SHENRAB'S ANCESTORS AND FAMILY MEMBERS: WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

Kalsang Norbu Gurung

Introduction

This paper is a part of my doctoral dissertation in which I study the life account of the founder of Bon, Shenrab Miwo (Gshen rab mi bo), which was written by Bonpos in the beginning of the last millennium. In the process of writing the life account of Shenrab Miwo in the *Mdo 'dus*,[1] the Bonpos have incorporated a number of stories from various Tibetan sources. In order to make these stories complete, they have also adopted many personal names in the stories, which I will discuss in this paper.

There are an abundance of names in the *Mdo 'dus*. Many of these belong to members of Shenrab Miwo's family, including his ancestors. The author(s) seems to have considered these family names to be of equal importance as the other material contained in the *Mdo 'dus*. One might wonder where the author(s) got these names from. I will try to answer this question by tracing the possible origins of these names. I have elsewhere discussed some of Shenrab Miwo's family members, including his wives and children.[2] Here I will discuss the name of Shenrab's father, the name of his mother and her family background, Shenrab's ancestors, and his brothers.

Father Rgyal bon thod dkar, *Bon po* of Men & Gods

According to the *Mdo 'dus*, Shenrab's father, named Rgyal bon thod dkar, was the son of *Dmu* King Lan kyis thems pa skas and Queen Ngang 'brang ma.[3] His mother, the queen, was a daughter of A lde khyab pa of the *Phya* family. This indicates that Shenrab was a grandson of *Dmu* and *Phya*, which are recognized as two important clans in old Tibetan historical sources.[4] In the very brief account in

---

1 The *Mdo 'dus* is a shorter and older account compared to the other accounts: the *Gzer mig*, a mid-length account and the *Gzi brjid*, a long account. For the dating of the *Mdo 'dus*, See Gurung 2011 (chapter ii) and Gurung (forthcoming).

2 Gurung 2011, chapter v.

3 On the other hand, the *'Dul ba gling grags* and *Rtsa rgyud nyi sgron* record the name of Rgyal bon thod dkar's mother as Lha za 'phrul mo. Shar rdza (1985: 16) gives us yet another similar name, Ngang grags ma, who was the lady (consort) of Srid rje 'brang dkar, an ancestral member of *dmu* lineage, and was also called *lha za*, "a divine princess."

4 See Mkhas pa lde'u 1987: 233. A dialogue between the ruler of *Dmu* and an envoy of *Phywa* (alternatively *phya*) is also described in Pelliot tibétain 126 (lines

the *Mdo 'dus*, we see Shenrab's parents and grandparents being identified by several names.[5] These names also include those of Shenrab's maternal grandparents, although their family name is not recorded.

In order to trace the possible sources of Shenrab's father's name, I shall first look closely at the structure of his name. His name is written in at least five different ways in the *Mdo 'dus*, including some that are probably modified from *mi* (human) to *myes* (grandfather). The names are:

1. *Mi bon lha bon rgyal bon thad/thod dkar*[6] and its shorter version *Rgyal bon thod dkar*[7] are the most well known names among the Bonpos. To translate them literally, *mi bon* means "human bon," *lha bon* "divine bon," *rgyal bon* "royal bon," and *thod dkar* means "[wearing a] white turban."
1. *Mi bon lha bon rgyal po thod dkar* and its shorter version *Rgyal po thod dkar*,[8] in which *rgyal bon* is replaced with *rgyal po* (king).
2. *Myes bon lha bon rgya bon thod dkar*,[9] in which *mi bon* is replaced with *myes bon* (grandfather bon) and *rgyal bon* is replaced with *rgya bon* (Chinese *bonpo*).[10]
3. *Me (or mes) bon lha bon rgyal bon thod dkar*.[11] There is an alternative spelling of *me bon* (literally "fire bon") with *mes bon* or *myes bon* in the name. The word *mes* is the alternative spelling of *myes*.
4. *Yab myes rgyal bon thod dkar*.[12] In this name, *mi bon* or *myes bon* is replaced with *yab myes* (father and grandfather). This name clearly shows Rgyal bon thod dkar as the father of Shenrab and a grandfather (probably of Shenrab's son as well as, metaphorically, of Shenrab's followers). All the instances of the word *bon* in these names seem to be an ab-

---

104-68, see Imaeda 2007: 22-24). In this text, a man from the *Phywa* is asking a man from the *Dmu* to rule the land of the black-headed men, which latter generally refers to Tibetans (for a detailed discussion, see Karmay 1998: 178-180, note 31). This *Dmu* and *Phya* family relationship is also maintained in the *Mdo 'dus*.

5 *Mdo 'dus*: 55.

6 *Ibid.*: 41 and *Mdo 'dus* Lhagyal: 18a and 24a for this name.

7 *Mdo 'dus*: 52, 55, 59, 105, 119, 191 and 203 and *Mdo 'dus* Lhagyal: 22b, 24b, 26a, 46a, 52a, 84a and 89b.

8 *Mdo 'dus* Karmay: 26b, 28a and 29b for the short name.

9 *Ibid.*: 21a.

10 The word *rgya* refers to China. I have argued for this translation in Gurung (2009: 258). See Stein 2003: 600 for a different opinion. The word *rgyal* means king as in *rgyal po* above.

11 *Mdo 'dus*: 55.

12 *Ibid.*: 203, *Mdo 'dus* Karmay: 90b, *Mdo 'dus* Lhagyal: 89b.

breviated form of *bon po* (cf. *mi'i bon po*, *lha'i bon po*, *rgyal po'i bon po* and *rgya'i bon po*).

All the above names are only present in the *Mdo 'dus*. There is a slightly different name, *Mi bon lha bon yo bon rgyal bon thod dkar*, recorded in the *Gzer mig*.[13] Here, an extra word *yo bon* is added, the meaning of which is not clear to me, unless it is derived from *ye bon* (primordial bon) or from *yog bon*, which is a name that appears among the thirty-three *bonpos*.[14] As I will argue later, *yo bon* corresponds with *yo phyi*, a part of the name of Shenrab's mother. Shenrab's father's name is one example of a name that seems to have been derived in different ways from old Tibetan sources.

References to *mi bon lha bon rgyal bon*

Among the old Tibetan sources, I will first look at some Tibetan documents preserved in Dunhuang caves. Those documents were only accessible until the early 11th century due to the closure of the caves either in 1002 AD[15] or in 1035 AD.[16] The documents became available again after their discovery in the beginning of the twentieth century. I assume that some fragments of these texts, or oral traditions that correspond to the documents preserved in Dunhuang, were probably available elsewhere and Bonpos may have had access to them. To the best of my knowledge, such hypothetical fragments and traditions are no longer in circulation today, apart from what has been preserved in Dunhuang sources and what may be reflected in some of our Shenrab narratives. Based on this assumption, I shall try to determine how the name of Shenrab's father relates to the names found in the Dunhuang documents.

As stated above, the first part of the name of Shenrab's father is *Mi bon lha bon rgyal bon*, which is recorded in Pelliot tibétain 1134[17] as follows.

