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Etudes rDzogs chen — volume I
sous la direction de Jean-Luc Achard



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Préface

par Jean-Luc Achard
(CNRS, CRCAO)

Les études rDzogs chen (“Grande Perfection”) ont bénéficié de formidables développements au cours des vingt dernières années. L'une des raisons expliquant cette situation nouvelle repose sans nul doute sur l'accès relativement aisé à des collections entières de textes de la Grande Perfection sur le site du TBRC, grâce à la générosité de Gene Smith et maintenant de Jeff Wallman.¹ Toutefois, malgré ces progrès, les origines du rDzogs chen lui-même restent encore largement nimbées d'un voile de mystère et même les sources les plus anciennes ne s'avèrent guère d'une grande aide pour l'historien, notamment parce qu'elles nous présentent, au moins pour le *Man ngag sde*, un système étonnamment bien structuré à date ancienne, avec un lexique particulièrement pertinent entre ses cycles principaux. On peut s'interroger sur le rôle joué par la transmission orale (*snyan brgyud*) dans la codification de la littérature rdzogs chen et tenter de comprendre dans quelle mesure ce qui est écrit (et, parfois même datable) à haute antiquité reflète (à l'image d'un iceberg) ce qui est effectivement enseigné oralement au début de la période historique (10e siècle). En laissant temporairement de côté l'origine de la classification en trois sections (*sde gsum*) des enseignements de la Grande Perfection,² il est intéressant de rappeler que la littérature elle-même présente les trois Sections (*sde gsum*) du rDzogs chen comme étant organisées en fonction d'une approche extérieure (*phyi*), d'une approche intérieure (*nang*), et d'une approche secrète (*gsang ba*). Etant donné la nature de ces enseignements — relevant des Tantras Supérieurs et des arcanes

¹ Voir <http://www.tbrc.org>. Le Tibetan Buddhist Research Center a été récemment rebaptisé BDRC (Buddhist Digital Research Center), mais l'intitulé de son url est resté jusqu'à présent identique.

² Cette classification est traditionnellement attribuée à Mañjuśrīmitra (Jam dpal bshes gnyen, ca. 7-8e s.), disciple principal du fondateur humain du rDzogs chen, dGa' rab rdo rje (au moins pour la tradition bouddhique, le rDzogs chen étant également enseigné dans la tradition bon po). Si l'existence historique de Mañjuśrīmitra n'est pas véritablement contestée, celle de dGa' rab rdo rje reste à démontrer. Pour certains, la classification en trois Sections semble apparaître dans le *Bi ma snying thig*, alors qu'elle se trouve *inter alia* dans le *sGra thal 'gyur* et, bien évidemment, dans le *Commentaire* de ce Tantra, lesquels précèdent en théorie très légèrement la révélation du *Bi ma snying thig*.

qui leurs sont associés³ —, il n'est pas irraisonnable de suggérer que les enseignements appartenant à l'approche secrète aient été transmis oralement jusqu'à une date donnée, ce qui pourrait expliquer la maigreur des éléments démontrant leur existence à l'époque royale.⁴

L'image que la recherche actuelle nous donne du rDzogs chen est au mieux fragmentaire pour ce qui est de son origine et de ses premiers développements au Tibet. En revanche, la tradition elle-même fournit des éléments clairs — évidemment pas historiques — relativement à ce qu'est le rDzogs chen lui-même. On peut ainsi le définir comme :

1. le fruit de l'Anuyoga,⁵
2. l'état naturel de l'esprit,⁶ et
3. le système ou la tradition du rDzogs chen proprement dit.

[1]. L'Anuyoga (*rjes su rnal 'byor*) est une voie tantrique non graduelle qui correspond au 8e des Neuf Véhicules (*theg pa rim dgu*) reconnu par la tradition rNying ma pa. Il relève des Tantras parce qu'il repose sur les principes des deux Phases (*rim gnyis*) et plus précisément ceux de la Phase de Perfection (*rdzogs rim*). Il est présenté comme non graduel (*rim gyis ma yin pa*) parce que sa pratique ne dépend pas de la progression des trois recueils (*ting 'dzin gsum*), comme par exemple dans le Mahāyoga, dans le sens où la visualisation tantrique centrale (dans une sādhana par exemple) est élaborée “dans la perfection d'une évocation instantanée” (*skad cig dran rdzogs su*), sans étape graduelle. Son fruit est défini comme “la Grande Perfection”, c'est-à-dire, dans ce contexte limité à l'Anuyoga, l'état naturel de l'esprit obtenu par le biais d'une approche purement tantrique.

[2]. En tant qu'état naturel de l'esprit (*sems kyi gnas lugs*), le rDzogs chen est l'état de la Vacuité-Clarté indifférenciée (*stong gsal dbyer med*), autrement dit l'état de la Pureté Primordiale (*ka dag*) et de la Spontanéité (*lhun grub*) qui caractérisent la véritable nature de l'esprit de l'individu. Au niveau de la Base (*gzhi*), cet état s'exprime comme la Vacuité-Clarté, ainsi qu'on vient de le préciser. Au niveau de la Voie

³ Comme les consécration (*dbang*), les préceptes secrets (*gsang ba'i man ngag*), etc.

⁴ Cette maigreur n'implique toutefois pas une absence totale d'éléments. J'en ai décrit certains dans *L'Essence Perlée du Secret*, *passim*.

⁵ Voir M. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, p. 105.

⁶ Lorsque l'on parle d'état naturel (*gnas lugs*) dans le contexte du rDzogs chen, on fait référence à la manière (*lugs*) dont l'esprit s'exprime (*gnas*, lit. “demeure”) antérieurement à l'égarement (*khrol pa*) dans l'existence conditionnée. Cet état s'exprime en fonction de trois “moments” : au niveau de la Base (*gzhi*, en référence à son expression originelle ou théorique), au niveau de la Voie (*lam*, en référence à son expression au cours de la pratique spirituelle, tout au long de la vie, ou tout au moins jusqu'à la libération [*gröl ba*]), et au niveau du Fruit (*'bras bu*) ou la nature originelle de l'esprit est “retrouvée” dans toute sa virginité primordiale.

(*lam*), les modalités de cette Vacuité-Clarté que l'adepte expérimente grâce aux points-clefs spécifiques du Franchissement du Pic (*thod rgal*) par exemple, s'expriment en tant qu'Espace (*dbyings*) et Discernement (*rig*). Enfin, au niveau du Fruit (*'bras bu*), ces mêmes modalités manifestent leur expression ultime en tant que Corps (*sku*) et Sagesse (*ye shes*).

[3]. En tant que tradition spirituelle et littéraire, le rDzogs chen est essentiellement décrit dans un ensemble de textes répartis en trois catégories : 1. la Section de l'Esprit (*sems sde*) qui met l'accent sur la Clarté (*gsal ba*), 2. la Section de l'Espace Abyssal (*klong sde*) qui met l'accent sur la Vacuité (*stong pa*), et 3. la Section des Préceptes (*man ngag sde*) qui, elle, met l'accent sur l'indifférenciation de la Clarté et de la Vacuité.⁷

D'un point de vue purement doctrinal, certains maîtres ont présenté la Vue (*lta ba*) du rDzogs chen comme étant identique à celle du Madhyamaka, affirmation qui doit nous apparaître comme éminemment teintée d'une volonté politique d'assimilation et de réduction des différences doctrinales entre écoles.⁸ Ne serait-ce que par son lexique, le rDzogs chen diffère totalement du Madhyamaka dont les représentations fondamentales reposent sur l'intellect (*blo*) et le *sems* (l'esprit conceptuel, dualiste et en proie aux passions), alors que le rDzogs chen repose dès le départ sur la connaissance dite du Discernement (*rig pa*), laquelle est indépendante de toute représentation discursive, s'avère non duelle et vierge de toute passion.⁹ Au mieux, le rDzogs chen a hérité du Yogācāra certaines de ses représentations relatives à la conscience — comme le système des huit consciences qui n'est pas reconnu par le Madhyamaka.¹⁰ Le fait est, qu'à la différence de ce dernier, les théories du rDzogs chen (à commencer par ses représentations cosmologiques, etc.) reposent entièrement sur l'expérience directe de la Vacuité-Clarté et non pas sur les spéculations de l'intellect.

⁷ Ces Sections correspondent respectivement aux “approches” extérieure (*phyi*), intérieure (*nang*) et secrète (*gsang*) mentionnées *supra*.

⁸ C'est une sorte de *leitmotiv* que l'on voit notamment dans la jeune génération des *mkhan po rnying ma pa* contemporains, notamment chez ceux qui suivent la tradition de Mi pham (1846–1912). La même affirmation mise dans la bouche de Klong chen pa (1308–1364) est plus problématique étant donné que celui-ci a été parfois contraint d'adapter son discours en fonction de son audience, pour des raisons de sécurité et de politique qu'il est impossible de synthétiser ici (cf. les tentatives d'assassinat commanditées par Tai Si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan).

⁹ Je me limite ici au seul lexique. S'il fallait s'attarder sur les pratiques yogiques avancées, on ne retrouverait aucun pont véritablement convaincant entre les deux traditions.

¹⁰ Le Madhyamaka ne reconnaît que six consciences, celles des cinq sens et celle du mental.

A ce titre, les comparaisons entre le rDzogs chen et les autres traditions bouddhiques, élaborées dans le monde académique, sont de plus en plus passionnantes, à mesure que les recherches s'approfondissent à la fois sur la pensée, la littérature et les pratiques de la Grande Perfection. Sur ce thème, on pourra lire ici un article de Sam van Schaik consacré aux rapports entre certains textes tardifs du rDzogs chen et le système du Yogācāra (p. 9-31).

L'analyse de la terminologie employée dans les textes de la Grande Perfection progresse également à grands pas, avec comme exemple ici l'étude de Morten Ostensen sur la signification de l'expression *Sems phyogs* à date ancienne (p. 32-49).

Cette expression est supposée s'appliquer à tout le rDzogs chen, selon certains, ou bien au seul système de la Section de l'Esprit (*sems sde*), selon d'autres. Les recherches de Manuel Lopez sur les textes-racines de cette Section, incluses dans le présent numéro, présentent une analyse exhaustive des classifications de ces textes (p. 50-94).

Le groupe suivant de trois articles, par Jay Valentine (p. 95-133), Katarina Turpeinen (p. 134-195), et Stéphane Arguillère (p. 195-254), se focalise autour d'un cycle important de la Section des Préceptes intitulé *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal*, chacun dans un domaine particulier dont le cycle est le point de convergence.

Enfin, Jacob Dalton et Khenpo Yeshe (p. 255-272) abordent un ensemble de notions importantes — celles des “perfections” (*phun sum tshogs pa*) — telles qu'elles sont présentées dans le *Tshig don bcu gcig pa* de mKhas pa Nyi ma 'bum (1158-1213), l'un des premiers commentateurs des enseignements des *sNying thig*, si ce n'est le premier (historiquement parlant).

Fondamentalement, ce qui manque maintenant à la recherche académique sur le rDzogs chen, c'est la prise en compte de la contrepartie “bon po” de cette tradition. En effet, les cas d'intertextualité entre les rNying ma pas et les Bon pos sont extrêmement abondants et témoignent d'interactions entre deux courants religieux qui édifient leur propre canon ou ensemble de textes canoniques à une époque où de nouvelles traditions commencent de se développer au Tibet, parfois en concurrence ou en conflit dogmatique avec les représentations mêmes du rDzogs chen (qu'il soit rnying ma pa ou bon po).



Adaptations and Transformations of Indian Yogācāra in Tibetan rDzogs chen

Sam van Schaik
(The British Library)

The doctrines of the Yogācāra or Vijñānavāda movement, especially as developed in the works of Vasubandhu and Asaṅga, had a deep and lasting influence on all the schools of Tibetan Buddhism. In the classical Tibetan hierarchies of philosophical views, Yogācāra is generally placed below Madhyamaka; however, in the Tibetan 'practice traditions' of rDzogs chen and Mahāmudrā, this hierarchy is ignored or inverted, and the most important models are drawn from Yogācāra. The influence of Yogācāra on rDzogs chen, especially in its treatment of the psychological makeup of samsaric consciousness, has often been noted.¹ This paper looks at the question in a little more detail, taking as a starting point an intriguing statement made by Samten Karmay in his in his seminal work on rDzogs chen, *The Great Perfection*:

The *Kun tu bzang po ye shes klong gi rgyud* by 'Jigs med gling pa is perhaps the best example of a work on rDzogs-chen philosophy in which the fusion of the doctrine of the Vijñānavāda and rDzogs-chen reaches its most characteristic elaboration.²

The *Kun tu bzang po ye shes klong gi rgyud*, which can be translated as the *Tantra of the Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*, is the most important rDzogs chen tantra of the *Klong chen snying thig*, a *gter ma* collection written down by 'Jigs med gling pa (1730–98) in the latter half of the eighteenth century.³ As with all of the rDzogs chen texts in this collection, it is classed as *sNying thig* ('heart essence'), a category

¹ The most thorough discussion of the rDzogs chen development of Yogācāra thought is Waldron and Germano 2006. See also Karmay 1988: 180-82; and Guenther 1989: 134-38.

² Karmay 1988: 180-81.

³ On the life of 'Jigs med gling pa and the revelation of the *Klong chen snying thig*, see Goodman 1992, Thondup 1996, Gyatso 1998, and van Schaik 2004a. The *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* is one of eleven rDzogs chen texts in the *Klong chen snying thig*. It and the other rDzogs chen texts of the *Klong chen snying thig* have been translated in van Schaik 2004a.

of text and practice closely associated, and often synonymous with the Instruction Class (*man ngag sde*).⁴

The foremost exponent of the Instruction Class was Klong chen rab 'byams, usually known simply as Klong chen pa (1308–63); in his most methodical and elaborate works on rDzogs chen, the vast *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle* and the more concise *Treasury of Meanings*, Klong chen pa presented a systematisation of the doctrines of the Instruction Class, based largely on the fundamental scriptures of the genre, the *Seventeen Tantras*. Although some of the rDzogs chen texts in the *Klong chen snying thig* are presented by 'Jigs med gling pa as essentialisations of Klong chen pa's work, the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* is not; rather it is a *gter ma* text said to have been 'set down' by Vimalamitra in the eighth century.⁵

Whatever one thinks of the nature of *gter ma* texts, there is no doubt that the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* is quite different from the rDzogs chen texts for which 'Jigs med gling pa claimed authorship in the more conventional sense. The first chapter of the tantra takes on a key theme of Instruction Class rDzogs chen: how awareness develops from the basis of mind into either samsaric consciousness or enlightened awareness. The way that it presents this topic differs in some important respects from Klong chen pa's systematised version of rDzogs chen, and indeed from 'Jigs med gling pa's own major philosophical work, the *Treasury of Qualities* and its autocommentary, which follow Klong chen pa closely.⁶ One could argue that the truly characteristic rDzogs chen elaboration of Yogācāra is found in Klong chen pa's innovative works, and those in which 'Jigs med gling pa followed Klong chen pa's lead.

