of paper. In 1960, they were consecrated by monks and lamas led by Tai Si tu Rin po che of dPal spungs, with lay devotees in attendance, and, in addition, H.H. the 16th rGyal dbang Karma pa bestowed upon them an extraordinary blessing with his wisdom mind. Once again, on the fifth month of the lunar calendar, on the first anniversary of his death, monks and incarnate lamas, led by H.H. Sa skya Khri chen Rin po che, performed grand day-long consecrations of the stūpas along with the feast offering for the late lama.

In this way, by its consecration and installation, the stūpa,⁵ which is located on the ground floor of the Gangtok Royal Palace—the place where the late lama worked extensively for the benefit of the teachings and of sentient beings, the place of enlightenment, the nonsectarian garden of Dharma, the great adamantine palace of Akaniṣṭha—exists as a precious field for the accumulation of good merit for all beings.

Many of the works of the late Lama Vajradhara composed in or pertaining to Sikkim—praises, prayers, sādhanas, etc.—are contained in the individual texts of his eight-volume collected works, published by the rDzong sar mkhyen rtse La brang in 1981.

⁵ His consort, mKha' 'gro Tshe ring chos sgron, maintained the stūpa at the Royal Palace in Gangtok until 2006, at which time both mKha' 'gro lags and the stūpa moved to rDzong sar monastery, the exile monastic seat of the present rDzong sar mkhyen rtse (born 1961), at Bir, state of Himachal Pradesh.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dil mgo mkhyen rtse rin po che theg mchog bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan. *Rigs dkyil rgya mtsho'i khyab bdag rje btsun bla ma 'jam dbyangs chos kyi blo gros ris med bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan gtsug la lung rigs nyi ma smra ba'i seng ge dpal bzang po'i rnam thar cha shas tsam brjod pa ngo mtshar yongs 'dus dga' tshal zhes bya ba bzhugs so.*
- gDong thog rin po che sku phreng lnga pa theg mchog bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan. 1977. *Byang phyogs thub pa'i rgyal tshab dpal ldan sa skya pa'i bstan pa rin po che ji ltar byung ba'i lo rgyus rab 'byams zhing du snyan pa'i sgra dbyangs zhes bya ba bzugs so (Sa skya'i chos 'byung) (A History of the Sa-skyapa Sect of Tibetan Buddhism, by T.G. Dhongthog Rinpoche).* gDong thog rin po che mchog nas par skrun zhus pa. New Delhi.
- bsTen 'dzin kun bzang lung rtogs bstan pa'i nyi ma. 2004 snga 'gyur grub dbang rgyal ba rdzogs chen pa'i gdan rabs chos brgyud dang bcas pa'i byung ba brjod pa'i gtam yid bzhin dbang gi rgyal po'i phreng ba zhes bya ba bzhugs so. Published by Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang. Beijing, China.