> [119] *bu ni lha'i bu tsha ni srin gyi tsha'/ myi bon/ lha'i bon/ rgya bon brim tang gis/ rgyal tag brgyad* [120] / *ni* / *gnam las* / *bre*[18][/] *se* [*mo*] *gru bzhi ni* / *sa la* / *bchas* / […]
>
> The son is the son of a god and the nephew/grandson is the nephew/grandson of a demon, [he who is] the human *bon*, the

[13] *Gzer mig*: 15.
[14] For the list of the thirty-three *bonpos*, see Gurung 2011: appendix 2.
[15] Rong 2000: 274.
[16] Stein 2003: 591.
[17] Imaeda 2007: 149.
[18] There may be a different interpretation of the word *bre*, but here I translate it in the sense of *bre ba* which means "to connect," "to display" or "to weave," as defined in Zhang (1996: 1906-1907, see *gnam la 'ja' tshon bre ba*) and in Bon ritual texts.

> divine *bon* and the rgya *bon* called *brim tang* connects the eight *rgyal* cords[19] in the sky and constructed the *se* [*mo*] *gru bzhi* (four sided tomb) on the earth.[20]

As shown in the above passage, there is a long phrase *myi bon lha'i bon rgya bon brim tang*. This phrase appears to be either a description of a person called *brim tang* (the last part of the phrase), or a description of three different people—judging from the punctuation marks separating the phrases into three parts in the original document. In the latter reading, one would take *myi bon*, *lha'i bon* and *rgya bon brim tang* separately. Alternatively, this phrase can also be read as a description of two persons (*myi bon lha'i bon* and *rgya bon brim tang*), as we find in the late 13th-century Tibetan history, *Rgya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa* written by Mkhas pa lde'u, which I will discuss later.

It is well known that *myi* is an alternative spelling for *mi*, and thus *myi bon* becomes an alternative spelling for *mi bon*.[21] Similarly, as I have shown in the list of the father's names above, *rgya bon* seems to be an alternative spelling of *rgyal bon* in the *Mdo 'dus*, although the literal meanings of *rgya bon* and *rgyal bon* in present-day use are different. The Bonpos probably considered *rgya* and *rgyal* to be interchangeable.[23] However, the *rgya bon brim tang* that appeared in Pelliot tibétain 1134 has become *rgyal/rgya bon thod dkar* in the account of Shenrab. I will discuss *thod dkar* in the next section.

Table: A Speculative Example of Name Transformation

Pelliot tibétain 1134	Transformation	*Mdo 'dus*
rgya bon brim tang	*rgya* <alternative> *rgyal* *brim tang* >replaced by> *thod dkar*	*rgyal bon thod dkar*

[19] In this context, I prefer to translate *rgyal t(h)ag* as "a protection cord belonging to *rgyal* spirit," as *rgyal* is, alternatively, one of the eight classes of gods and demons (Tib. *lha srin sde brgyad*) who is assigned to remove obstacles to the funerary ritual activities.

[20] Cf. also Stein 2003: 601-602, for *se* [*mo*] *gru bzhi* and *rgyal t(h)ag*.

[21] Cf. *myi bo* for *mi bo*, *myi rje* for *mi rje* in Pelliot tibétain 16 [25v3] (see Imaeda 2007: 7) and *myi rabs* for *mi rabs* in Pelliot tibétain 1047 [8] (see Imaeda 2007: 51).

[23] There are other examples like, *rgya rong* and *rgyal rong* (a region in Sichuan province in China) and *rgya mkhar* and *rgyal mkhar* (a mythical palace in Bon texts), which are interchangeable too. Most of these interchangeable words are the result of how these words are pronounced by the people of eastern Tibet.

The rendering of names in the *Mdo 'dus* from old Tibetan documents can also be seen in some other names. Within the list of thirty-three *bonpos*, there are three names listed as *phya bon thod dkar*, *rgyal bon bong (bon) po* and *sman bon 'bring dangs*.[24] If these names are compared with the names found in the above passage in Pelliot tibétain 1134, the similarity is evident. Here we can see that one name is spread over three names: *thod dkar* in the first name, *rgyal bon* in the second name, and '*bring dang*s (cf. *brim tang*) in the third name. This proves that either several names were compiled to form one name or that an existing name was modified to form another.

Another reference to the name of Shenrab's father is given in the late 13th-century Tibetan history *Rgya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa* written by Mkhas pa lde'u. Although this source is dated almost two hundred years later than the *Mdo 'dus*, some information recorded in Mkhas pa lde'u's *chos 'byung* could still depend on an older tradition. Furthermore, this Tibetan history was apparently composed on the basis of an older source, although the author(s) does not specify any details. In fact, the names recorded in this text are comparable to the names given in Pelliot tibétain 1134. I shall first quote the passage from the history by Mkhas pa lde'u[25] and then compare it to Pelliot tibétain 1134:

> *'bring mo dre btsun rmu mo dang mi bon lha bon dang rgya 'brong tam chen po bshos pa'i sras 'chi med gshen gyi rmu rgyal tsha dang/ ce'u gshen gyi phyag (phya) dkar tsha gnyis so.*
>
> The middle daughter, Dre btsun dmu mo, consorted with Mi bon lha bon and Rgya 'brong tam chen po. From [each] union, they had two sons. The first is a grandson of *Dmu* King, 'Chi med gshen, and the second is a grandson of White *Phya* called Ce'u gshen.

This passage has been translated by Karmay as, "Mi bon lha bon unites with the second daughter Dre btsun dmu mo. From this union two brothers Mtshe mi gshen gyi dmu rgyal tsha and Gco'u gshen gyi phyag mkhar were born."[26] In his translation, Karmay omits the name Rgya 'brong tam chen po. In reference to the first son '*Chi med gshen gyi rmu rgyal tsha*, he also reads *mtshe mi* instead of *'chi med*. Karmay seems to have used the version of the history by Mkhas pa lde'u published in 1987 in Lhasa, volume three of the series *Gangs can rig mdzod*, which I have also checked. However, for an unknown reason, he has read the passage differently from the original passage in Tibetan.

According to this Mkhas pa lde'u's *chos 'byung*, Dre btsun dmu mo had two husbands: Mi bon lha bon and Rgya 'brong tam chen

---

[24] *Mdo 'dus*: 53.
[25] Mkhas pa lde'u 1987: 232.
[26] Karmay 1994: 418.

po. From these unions, she also bore two sons: a grandson of the *Dmu* King and a grandson of White *Phya*. The two names of the husbands suggest a significant relationship between this source and Pelliot tibétain 1134, although Pelliot tibétain 1134 gives Myi bon lha bon and Rgya bon brim tang as two names of the same person, while Mkhas pa lde'u lists them as the names of two separate persons. If we look carefully at the names (Rgya bon brim tang in Pelliot tibétain 1134 and Rgya 'brong tam chen po in the history by Mkhas pa lde'u), we can find a link between their sources. Given that one of these sources is dated before the *Mdo 'dus* and the other after it, we may conjecture that the two later accounts derive from a source similar to the passage in Pelliot tibétain 1134. Mkhas pa lde'u could have written the *Rgya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa* on the basis of the same source. In other words, the anonymous source first related in Pelliot tibétain 1134 and later recorded in the *Rgya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa* could have influenced later Bonpo authors' understanding of Shenrab's father's name.