What is interesting about the presentation of the nature of consciousness in the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* is how much closer it is to the classical form of Indian Yogācāra than to Klong chen pa's elaborations of the same themes. The Yogācāra was not, of course, a homogeneous set of doctrines, and the comparisons made here are based on key texts within the multiplicity of the Yogācāra school's discourse.⁷ Nevertheless, I will try to show the ways in

⁴ Karmay (1988: 210) and Germano (1994: 269) argue that the basic texts of the Instruction Class, i.e. the *Bi ma snying thig* and *Seventeen Tantras*, were written in the eleventh century. The tradition believes them to be eight-century translations from Indian scriptures.

⁵ See van Schaik 2004a: 42.

⁶ It is the last three of the thirteen chapters of the *Treasury of Qualities* which deal with rDzogs chen, and the commentary on these chapters is contained in the second book of the autocommentary, called *Chariot of Omniscience*.

⁷ Other doctrines associated with the Yogācāra have some presence in rDzogs chen. The idea of a self-referential awareness (*rang rig*, skt. *svasaṃvedana*) is present, though not in a philosophically elaborate form. Paul Williams (1998) has

which the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* tends to steer closer to Indic Yogācāra models than those of Klong chen pa.

The basis of all

The first chapter of the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* opens with a question from the bodhisattva Vajra Realisation, setting out the framework of the discussion which follows:

Again and again you have given the teaching on separating the phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa through distinguishing the *ālaya* and great wisdom. What is the difference between the characteristics of these two?

The Sanskrit term *ālaya* is translated into Tibetan as *kun gzhi*, which literally means ‘universal ground.’ In the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*, the *ālaya* is clearly stated to be a saṃsāric phenomenon, in opposition to nirvanic wisdom (*ye shes*, Skt. *jñāna*). This distinction places the text firmly in the Instruction Class tradition. In the other classes of rDzogs chen literature the term *ālaya* is often used to signify the ground of all existence, both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

So the opening question of the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* indicates that in this discussion the distinction between *ālaya* and wisdom is a given. The phrase ‘again and again you have spoken’ alludes to the fact that there is a standard type of Instruction Class discourse which defines and polarises *ālaya* from the enlightened state, usually signified by *ye shes*, *rig pa* or *chos sku* (Skt. *dharmakāya*). Detailed discussions of this topic are to be found in Klong chen pa’s *Treasury of Words and Meanings* and ‘Jigs med gling pa’s own *Chariot of Omniscience*.⁹ The following is from one of the *Seventeen Tantras*:

discussed a Nyingma defense of *rang rig*, but this defense is not made in the context of rDzogs chen. The ‘mind only’ theory has a complex history within rDzogs chen: the assertion that ‘all phenomena are mind’ is common in the Mind Series literature, but much more rare in the Instruction Class, and is in fact explicitly rejected in certain passages in the *Seventeen Tantras* and by Klong chen pa in *Treasury of Words and Meanings* 114.5-115.6. In brief, Klong chen pa’s position is that perceptions (*snang ba*) can be called ‘mind’ (*sems*) but to call the object of perception (*snang yul*) ‘mind’ is an error. ‘Jigs med gling pa takes the same position in *Treasury of Qualities* 101.3. On criticisms of Yogācāra in rDzogs chen, see van Schaik 2004a: 78–84.

⁸ *kun gzhi dang ye shes chen po’i khyad par las ’khor ba dang mya ngan las ’das pa’i chos tha dad du rgyab gyes par ston pa khyod kyis yang nas yang du bka’ stsal la / de dang de’i mtshan nyid so sor phye ba ni gang / (AC III 75.3).*

⁹ *Treasury of Words and Meanings* 103.4ff, *Chariot of Omniscience* 648.3ff.

Kyé, Sems-dpa' Chen-po! The location of mind is the *ālaya*. If you ask why, it is because the *ālaya* amasses all the objects of thought and is awareness [operating] as mind. The location of wisdom is the *dharmakāya*. If you ask why, it is because the *dharmakāya* is not under the power of all the concepts of consciousness and is without the awareness that apprehends objects as distinct.¹⁰

There are possible sources for this type of discourse in the Yogācāra, which I will come to later. Returning to the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*, Samantabhadra's answer to Vajra Realisation's question focuses on the nature of the *ālaya*:

The *ālaya* is a state which is like the vast general ground of all saṃsāra and nirvāṇa having fallen asleep and not being awake to the sense objects.¹¹

The analogy of sleep is used here to point to the relationship between the *ālaya* and its counterpart the 'general ground' (*spyi gzhi*). This general ground, which is often simply called 'the ground' (*gzhi*) in Instruction Class texts, is completely pure and undefiled, equivalent to the *dharmakāya* itself. The three aspects of this pure ground are essence (*ngo bo*), nature (*rang bzhin*) and compassion (*thugs rje*); the usual attributes of the three are the emptiness (*stong pa*) of the essence, the luminosity (*gsal ba*) of the nature, and the dynamism (*rtsal*) or unobstructedness (*dgags med*) of compassion.¹²

The image of the general ground falling asleep differs from the way in which the coming-to-being of the *ālaya* is presented in Klong chen pa's Instruction Class texts, where the process is explained as a misapprehension (*ma shes pa*), rather than a blank unawareness.¹³ For Klong chen pa, the nature of this misapprehension is that the ground's manifestation (*gzhi snang*) is not recognised as intrinsic to the ground itself. From the *Treasury of Words and Meanings*:

¹⁰ *kye sems dpa' chen po / sems kyi gnas ni kun gzhi yin no / de ci'i phyir zhe na / kun gzhi ni bsam pa'i yul thams cad sdud cing / sems su shes pa'i phyir ro / ye shes kyi gnas ni chos kyi sku yin no / de ci'i phyir na / chos sku ni dran rtoḡ thams cad mi mnga' zhing / yul tha dad du 'dzin nga'i shes pa med pa'i phyir ro / (Klong drug, cited in Chariot of Omniscience 649.4).*

¹¹ *kun gzhi ni 'khor ba dang mya ngan las 'das pa thams cad kyi spyi gzhi chen po dbang po yul la ma sad pa gnyid du song ba'i skabs lta bu ste / (AC III p. 76.1).*

¹² See van Schaik 2004a: 52–54.

¹³ For a discussion focussed specifically on Klong chen pa's presentation of these topics and his sources in the *Seventeen Tantras* see Achard 2001 and 2005.

Delusion comes from the ground's manifestation not being recognised as intrinsic.¹⁴

The ground's manifestation is apprehended as an 'other' (*gzhan*), and consequently there is a subject/object-oriented awareness (*shes pa gzung 'dzin*).¹⁵ These Instruction Class texts present the scenario, then, of the ground's manifestation being a non-dual awareness (i.e. *shes pa* prior to subject/object perception) which slips into dualistic apprehension by mistaking appearances which are intrinsic to it as something 'other'. Attendant upon this comes the concept that this awareness is in itself a discrete 'self'. Then, with awareness operating with the conceptual framework of subject and object, the basis for deluded perception is in place.

In the *Treasury of Words and Meanings* Klong chen pa enumerates four conditions in which this process is encapsulated:

- (i) Not recognising the ground's manifestation as coming forth from oneself is the causal condition.
- (ii) The ground's manifestation arising as an object is the objective condition.
- (iii) Apprehending 'I' and 'mine' is the egoic condition.
- (iv) The above three being present at the same time is the fourth, the immediate condition of straying.¹⁶

Klong chen pa adds that the cause of straying is nescience, and the condition is the manifestation the objective realm (*yul*) in awareness. The process is this: an awareness of the ground manifests from the ground itself, and in this slight movement, the one who strays is bound by a spreading dualistic awareness. The term 'slight movement' (*'gyu ba*) implies that, though the consequence of the move from enlightened awareness to delusion is the opposed states of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra, the initial move is only a minor realignment of awareness.¹⁷

¹⁴ *gzhi snang de rang ngo ma shes pa'i cha las 'khrul te* (*Treasury of Words and Meanings* 40.3).

¹⁵ *Treasury of Words and Meanings* 41.1-3.

¹⁶ *de yang gzhi snang de rang las byung bar ma shes pas rgyu'i rkyen / de nyid yul du shar bas dmigs pa'i rkyen / bdag dang bdag gir bzung bas bdag po'i rkyen / de gsum dus mtshungs pas de ma thag pa'i rkyen bzhir 'khrul pa ni* (*Treasury of Words and Meanings* 43.3-4). rTse le sNa tshogs rang grol (b.1608) enumerates only three conditions in his *Nyi ma'i snying po* (Guenther 1992: 105).

¹⁷ Guenther 1992: 102.

This discussion of the initial straying, so fundamental to Klong chen pa's Instruction Class philosophical texts,¹⁸ is completely absent in the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*, where the metaphor of falling asleep stands in its place. Yet the sleep metaphor has its own complexity, with two possible nuances to its interpretation. First, there is the old Buddhist analogy: saṃsāra is like a dream and a buddha is one who has woken up from the dream. In the same way, the *ālaya* is like sleep because it is on the side of delusion, and all appearances thereof are like dreams. This is the way 'Jigs med gling pa uses the metaphor in his *Chariot of Omniscience*:

Because the nature of the *ālaya*, like falling asleep, is the basis of the arising of all kinds of deluded appearances and dreams, it is important to wake up from it.¹⁹

The other possible use of the sleep metaphor is to illustrate the neutral, non-engaged nature of the *ālaya*, in contrast not to the nirvanic state, but to the activity of the further manifestations of saṃsāric consciousness, which I will come to shortly. Here 'sleep' carries the sense of unconsciousness rather than dreaming. This association with unconsciousness is characteristic of the *ālaya* from its earliest appearance in the sutras; see for example the following passage from the *Yogācārabhūmi*:

When [a person] has entered [absorption into] cessation (*nirodha* (*samāpatti*)), his mind and mental [factors] have ceased; how then is it that his mind (*viñāna*) has not withdrawn from his body? – [Answer: No problem;] for [in] his [case] *alayaviñāna* as not ceased [to be present] in the material sense-faculties, which are unimpaired; [*ālaya-viñāna*] which comprises the seeds of the forthcoming [forms of] mind (*pravṛttiviñāna*), so that they are bound to re-arise in the future.²⁰

Both senses of the sleep metaphor are present in the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*, if not explicitly distinguished. This is shown by the appearance of the metaphor in the descriptions of the process of enlightenment and the development of saṃsāric consciousness.

¹⁸ It is also present in the *Seventeen Tantras* and in rTse le sNa tshogs rang grol's *Nyi ma'i snying po* (Guenther 1992: 99ff).

¹⁹ *kun gzhi'i rang bzhin ni gnyid du song ba lta bu 'khrul snang dang mi lam sna tshogs pa 'char ba'i rten du gyur pas na de las sad par byed dgos te /* (*Chariot of Omniscience* 650.3).

²⁰ *Yogācārabhūmi* 78b5; translation in Schmithausen 1987: 18.

The *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* places the *ālaya* in an ambiguous middle state, transitional between samsaric and nirvanic realms:

Latently existent in [the *ālaya*], non-manifest in a way unfathomable by thought, there is: purity which is the gate to wisdom and the path to nirvāṇa, also the visions of the great *thig le* and the lake-like dharma of the fruit; and impurity in accord with saṃsāra, also karma, suffering and the multitude of discursive thoughts. Therefore it is not anything such as sentient beings or buddhas, the wisdom of the path or mind itself; it is the container of them all (*kun*) or it becomes the ground (*gzhi*) of their arising. Therefore it is called *ālaya* (*kun gzhi*).²¹

Again, there is a difference of emphasis here between the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* and many other Instruction Class texts. The statement that the *ālaya* cannot be identified with nirvanic phenomena ('buddhas' and 'mind-itself') is normal in the Instruction Class context, but the same assertion regarding samsaric phenomena ('sentient beings') is surprising. By contrast, Klong chen pa's Instruction Class texts, and 'Jigs med gling pa's own *Chariot of Omniscience*, explicitly identify the *ālaya* with saṃsāra, and draw on the *Seventeen Tantras* as authority for this. The following verse from one of the *Seventeen Tantras* is cited in the *Chariot of Omniscience*:

In the grasping, conceptualising *ālaya*
The various appearances are polluted by straying awareness.
The *ālaya* is nescience and substantial things (*dnegos po*);
It is named as such because it is the ground of all.²²

A strong definition of this type does not appear in the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*. Yet we cannot assume that this text is simply reverting to the more general use of *ālaya*. For one thing there is the bodhisattva Vajra Realisation's original question, which makes it clear that *ālaya* is held to be a fundamentally different entity from wisdom (*ye shes*); and for another, there is the following statement:

²¹ *sems med pa'i gnas skabs lnga'i dus na'ang sems dang sems nyid kyi rten dang brten pa'i rang bzhin bag la nyal du gnas so / ... de'i phyir 'di'i go na dag pa ye shes kyi sgo mya ngan las 'das pa'i lam dang / thig le chen po'i snang ba dang / 'bras bu'i chos rgya mtsho lta bu dang / ma dag pa 'khor ba'i sgo las dang / nyon mongs pa dang / rnam par rtog pa tshogs bsam gyis mi khab pa ltar mi mngon pa bag nyal gyi tshul du yod pas na / sems can dang / sangs rgyas dang / lam gyi ye shes dang / sems nyid gang yang ma yin te kun gyi snod dam / 'char gzhi gyur pas na / kun gzhi zhes bya'o / (AC III 76.2).*

²² *kun gzhi rnam rtog 'dzin pa la / sna tshogs 'khrul pa'i shes pas bsalad / kun gzhi ma rig dnegos po yin / kun gyi gzhi zhes de la bya (Rig pa rang shar, cited in Chariot of Omniscience 648.6).*

The teaching of some lower vehicles that this [*ālaya*] is the buddha nature is for the sake of guiding temporarily the childish ones who are eaten by doubts regarding the stainless *dharmatā*.²³

This is a clear rejection of a tendency in certain texts (notably the *Lankāvatāra sūtra*),²⁴ to identify *ālaya* with the buddha nature (*de gshegs snying po*, skt. *tathāgatarbha*). If the *ālaya* was the signifier both of samsaric and nirvanic for the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* then there would be no particular objection to identifying it with the buddha nature.²⁵ These two passages indicate that in *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* the *ālaya* cannot directly signify the nirvanic, yet it still does not seem to be explicitly linked with *saṃsāra*.