Regarding the descriptive name of the first son, 'Chi med gshen gyi rmu rgyal tsha, there seems to be a conflation, as '*chi med* corresponds with 'Chi med gtsug phud (the name used for Shenrab before his descent, according to the *Mdo 'dus*), and *gshen* with Gshen rab mi bo (i.e. Shenrab Miwo). As indicated in the last part of the name, the person is said to have been a grandson of the *Dmu* King (Tib. *dmu rgyal tsha*). The only person whom this description could be referring to is Shenrab, because he is not only described as we have seen earlier as a grandson of the *Dmu* King and a son of Rgyal bon thod dkar, but he is also connected to the name '*Chi med gshen* ('Chi med gtsug phud plus Gshen rab mi bo).

Now we can further speculate as to why it was Rgyal bon thod dkar who was portrayed as Shenrab's father. I shall refer here to the above passage from the 13th-century Tibetan history by Mkhas pa lde'u, regarding the relation between the first son 'Chi med gshen, and the first husband of Dre btsun dmu mo, Mi bon lha bon. Bonpo authors might have interpreted the first husband Mi bon lha bon as Mi bon lha bon rgyal bon thod dkar. The first son, or grandson of the *Dmu* King, *'chi med gshen* might have been interpreted as Shenrab Miwo. The name '*Chi med gshen* could be read as combination of Shenrab's name in his previous life, 'Chi med gtsug phud, with *gshen* from Shenrab Miwo. Therefore, it is clear that this sort of information may have driven the author(s) of the *Mdo 'dus* to assert that Rgyal bon thod dkar was the father, Shenrab Miwo the son, and that their family descended from the *Dmu* clan.

References to *thod dkar*

There are two different references to *thod dkar* found in the Dunhuang documents. The first is *pho gshen thod dkar* found in Pelliot tibétain 1285[27] and IOL TIB J 734.[28] It refers to male ritual priests wearing white turbans. There was a group of a hundred such priests who were invited from the White Pure Mountain (Tib. *dags ri dkar po*) to cure someone's illness. This reference always appears before a reference to "female priests" (Tib. *mo gshen*), who were also invited from the Black Shadowy Mountain (Tib. *sribs ri nag mo*) to cure illness.[29] We can see from this reference that *thod dkar* is an epithet for a group of male ritual priests (Tib. *pho gshen*) who were probably wearing white turbans (Tib. *la thod*). The second reference to *thod dkar* is recorded in Pelliot tibétain 1286[30] and Pelliot tibétain 1290.[31] The reference is to the name of a person identified as the king of Rtsang (nowadays spelled as Gtsang) province.[32] What is evident from these two references is that *thod dkar* is also a name of an historical figure. Therefore, it is very likely that these references could have influenced not only the name of Shenrab's father, but also his designation as a king, and even the clothing he is described as wearing.

I should also like to mention an interesting reference to *thod dkar* found in the list of twelve lords, spirits and masters given in the *Srid pa spyi mdos*.[33] According to this text, twelve lords, spirits and

---

[27] Pelliot tibétain 1285: [r39] *dags ri dkar po las/ pho gshen thod / dkar brgya' bsdus te/;* [r66] *dags rI dkar po la'las / pho gshen thod / dkar brgya bsogs te;* [r86] *dags rI dkar po la / pho gshen thod dkar brgya bsdus ste;* [r151] *dags rI dkar po la / pho gshen / thod kar brgya bsdus kyang;* [r165-66] *dags rI dkar po // pho/ gshen thod kar brgya bsdus kyang*, cf. Lalou 1958: 200 and Imaeda 2007: 184-186, 189-190.

[28] IOL TIB J 734: [2r48] *bdags raM / dkar po la / po gshen thod kar brgya bsogs te / / mo bthab* [*pya?*] *blhags/* See Imaeda 2007: 277.

[29] Cf. also Blezer 2008: 430-431 and Dotson 2008: 48-49 for a discussion on this reference.

[30] Pelliot tibétain 1286/line 8: [*myang?*] *ro'i pyed kar na/ rje rtsang rje'i thod kar/* See Imaeda 2007: 197.

[31] Pelliot tibétain 1290/line r4: *myang ro'i phyIr khar na rje rtsang rje'i thod kar/*, line v5: *myang ro'i phyIr khar na rje rtsang rje'i thod kar/* See Imaeda 2007: 249-250.

[32] See also Smith 2001: 219. Here the name *Rtsang rje thod dkar rje* is listed among the four lords of the *Stong* tribe, the fourth original Tibetan tribe.

[33] Bonpos claim that this text was discovered in 1067 AD by Gnyan ston shes rab seng ge. According to Shar rdza (1985), he was a shepherd called Gnyan ston shes rab rdo rje, but the people called him Gnyan 'theng re ngan (Tib. *'theng*, "lame") because of his lame leg (cf. Karmay 1972: 153 and Blondeau 2000: 249). Karmay (1998: 346) has translated part of this text into English. In the colophon to the *Srid pa spyi mdos*, this text is attributed to Sangs po khrin khod. Nam mkha'i nor bu (1996: 581) considered this text to be an old Bon source and he identified the author as Ra sangs khri na khod, who is said to have lived in the 8th century AD. According to Karmay (1972: 12), Ra sangs khri na khod was born into the Khyung po clan as one of the two sons of Gyer chen zla med (8th century AD?, cf. Karmay 1977: 51 for this date). The name Ra sangs rje from Khyung po is also recorded in Pelliot tibétain 1286, line 7: *zhang zhung dar pa'I rjo bo lig snya shur / blon po khyung po ra sangs rje dang* (see Imaeda 2007: 197) and

masters were invited for a ritual offering at the *mdos* altar.[34] The first of these twelve and perhaps their leader, Gshen rab myi bo, was asked to pacify some demonic forces, including Māra Khyab pa, who often interfered in Shenrab's practices.[35] The remaining nine lords and spirits (see table below) were offered whatever food and drink they desired, so that they would not cause any harm to other beings. The final two of the twelve are described as divine masters (Tib. *dbon/dpon gsas*). Although not specified clearly, their task seems to have been to mediate between the spirits and the humans. Elsewhere in the same text,[36] the author briefly writes that there were three hundred and sixty *thod dkar* in total, "*srid ni thod dkar srid/ sum rgya drug cu srid*." This suggests that *thod dkar*, according to the *Srid pa spyi mdos*, is also the name of group of divine masters, which corresponds to some extent with the description in Pelliot tibétain 1285 and IOL TIB J 734. Apart from the name *thod dkar*, parts of a few other names like, *rmu rje* and *btsan rje* can also be found in the list of Shenrab's ancestors. This will be discussed later in this essay.

Table: The Twelve Lords and Spirits Listed in the *Srid pa spyi mdos* (3b-4b)

	Their description	Place
1. Gshen rab myi bo	A god of *gshen* (cf. *gshen lha* or *lha gshen*)	at the border of god and human world
2. Dgung rgyal ma	Queen of the sky	at the upper of the three spaces
3. Rmu rje	King of *rmu* (alt. *dmu*)	at the middle of the three spaces
4. Gu lang	Cf. Maheśvara? Tib. *gu lang dbang phyug*	at the lower of the three spaces
5. Btsan rje	Lord of *btsan* spirit	on the other side of the space

Pelliot tibétain 1290 (line r4): *blon po khyung po ra sangs rje* […] (line v5) *zhang zhung dar ma'i rje bo lag snya shur* / / *blon po khyung po ra sangs rje* / (see Imaeda 2007: 249). The two names: Sangs po khrin khod and Ra sangs khri na khod are very similar, although it is not certain that these two names belong to the same person. Particularly, the latter part of the names Khrin khod and Khri na khod are very close. However, what can be justified here is that the narrative content of the text seems to have been derived from a source from a period contemporaneous to the Dunhuang documents.