A solution to this apparent paradox is implicit in the text in the suggestion that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are *potentially* present in the *ālaya*.²⁶ The passage above states that the pure aspect is a 'gate' (*sgo*) to wisdom and a 'path' (*lam*) to *nirvāṇa*, and in the same way the impure aspect is a 'gate' to *saṃsāra*, which indicates that the *ālaya* is defined as holding the potential for either. This appears to mean that if the suggested potentiality for purity is realised, it is no longer called the *ālaya*; rather, the ground (*gzhi*), wisdom (*ye shes*) or an equivalent term is used. If the potential for impurity is realised, then *ālaya* (under that name) becomes the basis of samsaric consciousness.²⁷ This gives the *ālaya* the role of occupying a middle ground

²³ 'og ma rnams su 'di nyid bde gshegs snying po'i rang bzhin du bstan pa ni / re zhig chos 'byings dri med la tshom za ba'i byis pa rnam drang ba'i slad du'o / (AC III p. 76.3). Note that Guenther's reading of this makes it an assertion that the teaching of the *tathāgatarbha* is itself provisional. In view of the unconditional use of the term *bde gshegs snying po* in Chapter 5 of the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* (AC III p. 89.6), Guenther's reading seems unlikely.

²⁴ Eg. from the *Lankāvatārasūtra*: 'Mahāmati, if you say there is no Tathāgata-garbha known as Ālayavijñāna, there will be neither the arising nor the disappearing [of an external world of multiplicities] in the absence of the Tathāgata-garbha known as Ālayavijñāna.' (Suzuki 1932: 192). See also Brown 1996: 179-94.

²⁵ Chapter 3 of *Treasury of Words and Meanings* (79.6ff) is devoted to the the buddha nature, which is identified with wisdom.

²⁶ This interpretation may have precedents in Indian Yogācārā material. For example, Brian Brown (1989: 270) quotes the following passage from the *Mahāyānaśraddhotpāda*: 'This Consciousness has two aspects which embrace all states of existence. They are (1) the aspect of enlightenment, and (2) the aspect of non-enlightenment.'

²⁷ Germano's commentary (1992: 633) on Klong chen pa's explanation of why *ye shes* is sometimes identified with *ālaya* (in *Zab mo yang tig* II, p. 267.3ff among other sources) indicates the same position:

[Klong chen pa] indicates that our current state is called 'universal ground' [*ālaya*] because in our present state of stained neurosis, awareness continues to be within *saṃsāra*, while the potential for these states to be reversed is perpetually

between samsaric and nirvanic states, merely containing the potential for either.

There is no question that the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* is ambiguous where Klong chen pa, and 'Jigs med gling pa himself in his *Treasury of Qualities* and autocommentary, strove to remove all ambiguity. Yet in this ambiguity, it is closer to the core texts of Indian Yogācāra. For example, in Vasubandhu's *Triṃśikā* the dharmakāya is identical with the transformed *ālaya*:

From abandoning the two faults the reversal of the *ālaya* comes about.

That alone is the *dhātu*, inconceivable, auspicious, unchanging, blissful,

The liberation-body which is also called the *dharmakāya* of the Great Sage.²⁸

Here we see the model for the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*, in which there is a single base undergoing a transformation. Thus, insofar as the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* does seem to employ a strategy in reconciling the samsaric and nirvanic aspects of the basis, it is the strategy found in classical Yogācāra literature, not the distinction between a wholly samsaric *ālaya* and the nirvanic ground preferred by Klong chen pa in his Instruction Class works.

How saṃsāra and nirvāṇa manifest

The *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* goes on to describe the way in which the potentials for saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are realised. Here we return to the metaphor of sleep; the two opposed processes of becoming, samsaric and nirvanic, are both described as a kind of awakening from sleep. Let us look first at the samsaric side:

The domain of the *ālaya* with no mental activity at all is like an egg. When its dynamic energy rises up as ground of the arising of its various contents, this is the *ālaya-vijñāna* itself. From that comes the movement of the winds which engage in virtue and non-virtue

present. While awareness itself is unfragmented into either extreme, its radiation [*gdangs*] as our psychic substratum can fuel the experience of either (thus 'foundation of all'). However, once we become free via realisation, this experience of saṃsāra is no longer possible as awareness functions exclusively as foundation for nirvāṇa ... such that this term 'universal ground' no longer pertains....

²⁸ *āśrayasya parāvṛttir dvidhā dauṣṭhulyahānitaḥ || sa evānāsravo dhātur acintyaḥ kuśalo dhruvaḥ | sukho vimuktikāyo 'sau dharmakāyo 'yaṃ mahāmuneḥ ||* (*Triṃ* v.29–30; text in Jaini 1985: 491).

through desire, anger and indifference. These are the characteristics of mind. Then, after waking up to the six sense objects, you become associated with the movement of the *manas* with its grasper and grasped and the afflicted *manas* which clings at 'mine'. From that, the five root afflictions, twenty related afflictions, fifty mental factors²⁹ and eighty-four thousand aggregate concepts are brought into being. Now everything which connects up to and supports the three realms is without a single exception complete.³⁰

This is the negative used of the metaphor of 'waking up': because it is accompanied by grasping and the subject-object fixation, it is waking up into delusion, *samsāra* itself. As the *ālaya* is not contingent with wisdom, this is not a description of a development from nirvanic wisdom to samsaric delusion, but the unfolding of delusion from the neutral latency of the *ālaya*. In the opposite yet complementary process, where 'waking up' takes the positive sense, the nirvanic state is distinguished from that unconscious state:

That which is called 'the transformation of the essence' is like waking up from that sleep. In this situation, although you have awakened to the sense-objects, you are not tainted by the manifestation of the objects, and you do not fall back into the co-emergent and conceptual-imputation forms of nescience.³¹

There are several statements here which need to be unpacked. First, 'that which is called 'the transformation of the essence' is like waking up after having falling asleep.' The 'transformation' (*gnas 'gyur*) of *ālayavijñāna* features in the *Yogācāra* as a way of describing enlightenment: the *ālayavijñāna* is 'transformed' (Skt. *pariṇāma*) or 'reversed' (Skt. *parāvṛtti*) at enlightenment, as in this line already quoted above from the *Triṃśikā*:

²⁹ *sems byung lnga bcu*: this is unusual in that the number is usually 51; c.f. Dudjom 1991: II.185.

³⁰ *kun gzhi'i khams ni ci yang mi sems bsgo nga lta bu'o / rtsal snod du ma'i 'char gzhir lang pa ni kun gzhi rnam par shes pa nyid do / de las dge mi dge chags sdang bar ma gsum gyis nye bar len pa'i rlung g.yos pa ni sems kyi mtshan nyid do / 'di ltar dbang po drug gi yul las sad pa'i las gzung 'dzin gyi yid g.yos / nyon mongs pa'i yid nga yir 'dzin pa dang 'grogs nas rtsa ba'i nyon mongs pa lnga / nye ba'i nyon mongs nyi shu / sems byung lnga bcu / rtogs tshogs bryad khri bzhi stong ldang 'dug gi tshul du khrid de khams gsum gyi rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba ma lus shing lus pa med pa thams cad rdzogs par bya'o / (AC III p. 77.3).*

³¹ *ngo bo gnas 'gyur ba zhes bya ste gnyid du song ba de las sad pa lta bu'o / 'di ltar dbang po yul la sad kyang yul gyi snang bas ni ma gos / lhan cig skyes pa dang kun tu brtags pa'i ma rig pa gnyis kyi sbubs su'ang ma chud / (AC III p. 78.1).*

From abandoning the two faults the reversal of the *ālaya* comes about.³²

This is another case where the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* does not conform to the strictures of Klong chen pa's Instruction Class. In the *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle* Klong chen pa rejects the use of the term 'transformation' with regard to the switch from *ālaya* to wisdom because it suggests a contingency in the unconditioned nirvanic state.³³ Yet this does not mean that the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* is suggesting that there is a contingency in the nirvanic state, a possibility which is expressly denied elsewhere in the text:

Because from the side of the essence there is no falling into the extreme of appearance or emptiness, do not look hopefully for buddhahood in a 'creator' and 'created' which involve cause and effect.³⁴

What this does mean is that here, once again, the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* follows the example of classical Indian Yogācāra rather than the philosophical developments of Klong chen pa's rDzogs chen.

Second: 'although you have awakened to the sense-objects, you are not tainted by the manifestation of the objects.' The nirvanic 'waking-up' here becomes a parallel process to the deluded version: the sense-objects feature again, but in the absence of the *mano-vijñāna* and afflicted *manas*, they have a different character. The metaphor in here suggests that the objects have no binding or entrapping character – there is a faint allusion to the 'naked awareness' (*rig pa rjen pa*) spoken of in the more practice-oriented rDzogs chen texts.³⁵

Third: 'you do not fall back into the co-emergent (*lhan gcig skyes pa*) and conceptual imputation (*kun tu brtags pa*) forms of nescience.' This line indicates that the transformation is permanent; nescience will not return. Here a little more should be said about nescience and its sub-divisions. As we saw earlier, nescience (*ma rig pa*) is the apprehension of the ground's manifestation or awareness (*shes pa*) as 'other'. Klong chen pa, in the *Treasury of Words and Meanings* gives it

³² *āśrayasya parāvṛttir dvidhā dauṣṭhulya-hānitaḥ* || (*Triṇ* v.29; text in Jaini 1985: 491). See also the discussion of this in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (Suzuki 1932: 55).

³³ TCD 33.4ff.

³⁴ *ngo bo'i cha nas snang ba dang stong pa'i phyogs gang du'ang lhung ba med pas rgyu 'bras dang bcas pa'i bskyed bya skyed byed la sangs rgyas su re ba ma 'tshol cig* / (AC III p. 85.5).

³⁵ For example, see *The Lion's Roar* from the *Klong chen snying thig* (AC III p. 547-565).

three subdivisions,³⁶ only two of which appear in the above passage from the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*:

The three are: (i) 'causal nescience of a single identity' – the arising of an awareness which fails to recognise itself; (ii) 'co-emergent nescience' – that non-recognition arising simultaneously with awareness; (iii) 'extensively conceptualising nescience' – the aspect which processes intrinsic manifestation as 'other'.³⁷

It is (ii) and (iii) which comprise the two-fold nescience of the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*, leaving out (i). These divisions can be read as a chronological sequence, (i) being the initial non-recognition, (ii) the following moment in which awareness continues to arise but now with its mistaken way of perceiving, and (iii) awareness elaborating on its basic misapprehension and its perception being based on a more and more complex field of conceptualisation. However, they could also be read as three ways of describing a process constantly in progress, (i) isolating the root of awareness' constant conceptualising process, nescience in its basic function, (ii) indicating that awareness and the basic misapprehension occur in simultaneity, and (iii) referring to the complexity of awareness' full development of the basic misapprehension.

In this case, rather than (i) and (ii) being momentary states which no longer pertain once (iii) is established, all three are different ways of describing a process in progress at this time. Since the nescience described in (i) is included in (ii), the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* need not be contradiction with this arrangement by dropping (i), and the fact that it does so indicates that the second way of reading of the three-fold division is more appropriate.

Returning to the description of the *ālaya* in the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*, its role is broken down into a four-fold definition:

In detail, it has four aspects, (i) the *ālaya* of the original ground, (ii) the *ālaya* of linking-up, (iii) the *ālaya* of the physical body of imprints and (iv) the *ālaya* of various imprints.³⁸

³⁶ An alternative six-fold division is also given in the *Treasury of Words and Meanings* p. 41.1-4 (see Germano 1992: 175ff).

³⁷ *rgyu bdag nyid gcig pa'i ma rig pa shes par skyes pa de nyid du ma shes pa dang / lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pa rang ngo ma shes pa de dang shes pa de gnyis lhan cig skyes pa dang / kun brtags pa'i ma rig pa rang snang la gzhan du dpyod pa'i cha dang gsum mo / (Treasury of Words and Meanings 40.5-6).*

³⁸ *dbye na rnam pa bzhi yod de / gdod ma'i gzhi'i kun gzhi / sbyor ba don gyi kun gzhi / bag chags lus kyi kun gzhi / bag chags sna tshogs pa'i kun gzhi 'o / (AC III p. 77.1).*

Here the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* is characteristically terse and ambiguous. Klong chen pa provides extensive glosses of this four-fold division in the *Treasury of Words and Meanings*, which 'Jigs med gling pa follows fairly closely in his *Chariot of Omniscience*.³⁹ Here is the *Treasury of Words and Meanings* version:

The four in detail are:

[i] The primordial *ālaya* (*ye don gyi kun gzhi*): it is the attendance of nescience upon *rig pa* – that aspect [of nescience] which primordially from the first arises simultaneously with *rig pa*, like tarnish on gold; it serves as the initial ground for all samsaric phenomena.

[ii] The linking-up *ālaya* (*sbyor ba don gyi kun gzhi*): the ground of karmic activity, the neutral basic support which links up and impels one through one's individual karma to saṃsāra or nirvāṇa.

[iii] The *ālaya* of various imprints (*bag chags sna tshogs pa'i kun gzhi*): the neutral [ground] of diverse latent karma which generates the samsaric cycle of mind (*sems*) and mental factors (*sems 'byung*).