[34] This altar may be similar to the altar built in the *Mkha' klong gsang mdos* ritual (see Blondeau 2000: 279, for an illustration of the altar).

[35] Gurung 2011: 83-92.

[36] *Srid pa spyi mdos*: 3b.

6. This rje	Lord of goblin (Tib. *this rang* / *the'u rang*)	in between the space
7. Ma mo	Female demonic spirit	on this side of the space
8. Dogs (dong) bdag	Lord of hole (nāga spirit?)	at the upper hole at the rainbow and the cloud
9. Gnyan rje	Lord of *gnyan*	at the middle hole at mountains and rocks
10. Klu rje	Lord of nāga	at the lower hole in water
11. Thod dkar		at the palace called Snang srid
12. Wer ma		lis rgyad kyi zer ma[37]

A passage from the *Khyung 'bum gong ma* (a text found amongst the manuscripts collected from Gansu)[38] sheds light on the question of why the phrase *rgyal bon thod dkar* is attached to the phrase *lha bon* (divine bon). This work informs us of a person by the name of *Lha bon thod gar*, a part of the name of Shenrab's father. According to the text, Dung myi lha gar invited Lha bon thod gar to defeat his enemy, a demon named Lan pa skyin reng. Dung myi lha gar is described as a primordial god and is also called *lha chen* (great god). Since all of the relevant events take place in a heavenly land called Lha yul gung thang,[39] Lha bon thod gar must also be identified as a divine figure. That is probably the reason why the name *Rgyal bon thod dkar* was also attached to *lha bon* (divine bon) to construe the name of Shenrab's father, Mi bon lha bon rgyal bon thod dkar.

Shenrab's Mother Rgyal bzhad ma, Mother of Men and Gods

Like the long name of his father, Shenrab's mother also has a very long name, Mi phyi lha phyi yo phyi rgyal bzhad ma. She is popularly known amongst the Bonpos by the shorter version of her

[37] The passage in the *Srid pa spyi mdos* (4b) reads: *lis rgyad kyi zer ma na/ spyan* [*'dren ni su 'dren na*]*/ spyan 'dren ni wer ma 'dren*/ From the context, this *lis rgyad kyi zer ma* seems to be a name of place, but I am not clear about its location or meaning.

[38] No information is available so far regarding the date of this source. I am grateful to Ngawang Gyatso for sharing this rare manuscript with me.

[39] This toponym, Lha yul gung thang, is found in Pelliot tibétain 1060 [3] (see Imaeda 2007: 83) and IOL TIB J 731[r44] (see Imaeda 2007: 264).

name, Yo phyi rgyal bzhad ma. According to the *Mdo 'dus*,[40] Shenrab's mother's maiden name was Gsal ba'i 'od ldan mo. When she married Rgyal bon thod dkar, she was initiated with the longer name. In regard to the construction of this long name, the author(s) of the *Mdo 'dus* used the same model as he used for the name of the father. Just as the word *bon* is repeated three times in the father's name, the term *phyi* is repeated three times in the mother's name. Also, the first two names of Shenrab's father, *mi bon* and *lha bon*, are repeated here with the suffix *phyi*, becoming *mi phyi* and *lha phyi*. These are followed by *yo phyi* (cf. *yo bon*) and *rgyal bzhad ma*. As mentioned above, in the *Gzer mig*, the name *yo bon* is added to Shenrab's father's name, which here corresponds with *yo phyi*. However, it is not entirely certain which one of the two, *yo phyi* or *yo bon*, influenced the other. *Rgyal* also appears in her name (cf. *rgyal bzhad* instead of *rgyal phyi*), which probably corresponds to *rgyal bon* in the father's name. However, modifying *rgyal bon* into *rgyal phyi* (following the same system of replacement) apparently was not possible; perhaps the latter phrase does not carry any relevant meaning in this context.

The old Tibetan word *phyi* as it appears in Shenrab's mother's name is to be interpreted as an abbreviation of *phyi mo*, which in this context means "grandmother."[41] It can be said that she was honoured as the grandmother of all human beings, as is clear from her descriptive name. From the long name of Shenrab's mother, she was known as *mi phyi* (grandmother of men), *lha phyi* (grandmother of gods), and *yo phyi* (everyone's grandmother) who is called *rgyal bzhad ma* (a blooming queen-cum-mother).

In the *Mdo 'dus*, there are several variants of Shenrab's mother's name, although they are all clearly referring to the same woman. I shall list them here, including those variants that are probably only the result of scribal errors:

1. *Mi phyi lha phyi yo phyi rgyal bzhad ma*[42] and its shorter version *mi phyi lha phyi'i rgyal bzhad ma*[43] are the name used most often by the Bonpos.
2. *Mi phye lha phye yo phye rgyal gzhan ma*.[44] The word *phyi* is replaced with *phye*, and *bzhad* with *gzhan*, probably scribal errors.

---

[40] *Mdo 'dus*, p. 55.

[41] See Pelliot tibétain 1071[r332], *zhang lon 'di rnams kyI myes pho dang / pha dang phyi mo dang ma' dang…* (see Imaeda 2007: 106) "these Żhang lon's grandfather, father, grandmother, mother and…" The word *zhang lon* in this text seems to be a title of a high ranking position, but its real meaning is unclear to me. Almost an identical passage is also found in Pelliot tibétain 1072[078] (see Imaeda 2007: 115).

[42] *Mdo 'dus*: p. 55, *Mdo 'dus* Karmay: 21r and *Mdo 'dus* Lhagyal: 18r and 24v.

[43] *Mdo 'dus*: 41.

[44] *Mdo 'dus* Karmay: 28r.

3. *Mi phyi lha phyi yo phyi rgyal bzhad*,[45] *Mi phyi lha'i yo phyi rgyal bzhed*,[46] and *mi phye yo phye rgyal bzhed*.[47] The main difference here is that *ma* is omitted, probably to achieve the required amount of syllables for this verse. In the third name, *phyi* is replaced by *phye*, which again looks like a scribal error.
4. *Yo phyi/phye rgyal bzhad yum*.[48] In this name, *ma* is replaced with *yum*, "mother."

The Family Background of Yo phyi rgyal bzhad ma

According to the *Mdo 'dus*, Yo phyi rgyal bzhad ma, alias Gsal ba'i 'od ldan mo, was a daughter of King Sa la[49] and Queen 'Gir ti ma. This tells us that she was born into a royal family. Elsewhere in the *Mdo 'dus*,[50] it is suggested that the mother of Shenrab must be from royal descent (Tib. *rgyal rigs*). However, the author of the *Gzer mig* disagrees with the account in the *Mdo 'dus* and supplies us with the information that King Sa la was born into a lower class, in Tibetan *dmangs rigs*, which is equivalent to Sanskrit *śūdra*, the "commoner" or "servant" class in the Indian caste system. It is also suggested that it was Yo phyi rgyal bzhad ma's engagement to Rgyal bon thod dkar that entitled her family to become members of the royal family.