[iv] the *ālaya* of the imprints-body (*bag chags lus kyi kun gzhi*): nescience as a basis, a ground for the manifestation of three different bodies: [a] a gross body which is manifest in parts, whose limbs and organs are [composed of] minute particles, [b] a radiant body of light, and [c] a body which manifests out of contemplation.⁴⁰

Sources for all of these functions may be located in the sutras. For example, Lambert Schmithausen has isolated several different roles for the *ālaya* in the early sources for Yogācāra, which were brought together in later writing, including: *ālaya* as the basis of the personality, as the factor which 'links up' (Skt. *pratisamḍhi*) to further existence through rebirth, as the container of the seeds, and as the support for the material body.⁴¹

In Klong chen pa's passage quoted above, the primordial *ālaya* is equated with nescience and specified as the ground of saṃsāra. Yet where Klong chen pa prefers the term 'primordial *ālaya*' (*ye don gyi kun gzhi*), the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* has the more ambiguous '*ālaya* of the original ground' (*gdod ma'i gzhi'i kun gzhi*). While *ye*

³⁹ *Chariot of Omniscience* 650.5ff.

⁴⁰ *dbye na bzhi ste / ye don gyi kun gzhi ni rig pa'i steng na ye thog dang po'i dus nas gser dang g.ya' bzhin lhan cig skyes pa'i cha rig pa la ltos pa'i ma rig pa ste / 'khor ba'i chos kun gyi dang po'i gzhi dang / sbyor ba don gyi kun gzhi las kyi cha'i gzhi de 'khor 'das su las dang so sos sbyor zhing 'phen pa'i rtsa ba'i rten can lung ma bstan pa dang / bag chags sna tshogs pa'i kun gzhi sems dang sems 'byung gi 'khor ba bskyed pa'i cha'i las sna tshogs pa bag la nyal gyi cha lung ma bstan pa dang / bag chags lus kyi kun gzhi yan lag dang nying lag rdul phran cha shas su snang ba rags pa'i lus dang / dangs pa 'od kyi lus dang / ting nge 'dzin ltar snang ba'i lus gsum du so sor snang ba'i gzhi ma rig pa'i rten gyi cha can te / (Treasury of Words and Meanings 106.1-5).*

⁴¹ Schmithausen 1987: 51ff, 36ff, 26ff and 18ff, respectively.

don signifies no more than primordially, *gdod ma'i gzhi* is specifically the source of enlightened awareness, equivalent to the dharmakāya. Thus, once again, where Klong chen pa strove to eliminate ambiguity by separating the samsaric from the nirvanic, it remains in the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*.

While the 'linking-up *ālaya*' elaborated in *Treasury of Words and Meanings* is similar to the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* passage regarding the *ālaya*'s potential for saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, Klong chen pa is, characteristically, at pains to establish that linking up to nirvāṇa does not change the *ālaya*'s samsaric character:

How can the ground of saṃsāra also be the ground of purification which is considered to be good? [Answer:] The general ground and the ground of substantial things are like the sun and its rays. The linking-up ground acts as the ground of higher realms through virtuous actions. It is given the name 'linking-up ground' because it is the aspect of the *ālaya* which accumulates through the three gates virtuous actions which are in harmony with the side of liberation which links to nirvāṇa. Actions conducive to liberation are called the cause of nirvāṇa in that they cause the clearance of the obscuring stains to nirvāṇa, but this does not mean as cause and fruit, creator and created. This is because it is contradictory [to assert that] the unconditioned essence of nirvāṇa can be created afresh through causes and conditions.⁴²

In order to maintain the pre-existence of the nirvanic state, the mode through which the *ālaya* links up to saṃsāra is explained by Klong chen pa using the same model as used in the *Uttaratantraśāstra* to explain the move from saṃsāra to nirvāṇa, that is, as the revelation of a pre-existent but obscured state. Klong chen pa ensures that the *ālaya*'s realm of operation is strictly samsaric, even when there is movement towards nirvāṇa.

The third and fourth aspects of the *ālaya* concern its function as store-house for imprints (*bag chags*, Skt. *vāsanā*). These imprints are mentioned briefly by name in *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*, but no explanation of their nature is given. Similarly, although imprints are mentioned more frequently in the *Seventeen Tantras*, in the rele-

⁴² 'khor ba'i gzhi r 'thad kyi rnam byang gi gzhi ji ltar yin zhe na / spyir gzhi la dngos kyi gzhi zer las nyi ma lta bu dang / de la sbyor ba'i gzhi dge bas mtho ris kyi gzhi byed pa lta bu las / 'di sbyor ba'i gzhi la ming du btags pa ste / myang 'das la sbyor ba'i thar pa cha mthun gyi dge ba sgo gsum gyis bsags pa'i kun gzhi'i steng na yod pa'i cha las so / thar pa cha mthun gyi las de myang 'das kyi cha la sgrib pa'i dri ma sel ba'i rgyu byed pa la myang 'das kyi rgyur btags kyi bskyed bya skyed byed kyi rgyu 'bras su mi 'dod de / myang 'das kyi ngo bo 'dus ma byas pa yin pas rgyu rkyen gyis gsar du byed par 'gal ba'i 'phyir te / (*Treasury of Words and Meanings* 108.2-5).

vant sections of Klong chen pa's *Treasury of Words and Meanings* and *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle*, and 'Jigs med gling pa's own *Chariot of Omniscience*, there is little in the way of a full definition.

The concept of imprints, or seeds (Skt. *bīja*), which goes back to the early development of the doctrine of the *ālaya-vijñāna* in the sutras, was adopted in rDzogs chen without significant alteration.⁴³ In the *Chariot of Omniscience* 'Jigs med gling pa explains the process by which karma ripens as imprints in the *ālaya*:

Because of the traces of the initial action, there is an imprint; after that, because of clinging, there is ripening; after the initial cause and fruit, there is conjoined ripening; and the linking-up to all happiness and suffering.⁴⁴

This is very similar to the explanation in the *Triṃśikā*:

Due to karmic imprints along with the twofold grasping, once the previous stage
Of ripening has been exhausted, the next stage of ripening is engendered.⁴⁵

In our discussion of the *ālaya*, we have seen how Klong chen pa's philosophical works on Instruction Class rDzogs chen (followed by 'Jigs med gling pa in his own writings) attempted to remove ambiguity in the samsaric or nirvanic status of the basis of consciousness by distinguishing the *ālaya* (as samsaric) from the nirvanic ground, called 'the general ground' (*spyi gzhi*) or just 'the ground' (*gzhi*). This development is not seen in the classic Yogācāra texts, where there is no ontological distinction between two bases, one samsaric and one nirvanic.

We have already seen that the concept of a 'reversal of the basis' was disliked by Klong chen pa. On the other hand, the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*, with its sense of the indeterminability of the *ālaya*, and use of the term 'transformation' is not following the ontological distinctions advocated by Klong chen pa, and in this is closer to Vasubandhu and other Indian Yogācāra texts.⁴⁶

⁴³ C.f. Schmithausen 1987: 7ff.

⁴⁴ *las snga ma'i rjes 'jog bas bag chags / phyi ma nye bar len pas rnam smin / rgyu 'bras snga phyir smin pa'i sdebs dang / bde sdug gi kun sbyor byed pa / (Chariot of Omniscience 651.6).*

⁴⁵ *karmaṇo vāsāna grāhadvayavāsanaṃ saha | kṣīṇe pūrvavipāke 'nyad vipākaṃ janayanti tat || (Triṃ v.19; text in Jaini 1985: 490).*

⁴⁶ C.f. Karmay (1988: 137-73), Germano (1994: 209ff) and van Schaik 2004b for arguments on the influence of mahāyoga tantras, especially the *Guhyagarbha*, on rDzogs chen.

The dynamic source of consciousness

A further distinction of the nature of the samsaric basis occurs in the Instruction Class, between the *ālaya* and the *ālaya-vijñāna* (*kun gzhi rnam shes*). In most Indian Yogācāra literature, *ālaya* is synonymous with *ālaya-vijñāna*, the 'basis of consciousness', but in Instruction Class rDzogs chen, a clear distinction is usually made between the two. While the *ālaya*, as we have seen, has an ambiguous status in the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*, the *ālaya-vijñāna* is firmly placed on the side of samsaric consciousness:

When the *ālaya*'s own dynamic manifestation moves out from it, and awareness begins to enter its object, the *ālaya-vijñāna* rises up. It is as if the realm of the *ālaya* awakens from a deep sleep. The objects which are grasped – that is the five sense-objects – have not arisen as substantial things, but a very subtle grasping awareness has risen up. This generates, out of itself, a connection of grasping at the reflections of conceptual imputation, as if in a mirror.⁴⁷

The dynamism (*rtsal*) is a defining characteristic of the *ālaya-vijñāna*, and is associated with grasping at the object.⁴⁸ The same point is made in another *Klong chen snying thig gter ma* text, *Distinguishing the Three Essential Points*:

The *ālaya-vijñāna* is similar to ice on water.
It arises as the dynamic energy which apprehends the state of the essence,
And due to attachment to the object thus grasped, it is extensively deluding.⁴⁹

Similar definitions occur in Klong chen pa's writing, where 'clarity' (*gsal ba*) or 'radiance' (*gdangs*) often take the place of dynamism.⁵⁰ In these passages and the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* there seems

⁴⁷ *kun gzhi las rang gi rtsal snang g.yos te shes pa yul la 'jug par rtsom pa na kun gzhi'i rnam par shes pa ldang ste / dper na kun gzhi'i kham s gnyid 'thug po lta bu las ni sad / yul lnga'i bzung yul la dngos su ni ma shar / 'dzin byed kyi shes pa shin tu phra ba zhig lang ba des kun tu rtogs pa'i gzugs brnyan 'dzin pa'i rten 'brel rang chas su slod ste me long bzhin no / (AC III p. 81.1).*

⁴⁸ As discussed earlier, dynamism (*rtsal*) is also commonly stated in Instruction Class texts to be the attribute of the general ground's compassion.

⁴⁹ *kun gzhi'i rnam shes chu nang chab rom 'dra / ngo bo'i gshis la 'dzin pa'i rtsal shar te / gzung ba'i yul la chags pa phal cher bslu / (AC III p. 117.2).*

⁵⁰ Germano 1992: 406-7.

to be a wish to explain what happens in the intermediate stage between the latent *ālaya* and the conceptual awareness of the *mano-vijñāna* and afflicted *manas*. The explanation creates a space for a specific concept of the *ālaya-vijñāna* as the dynamic effulgence of the *ālaya* itself.⁵¹

This stage of awareness is described as a grasping, though 'apprehension' is probably better here for 'dzin pa, without distinct objects. Thus the basic duality of apprehender and apprehended is in place, without any further elaboration. The analogy of the mirror and its reflections address the question of how the dual phenomena of subject and object can be generated from a single basis, with the further suggestion that this grasping is distorting in that it creates its own type of appearances.

Thus the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* follows the Instruction Class model of differentiating the *ālaya* from the *ālaya-vijñāna*, defining the latter in terms of dynamic energy or radiance, words with a technical meaning that are specific to rDzogs chen. Here the text moves away from the classic Yogācāra position; however, when we turn to the *ālaya-vijñāna* in its relationship with the other elements of consciousness, it is again closely based on earlier Yogācāra material.

Mind and the senses

In Instruction Class rDzogs chen, the agents which turn the undistinguished shapes of the *ālaya-vijñāna* into the distinct objects perceived by the five senses (*sgo lnga*, skt. *caḥsur-ādi*) are the channels (*rtsa*, skt. *nādi*) and winds (*rlung*, skt. *prāna*). This is a link to the discourse of Vajrayāna, in particular the practices of the perfection stage. In the Nyingma this appears mainly in the *anuyoga* class of meditation practice, but the channels and winds are also a feature of *thod rgal* practices of rDzogs chen.⁵² This process of perception is described in the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* thus:

By the activity of the channels and winds of each of the five gates, that [awareness] is led to the objects of awareness: form as the object of the eyes, sound as the object of the ears, odour as the object of the nose, taste of the object of the tongue and physical sensation as the object of the body. So the five sensory spheres of consciousness have arisen. Through the essential *manas* and the afflicted *manas* grasping

⁵¹ This is a similar process to Klong chen pa's elaboration of the six-fold *manas* in successive stages.

⁵² For example, the *thod rgal* section of the *Ye shes bla ma*, from the *Klong chen snying thig* (AC III 336.4-339.2).

at them with desire, anger and stupidity, nescience which is the cause of *samsāra*, karmic actions, imprints and all their fruits are compounded.⁵³

Here it is assumed that the sense-objects already have the nature of external objects, the basic subject/object discrimination having appeared along with the *ālaya-vijñāna*. The sense objects are grasped by the egoic mind (*yid*, Skt. *manas*), distinguished here into two basic elements: essential *manas* and afflicted *manas* (Skt. *kliṣṭa-manas*).

In the Instruction Class, *manas* is sometimes explained as having six functions, and sometimes only the two functions of essential *manas* (also known as *mano-vijñāna*) and *kliṣṭa-manas*.⁵⁴ Klong chen pa, in the *Treasury of Words and Meanings*, identifies the former as a special teaching specific to rDzogs chen and the Instruction Class, and the latter as common.⁵⁵ His presentation of the common teaching is virtually identical to the description of *mano-vijñāna* and *kliṣṭa-manas* in the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*. The *mano-vijñāna* and *kliṣṭa-manas* are indeed 'common' in that they are straightforwardly adopted into rDzogs chen from Yogācāra literature. In the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra*, the *mano-vijñāna* engages with the object through conceptualisation and the *kliṣṭa-manas* through the three emotional reactions:⁵⁶

In short, that which becomes like a container or ground for all of this is the *ālaya*. The aspect which opens up (*go 'byed*) is the *ālaya-vijñāna*. The aspect which, because of that [opening up], looks out and wakes up to the objects is five gates. The aspect which, moving from its own place engages with the afflictions is the *kliṣṭa-manas*. The aspect which distinguishes into various appearances is the

⁵³ *de'i sgo lnga so so'i rtsa rlung gi byed pas shes pa yul la khrid de / mig gi yul du gzugs dang / rna ba'i yul du sgra dang / sna'i yul du dri dang / lce'i yul du ro dang / lus kyi yul du reg bya ste rnam par shes pa'i khams lnga ldang ngo / de nyon mongs pa can dang yid kyi ngo bos chags sdang rmongs gsum la sogs par bzung nas 'khor ba'i rgyu ma rig pa dang / las dang / bag chags dang / 'bras bu thams cad du 'du byed pa'o / (AC III 81.5).*

⁵⁴ The sixfold model of the *manas* seems to be specific to the discourse on straying from the ground; see for example *Treasury of Words and Meanings* 42.3-4.

⁵⁵ *Treasury of Words and Meanings* 119.5-120.4.

⁵⁶ Another way of defining them makes the realm of the activity of the *mano-vijñāna* the object, and that of the *kliṣṭa-manas* the subject. In *Treasury of Words and Meanings* Klong chen pa employs that definition: "— At the time of conceptualising the object of conceptualisation which is nothing yet radiant, like a vajra throne: first, conceptual awareness is born as the object – the *mano-vijñāna*; following that, the awareness of the subject gives birth to the activity according to desire, aversion and neutrality – this is called the *kliṣṭa-manas*" (*Treasury of Words and Meanings* 120.1-2).

mano-vijñāna. These are called 'the eight aggregates of consciousness'.⁵⁷

Another passage offers a complementary definition, assigning to the *mano-vijñāna* and *kliṣṭa-manas* the roles of distinguishing subject and object, and self-clinging respectively:

Then, after waking up to the six sense objects, you become associated with the movement of the *manas* with its apprehender and apprehended and the *kliṣṭa-manas* which clings at 'mine'.⁵⁸

These statements in the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* are obviously based on the Indic scriptural and exegetical literature; for instance, the following passage on the *manovijñāna* is from the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*:

Because the self-nature of form etc. is not comprehended, Mahāmati, the system of the five consciousnesses comes to function. Along with this system of the five consciousnesses there is what is known as the *mano-vijñāna*, whereby the objective world is distinguished and individual appearances are distinctly determined.⁵⁹

And the *kliṣṭa-vijñāna* (i.e. *kliṣṭa-manas*), as described by Vasubandhu, is as follows:

It is always associated with the four afflictions, obscured and undeveloped:

View of self, confusion about self, pride in self and love of self.⁶⁰

However, in the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* the *manas* is not accorded the central role of maintaining samsaric consciousness which certain Yogācāra texts ascribe to it.⁶¹ Although, as I discussed above, it is not explicitly defined as samsaric, the *ālaya* is not defined as nirvanic either, and nescience is not explained as the defilement of a pure basis (*ālaya*) by an impure agent, the *kliṣṭa-manas*. Rather, the

⁵⁷ *mdor bsdu na / de thams cad kyi snod dam gzhi lta bur gyur pas na kun gzhi / go 'byed pa'i cha nas kun gzhi'i rnam par shes pa / de kha phyir bltas te yul la sad pa'i cha nas sgo lnga / rang sa nas nyon mongs nye bar len pa'i cha nas nyon yid: sna tshogs su 'byed pa'i cha nas yid shes te / rnam par shes pa'i tshogs brgyad ces bya'o / (AC III 82.3).*

⁵⁸ *'di ltar dbang po drug gi yul las sad pa'i las gzung 'dzin gyi yid g.yos / nyon mongs pa'i yid nga yir 'dzin pa dang 'groggs ... (AC III 77.4).*

⁵⁹ Suzuki 1932: 40.

⁶⁰ *kleśaiś caturbhiḥ sahitaṃ nīvṛtāvākr̥taiḥ sadā | ātmadr̥ṣṭyātmamahātmanānātmasneha saṃjñitaiḥ || (Triṃ v.6; text in Jaini 1985: 475).*

⁶¹ See Brown 1989: 216-17.

conditions for saṃsāra in the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* are the four aspects of the *ālaya* itself.

Conclusions

It should be apparent by now that the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* cannot be said to represent the most elaborate development of the Yogācāra doctrines in the Instruction Class. Indeed, it is in this respect much less sophisticated than in Klong chen pa's *Treasury of Words and Meanings* and *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle*, being less elaborately worked out, and less philosophically consistent. However, we should not leap to the assumption that there was a degeneration or simplification of these doctrines between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries.

In his own major philosophical work, *Treasury of Qualities* and its commentaries, 'Jigs med gling pa deals in great detail with this material and stays close to Klong chen pa's interpretation of the nature of consciousness. Nor should this be interpreted as a development in 'Jigs med gling pa's own understanding between his revelation of the *Klong chen snying thig* and his writing of the *Treasury of Qualities*. In the rDzogs chen section of the *Mirror of Wisdom and Compassion*, an early work written before the *Klong chen snying thig*, his presentation of the doctrines of the Instruction Class is also in accord with Klong chen pa.⁶² It is the status of *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* as a *gter ma* text which sets it apart from these other works by 'Jigs med gling pa; as I have mentioned, this text's own account of its history places its genesis in the time of Vimalamitra or earlier. True to this origin story, it hearkens back to a pre-Klong chen pa rDzogs chen, to the multitude of Instruction Class texts from the *Bi ma snying thig* and *Seventeen Tantras*.

To return to the question raised at the beginning of this paper, we can say that the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* is probably not the best example of the fusion of Yogācāra with rDzogs chen. That is to be found in the works of Klong chen pa, which elaborate, extend, and transform the models of Indian Yogācāra in ways never thought of in Indic Buddhism. What the *Wisdom Expanse of Samantabhadra* does is reveal the plurality of rDzogs chen discourse, showing how the *gter ma* genre worked, alongside the systematising work of writers such as Klong chen pa and 'Jigs med gling pa, against the establishment of orthodox interpretations of scripture through the constant production of variations on the themes of rDzogs chen.

⁶² See *Mirror of Wisdom and Compassion* 54–74.

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Reconsidering the Contents and Function of the rDzogs chen Classifications of *Sems phyogs* and *Sems sde*

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The following paper seeks to revisit some of the key rubrics under which much of the received oral tradition literature, or *bKa' ma*, of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs pa chen po*) became subsumed. Specifically, I am concerned with the, so-called, Mind Series (*sems sde*) texts, which are traditionally believed to have been imported into Tibet by the monk-translator Pa gor Bai ro tsa na during the latter part of the rule of King Khri srong lde'u btsan.¹ However, as I shall discuss, this material seems to have only been referred to as such centuries later, in texts we can reasonably date to around the 11thth century, at the earliest. Furthermore, those very texts which delineate this classification belong to the literature of a competing trend of the Great Perfection, namely the Pith Instruction Series (*man ngag sde*). Which begs the question: what did those who practiced and propagated the Mind Series teachings call them before somebody else started calling them the Mind Series? And so, therein lies one of the major obstacles that we must face when attempting to come to terms with the Mind Series, in that much of the picture we get of it is colored by the hindsight of later authors.

A case in point, when the famed fourteenth century scholar Klong chen rab 'byams (1308–1364) wrote the *Seven Troves* (*mdzod bdun*), his

¹ The most commonly given dates for Khri srong lde'u btsan, 742-799/800, are fairly standardized at this point, and are based on the findings of Tibetologists, see Haahr, 1969, whom relied heavily on the related Chinese accounts of this period. Alternatively, in Dudjom, 1991, pp. 613-614, we see the dates for King Khri srong lde'u btsan as 790-858, though in the original Tibetan version of Dudjom's *Religious History* (bdud 'joms, chos 'byung, 1996, pp. 240-241) the correspondence of these dates to the Western calendar is not so readily apparent, as they are only given in relation to the Tibetan calendar. And so, this later date, likely, represents the reckoning of the translators, rather than the author himself. Nevertheless, in Dudjom's work, which is representative of the contemporary rNying ma perspective, Khri srong lde'u btsan's reign occurred roughly one sixty-year cycle later than what is currently accepted by modern academia. Hence, from their perspective much of the action of the dynastic period, especially the founding of bSam yas Monastery and the related events, would have occurred in the beginning of the 9th century, rather than at the end of 8th century, which modern academia is more inclined to support.

magnum opus on the Great Perfection teachings, he cataloged twenty-one major works of the Mind Series.² And, for better or worse, this categorization seems to have stuck among the ensuing generations of rNying ma pas, even though they seem to have been more inclined to pursue newly emergent trends of the Great Perfection, and, likely due to the perceived weight of Klong chen pa's assessment, the vast majority of the attention paid to the Mind Series by modern scholars and translators has focused on these particular works. Included within the set of twenty-one are the Eighteen Lower Mind [Series Scriptures] (*sems smad bco brgyad*),³ a series of fairly brief works that are undoubtedly some of the earliest Great Perfection works to have spread on Tibetan soil,⁴ along with the *Tantra of the All-ruling King* (*Kun*

² This list is found in Klong chen pa's auto-commentary to the *Precious Treasury of Dharmadhātu* (*Chos dbyings mdzod*). See *Kun mkhyen klong chen rab 'byams gsung 'bum*, 2009, Vol. 17, pp. 380-381

³ More commonly known as the *Eighteen Scriptural Statements of the Mind Series* (*sems sde bco brgyad*), or simply the *Eighteen Major Scriptural Statements* (*lung chen po bco brgyad*) as they were originally known, they are the earliest extant examples of not only Mind Series literature, but Great Perfection literature, in general. Contents wise, they are quite short, pithy and terse verses with a marked poetic feel to them, which gives the sense that they were probably sung during transmissions. In the biographical narratives recounted in the *Great Portrait* (*'dra 'bag chen mo*), as well as in the *Copper Temple Chronicles* (*bka' thang zangs gling ma*), these are listed along with the specific reasons given for why each of them was taught to Bai ro tsa na and his compatriot gTsang legs grub by their Indian teacher Śrī Singha, though these two diverge on the details. As such, this group of texts has seen its fair share of oscillation over the following centuries after they were supposedly smuggled into Tibet by Bai ro tsa na and the makeup of this group of eighteen varies considerably from source to source, so it would seem that the road to standardization of this group of texts took many centuries, though it never really seems to have been achieved at all. Generally, the eighteen are divided into two groups, based on the circumstances of their translation into Tibetan. Thus, the list is usually divided into the Five Early Translations (*snga 'gyur lnga*), which are considered to have been completed by Bai ro tsa na before his reported banishment, and the Thirteen Later Translations (*phyi 'gyur bcu gsum*), attributed to the trio of Vimalamitra, g.Yu sgra snying po, and gNyags Jñānakūmara. Alternatively, these divisions are referred to as the "mother and child" (*ma bu*), respectively. Regardless, based on this criterion, these categories are strictly a Tibetan convention, though their order does seem to mirror the accounts of how they were initially taught to Bai ro tsa na and Legs grub, with some slight variations depending on the source. For more on the makeup of the lists of the eighteen, as well as the identification of some of the more obscure texts, see Liljenberg 2009 and 2012, a scholar whom has effectively taken the lead in recent years on the research of these works.

⁴ Of these eighteen, the first, *Rig pa'i khu byug*, has received the most attention in modern scholarship by far, as it was first Great Perfection work to be located among the Dunhuang cache (IOL 647), giving it an undeniably ancient pedigree in the world of modern scholarship. For an extensive discussion on this text see Karmay, 1988, pp. 41-5.

byed rgyal po'i rgyud)⁵ and its related commentarial work the *Ten Discourses* (*mDo bcu*), as well as the *Tantra of the Marvelous King* (*rMad byung rgyal po*),⁶ neither of which seem to be mentioned in any extant literature until at least the 11th century. Of these, the *Tantra of the All-ruling King* came to be considered the root of the Mind Series, which gives the impression that the rest of the literature related to this series is an offshoot of this particular text. Nevertheless, the seeming late date of the emergence of this work, as well as the fact that many of the *Eighteen Scriptural Statements* appear as chapters within it, gives the impression that it is more of a collection of various scriptural discourses (*mDo lung*) that were later weaved together into the framework of the dialogue that occurs within the setting in which the *Tantra* unfolds. And so, again, we have these two competing images of the Mind Series. The first being a traditional perspective, though somewhat external or at least retrospective, in which the major works of this trend were, for the most part, imported from India by a single individual. The second being the way the propagation of these works seems to have unfolded from the modern perspective, a millennia removed, in which there clearly appears to be some developmental steps suggesting that many of these works were actually composed by anonymous Tibetan authors over the course of several centuries. However, there is a third perspective which has received little

⁵ *Chos thams cad rdzogs pa chen po byang chub kyi sems kun byed rgyal po'i rgyud* can be found as the first text in the first volume of both the gTing skyes and mTshams brag editions of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, as well as in various editions of the *bKa' 'gyur*, such as in the sDe dge edition in which it is found in Volume 97, pp. 1-171, as well as in the recent Chengdu Edition of the *bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, where it can be found in Volume 31, pp. 1-276. As for English language works, until recently these have been limited to Neumaier-Dargyay, 1992 and Namkhai Norbu and Adriano Clemente, 1999. The former, *The Sovereign All-Creating Mind: The Motherly Buddha*, is a scholastic work that despite breaking ground on this important, but, up until then, overlooked text, seems to miss the mark in many regards. Nevertheless, despite the author's insistence on ascribing a feminine gender onto the orator of the text and some tenuous attempts to highlight theistic themes, as well as its, at times, incomprehensible translation, this work still must be regarded as somewhat pioneering, and certainly contains some useful research. The latter work, *The Supreme Source*, contains a much more accessible summary of the text, including many pertinent philological elements, as well as partial translations of various sections of the text. In addition to these, Jim Valby is currently in the process of translating and publishing an eight volume series on the two or three volume Tibetan commentary *Kun bzang dgongs rgyan* by mKhen po Zhan phan 'od zer (19th–20th century), as well as other related texts, such as Klong chen pa's *Kun byed rgyal po'i rgyud kyi bsodus don nyi zla'i drwa ba*, which has only fairly recently come to light.

⁶ This has been recently published in translation by a group of Namkhai Norbu's students, namely Elio Guariscov, Adriano Clemente, and Jim Valby, as *The Marvelous Primordial State*.

attention from modern and traditional scholars alike, and that is the perspective of the Mind Series adherents themselves. Which brings us back to the question posed earlier: how did they refer to their own literary tradition?