Apart from the brief account mentioned above, the author(s) of the *Mdo 'dus* does not provide further details on the family background of Shenrab's mother. I shall summarize the account recorded in the *Gzer mig*,[51] which also demonstrates how Bonpos later elaborated the story of Shenrab's mother.

Even after the whole world had been searched, it was very difficult to find a suitable bride for the Prince Rgyal bon thod dkar, the *Gzer mig* reports. When the Prince reached the age of thirteen, a father and a son came to visit him and introduced themselves as coming from the city Lang ling near the lake Mu le stong ldan had,[52] and being from a *dmangs rigs* (Skt. *śūdra*) family. The purpose of their visit was for the father to offer his beautiful daughter to the Prince. When the Prince saw that they were physically handicapped (the father was blind in his right eye and the son had a lame left leg)

---

45 *Mdo 'dus* Lhagyal: 84r.
46 *Mdo 'dus*: 191.
47 *Mdo 'dus* Karmay: 84v.
48 *Mdo 'dus*: 52, *Mdo 'dus* Karmay: 26v and *Mdo 'dus* Lhagyal: 22v.
49 The name Sa la occurs four times in the *Mdo 'dus* (55, 59, 113 and 208), three of which refer to the King who was the father of Yo phyi rgyal bzhad ma and one of which refers to a Brahmin.
50 *Mdo 'dus*: 52.
51 *Gzer mig*: 15-25.
52 A similar name is mentioned in Shar rdza 1985. It is a crystal lake (Tib. *shel mtsho*) called Mu le had, located in Spu rangs (cf. Vitali 1996 for Spu rangs). According to Karmay (1972: 124), three hunters, including Mar pa 'phen bzang, found some Bonpo treasures nearby this lake.

and belonged to the *dmangs rigs*, he replied with embarrassment. He said, "It is impossible that you could have a beautiful daughter, who would be appropriate to be my wife, therefore do not spread this news. If you have a beautiful daughter, then bring her secretly to the lake Mu le stong ldan had, when I go there to take a bath."

Because Prince Rgyal bon thod dkar was embarrassed by this meeting, he lied to those who asked him about it, though he reported the news truthfully to his father. His father responded positively and declared that it is not impossible for the visitor's daughter to be beautiful, for the man and his sons' disfigurements might be the result of either the downfall of a celestial being, or the liberation of someone from the suffering of Hell. Furthermore, this might be either an indication of the downfall of a king to become an ordinary person, or the uplifting of an ordinary member of a lower class to rule the country as a king. The physical disabilities of the father and son are not bad omens, he continued, because blindness of the right eye is an indication of blocking the door to the lower realms and a lame left leg is an indication of benefitting sentient beings. The Prince was convinced his father's reply and prepared to meet the daughter of the *dmangs rigs* family.

When the mother of the *dmangs rigs* family heard of the Prince's response, she became sad and cried. When the father decided to send his daughter to marry a man from the same class, she begged her father not to send her away, at least not until the full moon of the next month. The daughter told her father that she wished to go to see the prince. The parents agreed to her appeal that she may go to see the prince.

During the prince's bathing event, the Prince was looking at the centre of the city full of astonishment. Seeing the Prince's amazement, the Brahmin Gsal khyab 'od ldan asked, "You do not seem to appreciate the amusing performances of the gods, nāgas and humans; but you seem to be entertained by something else in the city centre. What is the amusement that you see there?" The Prince replied, "There is a beautiful girl on the top of the white palace in the centre of the city of Lang ling. Is she the daughter of a *nāga*, who has come in the form of a human, or a sky-goddess, who has come in the form of a *nāga*, or a human? I am amazed by this, therefore I am smiling."

The Brahmin saw the girl and went to gather information about her family background. He asked the girl, but she left without reply. Then he made enquiries among the local people who told him about her family. The Brahmin reported this to the Prince, who sent him again to enquire further. The lame son received the Brahmin. When the Brahmin found the girl exceptionally beautiful, he also became excited. He suggested to the parents that they offer their daughter to the prince. Although the father and son disagreed, the girl proposed a condition. The girl sent message that if the prince wished to be with her from his heart, he should offer a royal position to her

parents. The Brahmin conveyed the girl's proposal to the prince. The latter accepted the proposal and decided to appoint the girl's parents to royal positions. The Brahmin gathered the people of the city of Lang ling and announced the enthronement of the girl's parents. The father Sa la was enthroned as a king, the mother 'Gir ti ma as a queen and the brother Gsal khyab as a prince. After the marriage, the daughter Gsal ba'i 'od ldan mo was named Mi phyi lha phyi yo phyi rgyal bzhad ma.

In this long story from the *Gzer mig*, there are at least two points to consider. The family of *dmangs rigs* (Skt. *śūdra*), in which Shenrab's mother was born, and the activities of the Brahmin, which are also reported in the *Rgya cher rol pa,* the Tibetan translation of the *Lalitavistara*.

The *dmangs rigs* (Skt. *varṇa*) or the caste system is rooted in Indian culture and does not apply to Tibet, although the system is mentioned in numerous early Tibetan translations of Indian Buddhist texts. These early Tibetan texts probably influenced the understanding of the social order among Bonpos. However, the author(s) of the *Mdo 'dus* describes the origin of the four castes differently from how we know it from Indian texts and Tibetan translations. In the following passage from the *Mdo 'dus*, the four castes are said to have originated from the four elements: earth, water, fire and wind.

> The nāgas were miraculously born from the four elements: earth, water, fire and wind. The royal caste born from the earth, the merchant caste from water, the Brahmin caste from fire, and the commoner from wind.[53]

Although this passage describes the four castes of *nāga* spirits, the variation indicates a different understanding of the four-caste system in Tibet. We may understand that this interpretation of the four castes also applies to the human realm, although the author(s) of the *Mdo 'dus* does not explicitly mention these four together anywhere in the text. The author(s) does however mention all four of the castes: royal caste (Tib. *rgyal rigs*), merchant caste (Tib. *rje'i rigs*), Brahmin caste (Tib. *bram ze'i rigs*) and commoner caste (Tib. *rmang rigs gdol ba*) on various other occasions and there they do apply to the human realm.[54]

The four-caste system has been elaborated further in later Bonpo works, and there it is more clearly connected to humans. As examples, I will present two relevant passages from the *Gzer mig* and the *Mdzod sgra 'grel*. The four castes are even organized in hierarchical order in accordance with their distinct natures. The *Gzer mig* describes that there are four human castes. People belonging to royal

---

[53] *Mdo 'dus*: 13, *'byung bar smon lam btab pa las/ sa chu me rlung 'byung bzhi las/ klu rnams rdzu 'phrul las la skyes/ sa la rgyal rig/ chu las rje'u rigs 'byung/ me las bram ze rlung las rmang rigs 'byung/ de tshe rigs bzhi klu chen brgyad/*

[54] *Mdo 'dus*: 40, 47-48 and 207.

caste (Tib. *rgyal rigs*, Skt. *kṣatriya*) are the greatest, those belonging to merchant caste (Tib. *rje'i rigs*, Skt. *vaiśya*) are the purest, those belonging to Brahmin caste (Tib. *bram ze'i rigs*, Skt. *brāhmaṇa*) are the noblest, and those belonging to commoner caste (Tib. *rmangs rigs*, Skt. *śūdra*) are the lowest.[55]

A very similar interpretation is given in the early twelfth-century Bon cosmological text, *Mdzod sgra 'grel*.[56] According to this text, the greatest are those who belong to the royal group. The noblest are those who belong to the merchant group, the purest are those who belong to the Brahmin group and the lowest are those who belong to the commoner group. However, in contrast to the categorization of castes in the *Gzer mig*, the status of the merchant caste and the Brahmin caste are switched in this Bon cosmological text. This suggests that there was no standard categorization of the four caste systems among the Bonpos. Since the system of the four castes is foreign to Tibetan culture, its categorization depends largely on how an author understands the four castes, or how he remembers the interpretation of the four-caste system, as it appears in relevant texts.