The Mind Orientation

When examining early literature of this genre it often seems that the term Enlightened Mind (*byang chub sems*) was one of the initial designations used to refer to the Great Perfection teachings, as this often appears in the titles of early examples of this literature, as well as being perhaps the most salient theme detailed in the contents of those works. However, in the ensuing century or two after their introduction, this term gave way to the more widespread and enduring rubric of the Mind Orientation (*sems phyogs*), which remained in use long after it became standard to divide the Great Perfection into the Three Series (*sde gsum*), i.e. the Mind, Expanse, and Pith Instruction Series (*sems sde*, *klong sde*, and *man ngag sde*). Hence, the rubric of the Mind Orientation is most likely the first Tibetan attempt to categorize these teachings into an inclusive grouping, perhaps second only to the term Atiyoga or even the Great Perfection, itself, which even if it is indeed a translation of the Sanskrit term *mahāsāndhi*, certainly was not the initial signifier of the genre. On the other hand, the Mind Orientation definitely appears to be a Tibetan construct, but one that is often misunderstood in modern academic literature. In fact, the Mind Orientation is treated as a synonym for the Mind Series by modern scholars, and has consistently been translated as such.⁷ However, as we shall see, in this context this term actually refers to a specific group of cycles that intermingles certain literary works of what would eventually be termed the Mind and Expanse Series, and perhaps even some early representatives of the Pith Instructions Series, as well.⁸

It often seems that the distinction between the Mind and Expanse Series was not as pronounced prior to the emergence of the Three Series schema introduced through the literature of the Pith

⁷ This is likely due to Roerich's translation of this term, as such, throughout *The Blue Annals*.

⁸ The context I am referring to here is the group of teaching cycles that were subsumed under the rubric of the Mind Orientation. However, this same term is also used to describe the seven categories, or areas, of mind, which are successive stages of ever more profound realization of the enlightened mind, as it is understood in the Mind Series. For a description of these see Dudjom, 1991, pp. 323-325, as well as Klong chen rab 'byams, *Grub mtha' mdzod* in *gSung 'bum dri med 'od zer*, Vol. 15, pp. 274-277.

Instructions Series. However, that is not to say that these were not seen as distinct, but rather that while there were obvious differences between the works of these genres, as well as the transmission lineages through which they spread, they were not necessarily stratified into a hierarchical formula to the same extent as they are in the Three Series presentation. In other words, there was much more overlap between these categories that also extended to their lineages, which intersect significantly even from their early stages.⁹ However, in terms of the initial entry of the Great Perfection teachings into Tibet, the first inclusive development that subsumed these teachings seems to have been the Mind Orientation, which brought together teaching cycles from trends of the Great Perfection that had been introduced by the Tibetan monk-translator Bai ro tsa na.

As for the make-up the Mind Orientation, there are said to be seven cycles included within it. According to mKhen po Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (1929–1999), a renowned contemporary scholar from Kaḥ thog rdo rje gdan Monastery in Eastern Tibet, these seven cycles are the Resolving King's Cycle (*la bzla rgyal po'i skor*), the Distinguishing Brahmin's Cycle (*shan 'byed bram ze'i skor*), the Cycle of the Pith Instructions that Demonstrates the Actual Manifestation of Self-Liberation (*rang grol mngon sum bstan pa'i man ngag gi skor*), the Outer, Inner, and Secret Cycles of the Expanse Series, and the Cycle of Ke'u tshang.¹⁰ Thus, as this author claims, "these are not only [made up of] the two [categories related to] the Mind Series and Expanse Series," but rather the set of seven extends beyond those categories, which suggests that the traditional assumptions are quite different than the modern academics' and translators' take on this.¹¹ Now, many of these should be familiar names to those that have studied the Mind Series, as they are often mentioned in early accounts of the spread of the Great Perfection teachings. For example, in the biography of Bai ro tsa na, the *Great Portrait* (*'Dra 'bag chen mo*), the Brahmin and King cycles are some of the last teachings that he received from Śrī Singha before he departed for Tibet.¹² However, the Brahmin Cycle is also the name of an important set of teachings related to the Pith Instruction Series known as the Ultra Pith (*yang ti*), to borrow Germano's rendering of

⁹ Perhaps the major exception is the line associated with the *Vajra Bridge* (*rDo rje zam pa*), which much like the *All-ruling King* rose to predominance once the genre had somewhat matured, and seems to have come to occupy the central position in, an almost, standalone transmission lineage.

¹⁰ 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan, *rGyal ba kaḥ thog pa'i grub mchog rnams kyi nyams bzhes khrid chen bcu gsum gyi lo rgyus mdor bsduḥ brjod pa zung 'jug grub pa'i lam bzang*, p. 40.

¹¹ *Ibid.* *sems klong gnyis kho na ma yin*.

¹² Palmo, 2004, p. 120.

this term, and surprisingly this seems to be what mKhen po 'Jam dbyangs is referring to in this regard. Unfortunately, since the propagation of this particular conglomeration of early Great Perfection cycles has long since been eclipsed by more dominant treasure cycles, as well as their associated doxographical categorizations, very little information remains other than lists of their contents. Though these lists do present a very different view of the Mind Orientation than it just being a synonym for the Mind Series, and thus they are of considerable interest.

In terms of these lists, they seem to be drawn from a common source, though exactly which particular source is, as of yet, unclear. mKhen po 'Jam dbyangs quotes Śākya rdo rje (c. 13th century) from his *Lamp of the Compendium of Knowledge* (*Kun 'dus rig pa'i sgron me*), which gives a sparse overview of the texts included in each of these cycles, though it is unfortunately incomplete in its presentation, leaving many texts unnamed.¹³ This same list also appears with only some slight variations in a commentary by Ye shes rgyal mtshan (b. 1395) on the *General Overview of the Nine Vehicles* (*Theg dgu spyi bcings*) by Kaḥ thog Monastery's founder, Dam pa bde gshegs (1122–1192), and while he doesn't explicitly state his source, it is likely that he is either quoting Śākya rdo rje or at least the same source upon which he relied.¹⁴ However, both presentations depart from the above seven cycle presentation related by mKhen po 'Jam dbyangs. In these texts, there are six cycles initially mentioned, including the cycles of the Mind Series, the Expanse Series, the Tantra Series, and the first three of the cycles in the above list, i.e. the Brahmin cycle, the King cycle and so on, making a total of six. Furthermore, the Ke'u tshang cycle, the A ro cycle, and several other cycles are added to this list, though these two accounts do actually differ slightly on these addendums. Nevertheless, we do get at least a cursory look at some of the texts included in these cycles, as well as the amount of root and branch texts associated with them. Hence, from these accounts we learn that the *All-ruling King* is one of the five root Tantras of the King's cycle.¹⁵ Moreover, based on the six texts mentioned in relation to the Brahmin's cycle it is quite clear that all of these titles can be found in the Ultra Pith Brahmin's cycle that is found in the modern editions of the *Collected Tantras of the Nyingma* (*rNying ma rgyud 'bum*). And, while there is a group of six texts included in this particular cycle that are said to have been

¹³ Śākya rdo rje, *Chos kyi gter mdzod chen po kun 'dus rig pa'i sgron me*, in *sNga 'gyur bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, 2009, Vol. 117, pp. 91-94.

¹⁴ Dam pa bde gshegs dang Ye shes rgyal mtshan, *Theg pa spyi bcings rtsa 'grel*, 1997, pp. 357-359.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 357, and Śākya Dorje, 2009, p. 93.

translated by Śrī Singha and gNubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes (c. 9-10th centuries) both of whom were instrumental in lineages later associated with the Mind Series,¹⁶ those are not the six texts we are currently concerned with, but rather all of the six mentioned are attributed to the translation activity of Vimalamitra and either Smṛti Jñānakīrti (Dran pa ye shes) or gNyags Jñānakūmāra.¹⁷ Of course, the correspondence of titles could be misleading, as at least a couple of these titles could also refer to Mind Series works of the same, or similar, names, and half of these titles can also be found in the *Collected Tantras of Vairocana (Bai ro'i rgyud 'bum)*, in which they are not grouped together under the rubric of the Ultra Pith.¹⁸ Thus, since we have no early collections of the Brahmin's cycle to compare with the texts included in the Ultra Pith versions, it is difficult to be certain of the identification and the nature of these particular works. However, since the Ultra Pith is essentially a compilation of works from disparate sources, including many treasure revelations, it could very well be that some of the works later classified as such actually predate the Ultra Pith classification, and perhaps once made up an earlier formulation of the Brahmin's cycle, which was propagated before the emergence of the more treasure orientated works that we are now familiar with. One possible support for this theory is Ye shes rgyal mtshan's mention of the successive practices of the four meditative absorptions (*ting nge 'dzin bzhi*), which are delineated at length in the Khams Tradition's (*khams lugs*) guidance literature (*pra khrid*), as belonging to the Brahmin's cycle.¹⁹ And, considering that the mention of these is followed by a brief overview of practice in the Expanse Series, it seems to suggest that these are Mind Series practices, as they are commonly considered by the later traditions. So, it seems likely that if an earlier version of the Brahmin's cycle existed, as the traditional accounts of the propagation of these cycles clearly state, then it would have been considered a Mind Series cycle, or at least categorized as such by later adherents to this tradition. The alternative seems to be that the Mind

¹⁶ These six texts are all related to the *Kun tu bzang po ye shes gsal bar ston pa'i rgyud*. Also, in this case it is Śrī Singhaprabhā that is credited in the colophons.

¹⁷ These six texts are the *Nam mkha' klong yangs kyi rgyud*, *Ye shes gting nas rdzogs pa*, *Kun tu bzang po ye shes klong*, *Rang byung bde ba'i 'khor lo*, *Nges don 'dus pa*, and the *'Khor rtsad nas gcod pa*, the titles of all of which correspond to texts found in volumes 7 and 8 of the gTing skyes edition of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*.

¹⁸ In particular, the *Ye shes gting rdzogs* and the *'Khor rtsad nas gcod pa* could also refer to Mind Series Tantras translated by Śrī Singha and Bai ro tsa na, according to their colophons, which can be found in volumes 3 and 1, respectively, of the same edition of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*. And, the *Rang byung bde ba'i 'khor lo*, *Nam mkha' klong yangs*, as well as the *Kun tu bzang po ye shes gsal bar ston pa'i rgyud*, can all be found in the *Bai ro'i rgyud 'bum*.

¹⁹ Dam pa bde gshegs dang Ye shes rgyal mtshan, 1997, p. 364.

Orientation would have included Pith Instruction Series works, though again, this classification would likely have occurred at a much later date.

In summary, though it is obvious that the Mind Orientation is not merely another term used to refer solely to the Mind Series, as has been commonly assumed by some modern scholars and translators, there are still many lingering questions as to its actual makeup. At its most basic level, it seems likely that this simply referred to the orally received *bKa' ma* teachings of the Great Perfection, but even in this sense the accounts of its makeup suggest that these were not merely the Mind and Expanse Series brought to Tibet by Bai ro tsa na, as the later tradition would have us believe. Rather, the Mind Orientation, and by extension the *bKa' ma* teachings of the Great Perfection, included texts that would actually represent, at least pieces of, all of the Three Series, as they would be later defined. And, considering that this rubric remained in use long after the emergence of the Three Series schema, it would seem that the Mind Series traditions, as they came to be known, were in fact much more inclusive than has been previously thought. However, since we lack any early collections of the Mind Orientation, or have any evidence to suggest that such a collection was ever attempted to be put together, it might be that the term is little more than a convention, which outlived its usefulness somewhere along the way. Nevertheless, the fact that it has been relatively overlooked, or even blatantly misconstrued, by some modern scholars, suggests that we have collectively missed an important piece of the puzzle of the early Great Perfection tradition. Of course, the rather nondescript nature of the term may very well be the reason it that it fell out of use in favor of the more standardized doxographies of the Great Perfection teachings, which we are now familiar. Regardless, the accounts of its contents should certainly remind us of how much has been lost of the early tradition, and how little information we are left with to try and reconstruct this once dominant trend. Therefore, unfortunately, due to the lack of literary collections of the cycles that were apparently subsumed under the Mind Orientation, even a cursory look into this term, seems to bring up more questions than can be readily answered by the available information. Though, the fact that early Great Perfection literature was initially divided into cycles, rather than doxographical categories seems quite clear in this regard. And so, the notion of the twenty-one major Mind Series works and so on, should therefore be considered a later rendition as well, which was likely based on surviving literature, rather than indicative of the entire corpus of Great Perfection *bKa' ma* literature that once found circulation in Tibet. Thus, once again, we are reminded of how little we have to work with in trying to reconstruct an accurate image of the

early stages of this tradition, in that even by the 14th century most of it seems to have already been lost.

The Mind Series

The division of the Great Perfection teachings into the groupings of the Three Series, i.e. the Mind, Expanse, and Pith Instruction Series, seem to have not gained any traction among the Nyingmapas until they began appearing in the literature of the burgeoning Seminal Heart (*snying thig*) genre, which belongs to the latter series. Prior to this, there is not much evidence to suggest that the teachings had been stratified into doxographical or even hierarchical categories. In fact, outside of the divergence of distinct lineages of transmission between what would later become known as the Mind and Expanse Series it is not certain that these two trends were truly considered opposing aspects of the Great Perfection until they were retrospectively classified as such by progenitors of the Seminal Heart. Furthermore, as I have already mentioned, the first attempt to categorize them into a single group was likely the Mind Orientation, which was apparently made of loosely related cycles or collections of texts. Moreover, it is obvious that the divisions between these categories are anything but self-explanatory, as, for instance, all Three Series are rife with teachings that are labeled as pith instructions and so on. This has led some to present the various series' as representing the developmental stages by which the Great Perfection matured into the tradition that has survived up until the present. Hence, the notion that the Mind Series came first, followed by the Expanse Series, which eventually morphed into the Pith Instruction Series as the Great Perfection began to encompass more and more of the Tantric milieu of the times in which these texts were anonymously composed.²⁰ However, as we shall see, this supposition is not in line with how the tradition views the Three Series.

One of the earliest references to the Three Series from a possibly datable author, that is if we are to believe Karmay's somewhat tenuous assessment,²¹ and therefore in a reasonably datable text, appears in *The Great Annals of the Seminal Heart of the Great Perfection* (*rDzogs pa chen po snying tig gi lo rgyus chen mo*). In it, the assumed author Zhang ston bKra shis rdo rje (1097–1167) states that Mañjuśrīmitra divided the Great Perfection into the Three Series based on the following criteria:

²⁰ See Germano 2005, for a much more nuanced example of this type of developmental model.