Shenrab's Ancestors of the Dmu Family

As discussed in the first section above, only two male ancestors are recorded in the list of Shenrab's paternal lineage that appears in the *Mdo 'dus*. The first one is Shenrab's grandfather, the king of *Dmu* named Lan kyis thems pa skas, and the second is his father, Rgyal bon thod dkar. Let me paraphrase here the relevant passage. There was a king of *Dmu*, named Lam gyi thems pa skas, in the Bar po so brgyad palace, in the land of 'Ol mo gling in Jambudvīpa. He consorted with the *Phya* Princess Ngang 'brang ma, a grand-daughter of Ma btsun 'phrul mo. Their son was Rgyal bon thod dkar, who married Rgyal bzhad ma with whom he had nine sons and one daughter. The youngest of them was Shenrab, who became the ruler of the kingdom.[57]

In later Bon sources, the paternal lineage list of Shenrab's ancestors was further extended to include three or more names and their female partners. The inclusion of these names demonstrates the way in which the life account of Shenrab continued to develop. I shall discuss that expansion providing examples from two earlier Bon sources (*'Dul ba gling grags* and *Lta ba khyung chen*) and from a

---

[55] *Gzer mig*: 14.

[56] *Mdzod sgra 'grel*: 28. This text is said to have been discovered by Gyer mi nyi 'od and Sma ston srid 'dzin in 1108 AD.

[57] *Mdo 'dus*: 41–42 and 55.

twentieth-century Bon history by Shar rdza.[58] The *'Dul ba gling grags* has three extra names in the list of Shenrab's ancestors:[59]

> From the heart of Gshen lha ['od dkar], a brown-reddish light arose and landed on the peak of the brown *Dmu* mountain. That [light] transformed into a human, who possessed a white light. He was called Dmu phyug skyir mzhon. His union with Lha za gangs grags[60] bore a son named Dmu btsan bzher gyi rgyal po. [The latter] consorted with a *Phya* lady called Rgyal mo and they had a son named Dmu btsan rgyal po. [The latter] and [his wife] Rim nam rgyal mo son was *Dmu* King Lan gyi them skas. The latter consorted with Lha za 'phrul mo and their son was *Dmu* King Thod dkar [the father of Shenrab Miwo].

As we will see in the following quotation, four names are added in the second source, *Lta ba khyung chen*, which is datable to approximately the twelfth century.[61]

> There was a king called Dmu phyug skye rab, who was a direct descendant of the nine *'then*.[62] In this lineage, the king who had the power to liberate [his people] was the *Dmu* King Lam pa phya dkar. The king who was enthroned in the place of [Lam pa phya dkar] was the *Dmu* King Btsan pa gyer chen. His successor was the King Thog rje btsan pa, and the latter's successor was *Dmu* King Lan gyi them skas. He [*Dmu* King Lan gyi them skas] was succeeded by Rgyal bon thod dkar, the one who supported all existence.

As seen in the two passages above, it is generally agreed that all the figures are kings and are descendants of the *Dmu* family. However, the lists are not consistent in the *'Dul ba gling grags* and *Lta ba khyung chen*. For instance, the second and the third names recorded in the *'Dul ba gling grags* are not given in the *Lta ba khyung chen*. Instead, the second and third names are different and a fourth name is also added in the *Lta ba khyung chen*. This inconsistency between the two texts is probably due to different sources.

---

58 Shar rdza 1985.

59 *'Dul ba gling grags*: 118–19. Another early Bon text *Rtsa rgyud nyi sgron* (79-80) also follows the *'Dul ba gling grags* list: *dmu phyug skyer zhon, dmu btsan bzher gyis rgyal po, dmu btsan rgyal ba, dmu rgyal lan gyi them skas, rgyal po thod dkar, ston pa gshen rab*.

60 This can be compared to Lha za gung drug, one of the six wives of Shenrab Miwo in the *Mdo 'dus*. Another comparable name Lha mo gang grags appears in the Bon cosmogonical text, the *Mdzod phug*.

61 *Lta ba khyung chen*: 4-6. According to the colophon, a person with the family name *rma* discovered the text *Lta ba khyung chen* in Sham po cave. He is identified as *rma* Shes rab blo ldan in a small note, but I assume that *rma* in the colophon refers to *rma* Shes rab seng ge (b. 12th-century), because many other Bon texts were discovered by him in the same cave.

62 The nine *'then* spirits are said to be descendants of a god.

Nevertheless, these early sources have influenced later Bonpo authors' presentations of the names of Shenrab's ancestors. This is evident from the early twentieth-century Bon history by Shar rdza. Shar rdza's history has received great deal of attention in Western academia as it has been translated into English by Karmay (1972). Shar rdza combined the two lists above and then extended it to create a well-known list of Shenrab's ancestors. As can be seen in the table below, Shar rdza gives eight names, including the father Rgyal bon thod dkar, and thus pushes the family lineage of Shenrab Miwo about eight generations back. Nam mkha'i nor bu[63] seems to consider this to be an authentic list of the *Dmu* kings, though he pushes the list of Shenrab's ancestors even further back, to thirteen generations.

Table: Ancestors of the *Dmu* Family

***Mdo 'dus:* 41–42**	***'Dul ba gling grags*: 118–119**	***Lta ba khyung chen:* 4–6**	**Shar rdza 1985: 17–18**
X	Dmu phyug skyir mzhon	King Dmu phyug skye rab	Dmu phyug skyer gzhon
X	X	*Dmu* King Lam pa phya dkar	*Dmu* King Lam pa phyag dkar
X	Dmu btsan bzher gyi rgyal po	X	Dmu bzher rgyal po
X	X	*Dmu* King Btsan pa gyer chen	*Dmu* King Btsan pa gyer chen
X	Dmu btsan rgyal po	X	Dmu rgyal btsan po
X	X	King Thog rje btsan pa	*Dmu* King Thog rje btsun pa
Dmu King Lam gyi thems pa skas	*Dmu* King Lan gyi them skas	*Dmu* King Lan gyi them skas	*Dmu* King Lan gyi them skas
Mi bon lha bon Rgyal bon thod dkar	*Dmu* King Thökar	Rgyal bon thod dkar	Rgyal bon thod dkar
Shenrab Miwo	[Shenrab Miwo]	[Shenrab Miwo]	Shenrab Miwo

[63] Nam mkha'i nor bu 1996: 48-49.