²¹ This assessment is apparently based on a single agentive "I" (*bdag gis*) that appears within this work. See Karmay 1988, p. 209 n. 16.

*For those that abide in mind, there is the series of mind,
For those that are free of mundane activities, there is the
series of the expanse,
For those that are primarily concerned with the key points,
there is the series of the pith instructions.*²²

The positioning of the above statement in relation to the flow of the narrative puts it directly subsequent to the passing of dGa' rab rdo rje, which is inexorably associated with the famous *Three Lines that Strike Upon the Key Points* (*Tshig gsum gnad brdegs*). The notion that the Three Series are divided along the lines of the three statements contained within the above teaching, which dGa' rab rdo rje granted to Mañjuśrīmitra as his parting advice, has certainly found voice in recent years. However, despite the intriguing nature of their concurrence, this is not explicitly mentioned in the related Tibetan material and is certainly not what is described in the passage above. But what is also not clear is whether these groups for whom the Three Series are devised refer to individual practitioners, as I have translated them in the above quote, or whether they refer to the subject matters of particular works. In other words, the Mind Series was for works that dealt with the mind and the Pith Instructions Series was mainly for the key points. However, the statement that the Expanse Series is for *bya bral* is somewhat problematic with this reading, as this is a common euphemism for yogis. And, while this could refer to works that contained material intended for those practicing in retreat, it does tend to weight the scales in favor of the former reading, in which it is for the recipients of the teachings that the Series are divided, rather than for the teachings themselves. Though there are other iterations of this schema that do seem to make it clear that the divisions are related to the inclinations of their intended audience.

In the *Tantra of the Great Array of Ati* (*A ti bkod pa chen po rgyud*), which, despite being the source of many often repeated citations, seems to be no longer extant,²³ it states that:

*For those inclined toward the mind, there is the series of
mind,*

²² *rDzogs chen snying tig gi lo rgyus*, p. 532: *sems gnas pa rnams la sems kyi sde/ bya bral rnams la klong gi sde/ gnad gtso bo rnams la man ngag gi sde/*.

²³ It is difficult to determine how long this seemingly important text has been out of circulation, as it is likely that the numerous references cited from it are citations of the citations used by authors such as Klong chen pa, rather than citations from the root text itself.

*For those inclined towards space, there is the series of
expanse,
For those free of gradual effort, there are the pith
instructions.²⁴*

Here it is much more likely that those referred to are actually groups of individuals with shared inclinations. It is also interesting to note that the above is presented as a prophecy, as it is preceded by the statement, “Though, after I have passed on, in this way it will become exceedingly apparent,”²⁵ which leaves these divisions open to being perceived as a convention that will become common place in future generations, or at least will become readily apparent to the audience of this statement, in particular, at a later date. Of course, without the root text we can’t be absolutely certain of the context of this statement, such as the orator and his audience, but within the milieu of Great Perfection literature it would be easily surmised that this would be dGa’ rab rdo rje speaking to Mañjuśrīmitra. However, this is certainly the case in another derivative of this quote that is found in a much more recent work on ‘Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse’i dbang po’s (1820–1892) *lCe btsun bi ma la’i zab tig* by the famed A ‘dzom ‘brug pa ‘Gro ‘dul dpa’ bo rdo rje (1842–1924), which states:

*Regarding that, dGa’ rab rdo rje said,
In accordance with the dispositions and capacities of those to
be trained, Mañjuśrīmitra should devise,
For those inclined to gradually engage, the series of mind,
For those inclined toward space, the series of the expanse,
For those free of gradual effort, the pith instruction series.²⁶*

Here, there is no doubt that these divisions are delineated in terms of the inclinations of disciples. It is also interesting to note that, despite some rather strong assertions to the contrary found in the root material, here the Mind Series is described as being for “those who are

²⁴ Bdud ‘joms ‘Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje, *The Collected Writing and Revelations of H.H. bDud ‘joms rin po che ‘jigs bral ye shes rdo rje*. New Delhi: Yashodhara Publications, 1999: Vol. 2, p. 385: *yiḍ can rnam la sems kyi sde/ nam mkha’ can la klong gi sde/ rim rtsol bral la man ngag gol.*

²⁵ Ibid. ‘on kyang nga ‘das ‘og dag tu/ ‘di ltar rnam par snang bar ‘gyur/.

²⁶ *lCe btsun chen po bi ma la’i zab tig gter gzhung dang yan lag gi chos sde’i skor*, 2006, p. 272: *de la dga’ rab rdo rjes gsungs/ slob dpon ‘jam dpal bshes gnyen gyis gdul bya’i khamis dbang dang mthun par/ rim ‘jug can la sems kyi sde/ nam mkha’ can la klong gi sde/ rim rtsol bral la man ngag sde/.*

inclined to gradually engage,” which is very much in line with some of the practice regimens outlined in the literature of the Mind Series Traditions (*sems sde lugs*). However, what we should take away from these statements is that, in the eyes of the tradition, the advent of the Three Series has very little to do with the historical development of the Tibetan Great Perfection tradition and everything to do with how these teachings were intended to be transmitted among a diverse groups of aspirants. Moreover, as the accounts of the advent of the Three Series progress, we see more and more of a sense that while they were admittedly applied retroactively to the corpus of Great Perfection literature, the divisions represent a natural order that reflects the underlying intent of these diverse works. Furthermore, if we take the references contained in the *Seminal Heart of Vimalamitra* (*Bi ma snying thig*) as our initial source for these divisions, then at least by the early 11th century the Three Series schema referenced groups of teachings that were being propagated simultaneously through, nevertheless, distinct lineages. And, this situation would continue for centuries to come, as it’s not at all the case that the appearance of the Pith Instructions Series entirely eclipsed the other two. Therefore, to take these divisions as representative of some sort of ongoing development is a misguided appropriation of traditional terms, which has little in common with the ways in which they were apparently intended. It seems to born out of ease of reference more than anything else, and is not particularly indicative of the views of the preeminent scholars working in this field, though, it is a convention that persists nonetheless.

Of course, as modern scholars, the major point of contention with the above statements has much less to do with what they say, than it does with who is saying it and when Tibetans started writing about it. Though the Mind Series accounts of the Indian progenitors of their tradition place most of these figures in what would ostensibly be considered the early 9th century, the *Great Annals of the Seminal Heart*, the source of our first quote on the advent of the Three Series, places them centuries earlier. So, while in the *Great Portrait* there is mention of Bai ro tsa na meeting dGa’ rab rdo rje, in the *Great Annals* he is born some three centuries after the Buddha, leaving a disparity of more than a thousand years between these two accounts. Furthermore, these accounts weren’t set into writing until at least the 11th century and as of yet we have no evidence of the Three Series appearing in Great Perfection *bKa’ ma* literature that could corroborate an Indian origin to this schema or even their usage in Tibet at an earlier age. Thus, these certainly appear to have been a Tibetan development. However, there also seems to have been little resistance from those whose teachings became retroactively classified as the Mind Series. In fact, they seem to

have embraced the characterization, as it certainly does lend some legitimacy to the authenticity of their tradition. And so, while the details of the above accounts related to the Three Series may have an obfuscating effect on modern attempts to map the development of the various strands of the Great Perfection that emerged in Tibet, for the traditions themselves it seems to have brought a greater sense of unity as much as it delineated their differences.

Though, from an evidence based perspective, we might not be able to accept the claims that the entire corpus of the Great Perfection literature was split into the Three Series long before any Tibetans ever encountered them, we do actually see a similar event occurring from the late 11th century onwards among the Tibetan adherents of this trend. Hence, we see a massive amount of literature already in circulation being newly categorized based on their audience. However, that is not to say that the Three Series represents a predetermined set of texts that were devoid of further expansion. Though it is obvious that the Pith Instruction Series, which emerged almost entirely within the milieu of treasure (*gter ma*) revelations, is a constantly expanding genre, the same can be said for much of the Mind Series, especially in terms of the instruction literature. But, rather that, for the most part, these divisions seem to have already been readily apparent due to the development of the traditions surrounding them. In other words, they seem to have naturally gravitated into their respective camps by the time the Three Series schema began to appear in writing. And the relative speed with which the longer established traditions began to use these terms self-referentially goes to show that the schema was deemed a useful representation. Of course, we have seen this notion of teachings being given based on the varying capacities of their audience used to undermine the historical development of Indian Buddhism, namely the Three Vehicle (*theg gsum*) schema. However, here, unlike the controversy surrounding terms like the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, the term Mind Series never seems to have to be taken as, or intended to be, pejorative. And, while it is understandably tempting to utilize the Three Series schema to explicate certain temporal periods in which the Great Perfection teachings had taken a particular form of exegesis, the fact is that during the period from the 11th to 14th century they seem to have coexisted on fairly equal footing. Thus, more accurately, they might be viewed as genres of methodologies that were tailored to reach specific audiences. Just as we use the expression, “the cream rises to the top,” knowing full well that cream does not emerge from somewhere other than the milk, these divisions and their respective recipients can, likewise, be viewed as the natural clarification of various methodologies that from a mutual source seemingly separate

overtime, gravitating, in this case, towards increased levels of profundity appealing to an ever more adept audience. And in this case, as with milk, we don't really notice the cream until it rises to the top.

Regardless of the initial emergence of the various texts and instruction lineages that make up the respective Three Series, it is clear that by at least the late 11th century onwards they were all in play. And, it is during this period that the convention of delineating them in this way begins to appear in Great Perfection literature. In the context of the traditional narratives, the division is described as being organized according to their respective audiences. Of course, all of these narratives are found in the literature of the Pith Instruction Series, which would come to revolutionize the Great Perfection in its own image. However, it is also at this time that there becomes more of a sense of a cohesive Great Perfection tradition, as a growing tree with deep roots and ever-widening branches, a process which, seemingly, reaches its culmination in the efforts of the *de facto* forefather of the modern Great Perfection, Klong chen pa. So, although, there has been a tendency in academic circles to perceive the Three Series schema as essentially artificial, in that such categorizations do not appear in the seemingly earliest forms of Great Perfection literature, it is in fact only in relation to each other that this schema has any real value. They portray the options open to guiding different types of practitioners that become clear only when viewed from a distance, as it is only once all of these three trends began to occupy the same time and place that such a distinction became possible, let alone useful. Therefore, rather than superimposing a developmental model onto them, or discounting them as a later invention, which they may very well be, it seems much more reasonable to appreciate their function and the insight they afford into the intentions of those that forged the various strands of the Great Perfection teachings into the inclusive tradition that followed in their wake.

And so, once more, we are plagued with a variety of perspectives on this issue, all of which highlight certain aspects each camp deems fundamental, to the detriment of other realities that clearly have some bearing. Thus, on the one hand, we see the tradition's insistence that these categories have been in place from the earliest stages of the Indian Great Perfection lineage, which undermines their own involvement with these developments. While, on the other hand, we see the views of the tradition being discarded in an attempt to isolate more observable facets of this development, which undermines our ability to come to terms with what these categories are meant to represent. And, though the first camp is concerned with legitimizing their tradition and the status of their position within and the second is primarily concerned with what we can possibly know for sure based

on the available evidence, the disconnect between these two agendas muddies the waters considerably. Therefore, while I'm certainly not advocating the wholesale acceptance of these traditional narratives, we must nevertheless accept the role that these narratives played in molding the tradition itself. For, without allowing the views of those we are researching to come to bear on our portrayal of them, we run the risk of veiling the topic of study by unduly inserting our own biases onto the information we encounter.

*

In conclusion, it would seem that the terms the Mind Orientation and the Mind Series are not synonymous. They overlap considerably, but were never intended to refer to the exact same set of literature. The Mind Orientation was an inclusive term used to demarcate all of the works that followed a particular approach (*tshul*) that gained widespread recognition as the Great Perfection. However, once treasure revelations, such as the *Seminal Heart of Vimalamitra*, came to light outside of that category and introduced the Three Series schema, the Mind Orientation gradually fell out of use with most of the teaching cycles it consisted of being categorized as the Mind Series and the Expanse Series, though some fringe elements seem to have been drawn into the Pith Instruction Series. So when we use the term Mind Series we are really referencing a later development that rivaled the rise of the Pith Instruction Series treasure cycles, rather than one that gave way to it. Much like the term *rNying ma* came to be retroactively applied to the early progenitors of this tradition, though no 9th or 10th century figures would have ever identified as such, the Mind Series began to be imputed onto various teachings and traditions that actually predated its initial usage. However, once these terms became the norm, their embrace signaled the strengthening of the traditions they were meant to reference. And so, it is in the wake of the arrival of the Three Series schema that we start to see literary output associated with the Mind Series Traditions and the prominence of these particular strands in specific locals and communities that enshrined them as key facets of their unique spiritual heritage. Thus the Mind Series should not be viewed as merely a reference to the earliest forms of the Great Perfection to have circulated during the dynastic era, but rather as the well established literary and practice traditions that rose to prominence centuries down the road.

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The “Twenty or Eighteen” Texts of the Mind Series: Scripture, Transmission, and the Idea of Canon in the Early Great Perfection Literature

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“Regarding the harmonious Dharma, [the books that you should take with you to a retreat are]: Kamalaśīla [’s *Bhāvanākrama*], [Hashang] Mahāyāna’s texts on contemplation, those of the profound Inner Yoga; the *Klong drug*, the *bZhi phrugs*, the *Six Tantras of Suchness*, and the *twenty or eighteen minor [texts of the] Mind*”

gNubs chen’s 9th century *The Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*

“Considerable confusion reigns over this list among the rNying ma pa works. Each claims to have eighteen, but often gives only sixteen or seventeen [...] The titles also vary from one source to another.”