Nine Brothers or Nine Ways

In chapter twelve of the *Mdo 'dus*, Shenrab is described as the only son of Rgyal bon thod dkar,[64] but chapter six of the *Mdo 'dus* informs us that King Rgyal bon thod dkar and Queen Rgyal bzhad ma had nine sons and one daughter. This is to say that there were nine brothers and one sister in Shenrab's family. The three elder brothers were named Phya gshen, Snang gshen and Srid gshen, who became teachers of three heavenly realms (Tib. *lha gnas gsum*).[65] The three middle brothers, 'Phrul gshen, Mi/Ye gshen and Gtsug gshen, went to tame the *g.yen* spirits of the three spheres: *yar g.yen* (the spirits in the sky), *bar g.yen* (the spirits in the intermediate sphere) and *sa g.yen* (the spirits on the earth).[66] They became the masters of the *g.yen* spirits. The younger three brothers are Grub gshen, Grol gshen and Gshen rab (Shenrab). These three stayed to assist their mother Rgyal bzhad ma. The sister, Ngang ring ma, was married to *Phya* An tse lan med, who gave birth to a son named Yid kyi khye'u chung. The youngest of the nine brothers, Shenrab, became the ruler of the kingdom, married six wives, and had ten children.

This description of the nine brothers is nowhere to be found in the other accounts of Shenrab Miwo. What can be the possible origin of this description? In chapter seventeen of the *Mdo 'dus*, there is a list of the Nine Ways of Bon or the nine methods for teaching the doctrines of Bon.

Table: Nine Brothers vs. Nine ways[67]

The Nine ways (*Mdo 'dus* , ch. xvii)		The Nine brothers (*Mdo 'dus* , ch. vi)
1. *Phya gshen*	=	*Phya gshen* (B1)
2. *Snang gshen*	=	*Snang gshen* (B2)
3. *'Phrul gshen*	=	*'Phrul gshen* (B4)
4. *Srid gshen*	=	*Srid gshen* (B3)
5. *Dge snyen*	=?	*Gtsug gshen* [68] (B6)

[64] *Mdo 'dus*: 105, *rgyal bon thod dkar bu cig gshen rab 'di*

[65] I have not been able to identify these three heavenly realms.

[66] See the thirty-three *Bonpos* listed in Gurung 2011 (appendix 2), who were also responsible for subduing the spirits of these three spheres.

[67] For the nine ways of Bon, see Snellgrove 1967: 9-11.

6. *Drang srong*	=?	
7. *A dkar sngags rgyud*	=?	*Grub gshen*[69] (B7)
	=?	*Grol gshen* (B8)
8. *Ye gshen*	=	*Mi/Ye gshen* (B5)
9. *Rdzogs chen a ti ba'i sde*	=?	*Grol gshen* (B8)
	≠	*Gshen rab* (B9)

Among the names of the nine brothers listed in the table, five names (B1–B5) exactly match five of the nine Bon doctrinal teachings. Three names (B6–B8) are also related to four of the Nine Ways (5–7 and 9), but only from their contexts. The remaining name, Gshen rab (B9), does not match any of the Nine Ways, but since he is identified as Shenrab Miwo, he is, after all, the one who taught the Nine Ways. I would therefore argue that most of the names of the eight brothers of Shenrab Miwo as listed in the *Mdo 'dus* are derived from the doctrinal system of the Nine Ways of Bon. It is still a mystery why such an interpretation was made, given that it does not add any credibility to the life account of Shenrab. In fact, it contradicts the assertion in chapter twelve of the *Mdo 'dus* that Shenrab was an only son. However, considering the highly composite nature of this text, we probably should not expect consistency.

In regard to how the names of the nine brothers were constructed, a few other factors are also worth discussing. There are two names listed among the thirty-three *bonpos* in the *Mdo 'dus*[70] that are relevant here: *srin(srid) bon* and *phya bon*. According to Pelliot tibétain 1285, the term *phya* is used to describe a ritual (text) to be recited (Tib. *mo btab phya klags*),[71] so the priest who performs that ritual is known as *phya bon*. This document also informs us that there are two kinds of ritual priests: *bon* and *gshen*.[72] Since both the terms *bon* and *gshen* designate a ritual priest, the names *phya bon* and *srid bon* could

---

[68] Cf. *gtsug phud thob pa'i gshen*, the *gshen* who has removed his crown and renounced worldly life, thus becoming an ascetic monk. This name also corresponds to *gtsug gshen* of Gtsug gshen rgyal ba, otherwise known as Yid kyi khye'u chung.

[69] The Tibetan terms *grub* and *grol* have the connotations of "practicing' and "liberating," which belong to Tantric practices, while *sgrol (lam)* may also refer to the *Rdzogs chen* path, the ninth of the Nine Ways.

[70] *Mdo 'dus*: 53–54.

[71] The *phya* ritual is generally performed to avert misfortune and to ensure a long life. See *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo terms* (Nagano [*et al.*] 2008: 152).

[72] Dotson 2008: 43–44.

have been reinterpreted as *phya gshen* and *srid gshen* in the list of Shenrab's brothers in the *Mdo 'dus*.

Table: Some Other Examples of *bon* and *gshen* designations

Bon	***Gshen***	**Source**
'Phrul bon	*'Phrul gshen*	Stein: 1972, 230
Lha bon	*Lha gshen*	
Ye bon	*Ye gshen*	
Dur bon	*Dur gshen*	
'Ol bon	*'Ol gshen*	PT 1285

Conclusion

As discussed above, the way that the names of Shenrab's parents, ancestors, and other family members are presented in the *Mdo 'dus* can demonstrably be traced back to earlier sources. As for the name of Shenrab's father, we find two separate names in the Dunhuang documents: *Mi bon/ lha'i bon/ rgya bon brim tang* and *Thod dkar*. It is evident that the first two names, *mi bon* and *lha'i bon*, are kept unaltered, as in the original. A part of the third name, *rgya bon* was modified and put together with *thod dkar*, a name found in old Tibetan documents. The intermingling of the names derived from old Tibetan sources is further evidenced by other names found in the *Mdo 'dus*[73] and in the late thirteenth-century Tibetan historical text called *Rgya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa*. The relationship between *Mi bon lha bon* and *'Chi med gshen*, as father and son, is also recorded in this history. Since *'Chi med gshen* is none other than Shenrab, later Bonpo authors may have remembered him as the son of *Mi bon lha bon* Rgyal bon thod dkar, and therefore as a grandson of a *Dmu* king.

After the father's name was settled, a similar model was applied to construe the name of Shenrab's mother. In parallel to the word formations with *bon* in Shenrab's father's named (*mi bon*, *lha bon*, and so on), Shenrab's mother's name features word formations with *phyi*

[73] *Mdo 'dus*: 54.

(*mi phyi, lha phyi*), where the *bon* in Shenrab's father's name are replaced by *phyi* in his mother's name.

As I have shown above, only two of Shenrab's ancestors were listed in the *Mdo 'dus*, but this list was extended in later sources. By the time of Shar rdza's twentieth-century Bon history, this list had increased up to four times in length. It was extended even further by Nam mkha'i nor bu, who added several other names.

Finally, confusion between the names of the Bon doctrinal teachings and the personal names of Shenrab's brothers that appear in the *Mdo 'dus* raises questions about the construction of this extended group of nine brothers.

Based on this evidence, I conclude that the names found in the *Mdo 'dus* have several origins. These names help us to construe the hagiography of Shenrab, but they also serve to connect the *Mdo 'dus* to other available historical sources. The author(s) seems to have had recourse to many old sources and/or oral traditions when including these names. Although the names that are recorded in the *Mdo 'dus* are comparable to the names that appear in documents preserved in Dunhuang, they do not necessarily derive from those specific texts. This would in fact be very unlikely, because there is a gap between the date of sealing of the cave in the early eleventh century and the emergence of the *Mdo 'dus* in the late eleventh century (approximately). But I think that it is safe to conclude that older Tibetan documents or oral traditions, closely corresponding to what has been preserved in Dunhuang, were in fact available to Bonpo authors and also influenced later works, including the *Mdo 'dus* and the later thirteenth-century Tibetan history by Mkhas pa lde'u.

Bibliography

Tibetan Sources

'Dul ba gling grags. In *Sources for a History of Bon*, Bstan 'dzin rnam dag (ed.). Dolanji: Tibetan Bon Monastic Centre, 1972: 114–140.

Gzer mig. *Dus gsum gshen rab kyi byung khyungs dang mdzad pa'i rgyud 'dus pa rin po che gzer mig gi mdo*. Discovered by Drang rje btsun pa gser mig. Tsering Thar (ed.) based on Khro chen block prints. Qinghai: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1991.

Khyung 'bum gong ma. Unpublished manuscript, Obtained a copy from Ngawang Gyatso, 2006.

Lta ba khyung chen. *Lta ba khyung chen lding pa'i rgyud*. Discovered in Sham po by Rma (Shes rab seng ge? b. 12th century). In *Bon Bka' 'gyur* volume 149. Chengdu: Mongyal Lhasey Rinpoche and Shense Namkha Wangden, 1995–99.

Mdo 'dus Karmay. *Lha yi bon mdo 'dus pa rin po che'i rgyud ces bya ba*. Unpublished. Original manuscript is probably preserved in Dbal khyung monastery in Tibet.

Mdo 'dus Lhagyal. *G.yung drung lha yi bon mdo 'dus pa rin po che'i rgyud*. Also contain this title: *Mdo 'dus pa rin po che'i rgyud bzhugs pa'i dbu phyogs lags so*. Unpublished. Original manuscript is in the custody of Lha rje A rgya in Tibet.

Mdo 'dus. *Mdo 'dus pa rin po che'i rgyud thams cad mkhyen pa'i bka' tshad ma*, In *Bon bKa' 'gyur* volume 30. Chengdu: Mongyal Lhasey Rinpoche and Shense Namkha Wangden, 1995–99.

Mdzod sgra 'grel. *Bden pa bon gyi mdzod sgo sgra 'grel 'phrul gyi lde mig ces bya ba*. Sarnath: Yungdrung Bon Students' Committee, 1993.

Mkhas pa lde'u (13th century). *Rgya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa*. In *Gangs can rig mdzod* 3. Lhasa: Mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1987.

Nam mkha'i nor bu. *Zhang bod lo rgyus ti se'i 'od*. Qinghai: Bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1996.

Rgya cher rol pa. *'Phags pa rgya cher rol pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo.* In Derge Kanjur, *Mdo* section volume Kha (overall volume n° 46).

Rtsa rgyud nyi sgron. *Srid pa las kyi gting zlog gyi rtsa rgyud kun gsal nyi zer sgron ma*. Discovered by Bra bo sgom nyag (pre 1310). Delhi: G.yung drung rgyal mtshan, 1969 [Published also in the *Bon Bka' brten* volume 187.14].

Shar rdza bkra shis rgyal mtshan (1859–1935). *Legs bshad rin po che'i gter mdzod*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985.

Srid pa spyi mdos. *Srid pa spyi skong snang srid spyi mdos*. Unpublished (16 folios), a photocopy of a manuscript obtained from Menri Ponlob Thinlay Nyima's private collection, Dolanji.

Zhang, Yi Sun. (eds *et al.*). *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1996.

Secondary Sources

Blezer, Henk. "Ston pa Gshen rab: Six Marriages and Many more Funerals." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 15 (November), 2008: 421-479.

Blondeau, Anne-Marie. "The *Mkha'klong gsang mdos*: some questions on ritual structure and cosmology." In *New Horizons in Bon Studies*, Yasuhiko Nagano and Samten G. Karmay (eds). Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2000, 249–287.

Dotson, Brandon. "Complementarity and Opposition in Early Tibetan ritual." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 128 (1), 2008: 41- 67.

Gurung, Kalsang Norbu. "The Role of Confucius in Bon Sources: Kong tse and his Attribution in the Ritual of the Three-

Headed Black Man." In *Contemporary Visions in Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the First International Seminar of Young Tibetologists, London, 9–13 August 2007*, Brandon Dotson (ed. *et al.*). Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2009: 257–279.

—— *The Emergence of a Myth: In search of the origins of the life story of Shenrab Miwo, the founder of Bon*. PhD Dissertation, Leiden University, 2011.

—— (forthcoming *PIATS*). "History and antiquity of the *Mdo 'dus* in relation to *Mdo chen po bzhi*." In *Proceedings of the eleventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies,* Königswinter 2006 (Halle: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies).

Imaeda, Yoshiro [*et al.*]. *Tibetan Documents From Dunhuang*. Old Tibetan Documents Online Monograph Series Vol. I. Tokyo: Research Institute for Language and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2007.

Karmay, Samten G. *The Treasury of Good Sayings: A Tibetan History of Bon*, London Oriental Series, vol. 26. London: Oxford University press, 1972. (Reprint: Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2001).

—— *A Catalogue of Bonpo Publications*. Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1977.

—— "The origin myths of the first king of Tibet as revealed in the *Can-lnga*." In *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Sixth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes 1992*, Per Kvaerne (ed.). Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994 (1): 408-429.

—— *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998.

Lalou, Marcelle. "Fiefs, poisons et guérisseurs." *Journal Asiatique* 246, 1958: 157-201.

Nagano, Yasuhiko and Samten G. Karmay (eds). *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms*. *Bon Studies 11*. Compiled by Pasar Tsultrim Tenzin, Changru Tritsuk Namdak Nyima and Gatsa Lodroe Rabsal, and translated by Heather Stoddard. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2008.

Rong Xinjiang. "The Nature of the Dunhuang Library Cave and the Reasons for its Sealing." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 11, 2000: 247-275.

Smith E. Gene. *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001.

Snellgrove, David L. *The Nine Ways of Bon,* London Oriental Series vol.18. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Stein, Rolf A. "The indigenous religion and the bon-po in the Dunhuang manuscripts." In *The History of Tibet*, Volume I, Alex Mckay (ed.). Translated into English from French by Peter Richardus. London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2003: 584-614.

Vitali, Roberto. *The Kingdoms of Gu ge Pu hrang: According to mnga' ris rgyal rabs by Gu ge mkhan chen ngag dbang grags pa*. Dharamsala: *Tho ling dpal dpe med lhun gyis grub pa'i gtsug lag khang lo 1000 'khor ba'i rjes dran mdzad sgo'i go sgrig tshogs chung*, 1996.

❖