Samten Karmay’s 1988 *The Great Perfection*

Introduction¹

The historical origins of the Great Perfection of Tibetan Buddhism and of its early literature have been a disputed topic since the tradition emerged on the Tibetan Plateau in the 9th century. There seems to be an agreement among scholars that the collection of texts known as the *Eighteen Texts of the Mind Series* (*Sems sde bco rgyad*)² is the earliest known corpus of Great Perfection literature, but as the two quotes, separated by a thousand years, introducing this article also reflect, there is a great deal of confusion about the actual contents of the collection, including if the numbers of texts within it were actually eighteen. The goal of this paper is to

¹ The research for this paper benefited from my participation in the Sems sde Project at the University of Virginia during my years as a graduate student. Led by Prof. David Germano and by Kurtis Schaeffer, and with the collaboration of then graduate student Dominic Sur, the project had as its goal to “sort out intertextuality among early Tibetan Great Perfection literature in an attempt to reconstruct the growth and development of this literature.” I want to thank them for sparking my interest in this literature as well as for their insights and help during the writing of this article. Prof. Germano’s research on the early Great Perfection literature, particularly his analysis of the Mind Series literature, and the *Eighteen Texts* in particular, in his unpublished manuscript *Mysticism and Rhetoric in the Great Perfection* has been invaluable. This article would not have been possible without it.

² I will refer to this collection as the *Eighteen Texts* from now on.

explore the transmission history of this literature from its very early reference as a corpus in gNubs chen’s 9th century *The Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*, its reception in the 11th and 12th century by figures such as Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po, Rog ban Shes rab ‘od, and Nyang ral Nyi ma ‘od zer, the role of the collection in the *Bai ro’i rgyud ‘bum*, its decline in the 13th century as reflected in both lDe’u histories and the incorporation of the texts as chapters of a larger tantra, the *All Sovereign King (Kun byed rgyal po)* and, finally, its reception in the 14th century by the great rNying ma scholar Klong chen pa in order to clarify the nature and actual contents of this collection of texts.³ As this paper outlines, the many lists of the *Eighteen Texts* that emerged between the 9th and the 14th century differ in their contents, there is no canonical collection of texts within the rNying ma tradition that includes all of the eighteen texts, and even texts with the same title can be remarkably different from one edition to the other, to the point that the only thing they have in common is their title and, as Karen Liljenberg has pointed out in her work,⁴ some of the texts of the collection may have disappeared in the rNying ma canon under new names. The main argument of this article is that there never was an actual collection of eighteen texts, and that following David Gray’s idea of the Tantric Canon as an idea,⁵ the name of this collection of texts had more symbolic than descriptive value, allowing the early Great Perfection tradition to define its early literature and practices within the confines of what was expected of all Buddhist traditions, mainly having a set of scriptures and a legitimate lineage of transmission.⁶

*The Origins of the Great Perfection in Tibet
and the Emergence of its Early Literature*

According to traditional Tibetan narratives within rNying ma literature,⁷ the Great Perfection tradition (Tib. *rDzogs chen*; Skt.

³ I have chosen the 14th century as an ending point for my study of the Mind Series literature since by this time the Great Perfection had shifted its focus to the Seminal Heart tradition, making the early Great Perfection texts and practices of the Mind Series a thing of the past.

⁴ See Liljenberg 2009 and 2012.

⁵ See Gray 2009.

⁶ The article has also been inspired by a similar project by Almogi (2013) on the Eighteen Mahāyoga Tantras.

⁷ Some of the oldest narratives can be found in Nyang ral’s 12th century *Copper Continent* and the 13th century *Mask of Bai ro tsa na*, which I discuss later in the

Atiyoga), considered “the realization of all the Buddhas of the three times [...], the essence of all the doctrines, the summit of all vehicles, the king of all tantras, the main point of all scriptures, [and] the root of all instructions,”⁸ was revealed for the first time by the Primordial Buddha Samantabhadra (Kun tu bzang po) to Vajrasattva (rDo rje sems dpa'), who, in turn, transmitted the teachings to the master from Oḍḍiyāna dGa' rab rdo rje.⁹ He was the first human to receive the teachings, and transmitted them to Śrī Siṃha (Shri sing ha),¹⁰ who would then teach them to the Tibetan translators Bai ro tsa na and Legs grub, who had been sent to India by the Tibetan Emperor Khri srong lde btsan as part of the Imperial project of bringing Buddhism to Tibet in the 8th century. Legs grub died on his way back to Tibet, but Bai ro tsa na was able to receive the transmission of the essential scriptures of the early Great Perfection tradition, *The Eighteen Texts of the Mind Series (Sems sde bco brgyad)*.¹¹ In his return to Tibet, he translated five of the *Eighteen Texts*, in what would be known as the *Five Early Translations (sNga 'gyur lnga)*, and Vimalamitra (Dri med bshes gnyen) translated the rest, known as the *Thirteen Later Translations (Phyi 'gyur bcu gsum)*. As the Great Perfection evolved and new scriptures and practices emerged, the tradition divided

article. More recent accounts can be found in Dudjom Rinpoche's *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*. Among contemporary Tibetan scholars, Namkhai Norbu, in *The Supreme Source*, for example, offers a slightly different account, placing more emphasis on the pre-Buddhist, Zhang zhung roots of the Great Perfection.

⁸ This is the narrative as found in *The Mask of Bai ro tsa na (Bai ro 'dra 'bag)*, one of the earliest accounts of the transmission of the Great Perfection teachings into Tibet. See Palmo 2005:5.

⁹ On the geographical location of Oḍḍiyāna see Hirshberg 2016: 6-7.

¹⁰ In the context of the origins of the Great Perfection, it is interesting to point out that Śrī Siṃha is considered to be born in China, although he later studied and taught in India. As Kapstein has discussed, the stories of the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet have focused on its Indian origins, while erasing any records of a more complex (and interesting) narratives in which borders and exchanges of ideas were much more fluid. See Kapstein 2000 for an exploration of a more complex historical account of the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet.

¹¹ The Great Perfection tradition talks about the *Eighteen Texts of the Mind Series* and the *Twenty-Five Tantras* as its early canonical literature, but as Germano has argued, “it seems likely that while the eighteen texts were partially of Indic origin, the twenty-five tantras were subsequent Tibetan compositions. This is indicated by their absence in other accounts of Śrī Siṃha's transmission, as well as Nub's omission of them within *The Lamp Eye of Contemplation*” (in Germano's *Mysticism and Rhetoric [unpublished]*, p. 112). In his *Secret History*, he also adds: “The eighteen mind series texts attributed to his transmission are clearly one of the very earliest matrixes of the Great Perfection in Tibet, though I am quite a bit more suspicious of the *Twenty-Five Tantras* also generally linked to [Śrī Siṃha] and Bai ro tsa na,” pp. 57-58.

them into a set of three distinctive classes of teachings: the Mind Series (*sems sde*), which would include the early translations by Bai ro tsa na and Vimalamitra, as well as a myriad of other texts that would focus on the nature of the mind; the Space Series (*klong sde*), which were never very popular within the Great Perfection tradition; and the Secret Instructions Series (*man ngag sde*), which by the 11th century started gaining popularity, and by the 18th century was the most popular form of Great Perfection practice.¹²

The early Great Perfection literature, as represented by the *Eighteen Texts*, reflects a tradition that focuses on the nature of the mind, is gnostic in nature, gives primacy to spontaneity over structure, values innate, primordial wisdom, and promotes a complete rejection, at least rhetorically, of practice that guides the practitioner not through a gradual set of contemplative practices, but through poetic, inspirational instructions that helps the practitioner recontextualize his/her understanding of the nature of self and reality. This is reflected in the earliest witnesses of this literature, as found in Dunhuang manuscripts such as the *Cuckoo of Awareness* (*Rig pa'i khu byug*).¹³ In Germano's description the emergence of a distinctive intellectual and textual tradition was a gradual process that was deeply rooted in a unique Tibetan understanding of Mahāyoga philosophy and contemplative practice. This process included the redaction of “an initial set of eighteen short texts in self-conscious mirroring of the canonical Eighteen Tantras of the Great Yoga, thus producing the first scriptural canon of the Great Perfection.” Originally, these texts were short, and lacked the traditional framework of other Buddhist tantras or a detailed description of contemplative practices.¹⁴

¹² According to Karmay (1988: 206), “the first two declined soon after the eleventh century and were finally extinguished as living religious practices, while the third which is in fact of relatively late origin, persisted and further developed all through the centuries until today.” For van Schaik (2004: 8), by the 18th century the Secret Instruction Series “supplanted entirely the Mind and Space series, becoming [...] the only form of Great Perfection still practiced.” In *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, Dudjom Rinpoche (1991: 319-334) spends four pages outlining the doctrines of the Space Series, seven for the Mind Series, and sixteen for the Secret Instructions.

¹³ A Dunhuang version of the text can be seen IOL Tib J 647.

¹⁴ Germano, *Mysticism and Rhetoric*, p. 93 (unpublished). He also argues that the label of *sems sde* became “a very loose rubric covering the majority of developments prior to the eleventh century, and their subsequent continuance by conservative authors. The texts that fall under this sub-rubric were thus authored over a lengthy time period, and are bound together (taking for granted the characteristic Great Perfection motifs and terminology) primarily by a common

As the Great Perfection literature grew and new systems emerged competing for patronage and followers, the most important texts of the Mind Series, the *Eighteen Texts* included, were collected, beginning in the 13th century, as chapters of what would become the most important tantra of the Mind Series tradition, the *All Sovereign King* (*Kun byed rgyal po*), which transformed a poetic and scattered literature collection into a cohesive and traditional tantric scripture, including a more standard Buddhist narrative of origins and transmission of the teachings.

While this narrative is widely accepted within the rNying ma tradition, the historical origins of the Great Perfection and of its early literature, though, have been a disputed and contested topic since the tradition emerged on the Tibetan plateau in the 8th century. In the 9th century the Great Perfection scholar gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes had to defend the tradition of the attacks claiming it to be a mere Tibetan copy of Chinese Chan.¹⁵ In the 11th century Lha bla ma Ye shes 'od, 959–1040 CE),¹⁶ as part of his project to reform Buddhist practices in Tibet after the collapse of the Tibetan Empire in the 9th century,¹⁷ attacked “the false doctrine of Dzogchen.”¹⁸ The Great Perfection in general, and gNubs chen in particular, will continue to be attacked in the 11th century by Ye shes 'od's nephew, Pho brang Zhi ba 'od, 1016–1111 CE),¹⁹ who dismissed gNubs chen's seminal work, the *Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*, as well as gNubs chen's commentaries on the Mind Series scriptures, like the *Rig pa'i nyi ma* (a commentary on the *Nam mkha' che*), as part of an attempt to create scriptures “composed in the guise of the word of the Buddha [while claiming] to be of Indian origin,” but which, in fact, were “produced by Tibetans,” and therefore “one can hardly accept them [...] since they may be the path leading into evil rebirths.”²⁰ Even

rejection of practice of any type, as well as by their rejection of funerary Buddhism,” p. 246.

¹⁵ gNubs chen acknowledges the similarities, particular in terms of rhetoric and their mutual rejection of any sort of practice, but he also stresses their differences.

¹⁶ For more on this figure, see the following Karmay (1998: 3-16), Karmay 2013, and Thakur 1994.

¹⁷ This project culminated with the invitation and subsequent arrival of Atīṣa (Atīṣa Dīpaṅkara Śrījñāna, 980-1054 CE) to Tibet in 1040. On the topic of Atīṣa, see Chattopadhyaya 1988, Decler 1997, and Ruegg 1981.

¹⁸ See Karmay 1998: 10.

¹⁹ See Karmay 1998: 17-40.

²⁰ See Karmay 1998: 31, 37-38. The 11th century scholar, 'Gos Khug pa lhas btsas, in his *Refutation of False Mantra* (*sNgags log sun 'byin gyi skor*), also accuses gNubs chen of composing tantras in Tibet while claiming to be of Indian origin. Dalton translates this relevant passage from 'Gos Khug pa lhas btsas attacking gNubs chen: “Because of Nup Sangyé Rinchen, sources appeared in India. Some really

Sakya Paṇḍita in the 13th century referred to the Great Perfection as being influenced by Chinese Chan:

In the Mahāmudrā of today and in the Rdzogs-chen of the Chinese fashion, "fall from above" and "climb from below" [on the one hand] and "successively" and "simultaneously" [on the other] are only terminological variants. Where meaning is concerned, no distinction is made between them.²¹

Modern scholarship on this subject began in earnest with the publication in 1988 of Samten Karmay's *The Great Perfection*, which argued for a more complex understanding of the origins of the tradition. According to Karmay, the early Great Perfection included "certain elements of the *cig car ba* [Chan] tradition, the *sems sde* type of teachings, and predominantly tantric doctrines expounded in Tantras such as [the *Guhyagarbha*]."²² With this work, Karmay acknowledged the syncretic nature of the tradition not as a weakness or as a proof of its lack of pedigree, but as a sign of the strength and creativity by which Tibetans absorbed, transformed, and reinterpreted the various forms of Buddhism that had made their way into Tibet since the 7th century.²³ In the following decades David Germano continued Karmay's line of enquiry and explored the emergence of the Great Perfection tradition as a uniquely Tibetan innovation grounded in certain Indian Buddhist developments centered around the *Guhyagarbha* (*rGyud gsang ba'i snying po*) in the Mahāyoga tradition.²⁴ Dalton and van Schaik also brought some light

astonishing teachings were composed. **The five and the eighteen mantra-teachings, as well as *The Great Mental Arising*, are all false and corrupt teachings made up by Tibetans...** Also made up by Sangyé Rinpoché are [*The Tantra of*] *The Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*, the greater and lesser *Planet Tantras of the Rahula Cycle*, [*The Tantra of*] *The Ice-Faced One*, and so forth." Bold is mine. See Dalton 2011: 8.

²¹ Sa skya pan chen, *Sdom gsum rab dbye*, fol. 25b, *Sa skya bka' 'bum* ed. (Tokyo, 1968), 5:309, quoted from Stein, R.A. "Sudden Illumination or Simultaneous Comprehension." In Gregory 1987:44.

²² See Karmay 1988: 212.

²³ For his analysis on the emergence of the Great Perfection, Karmay focuses on the *Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba*, a commentary on the perfection phase practices as are described in the *Guhyagarbha*. In his opinion, "[b]eing the principal work dealing with the final stage of the process of the rdzogs rim meditation expounded in SNy, it is the original source that gave birth to what is known as the doctrine of rdzogs chen, a syncretic teaching mainly drawn from SNy and tinged with thoughts originating the Sems sde." In Karmay 1988: 152. He dedicates the greater part of chapter six to that issue.

²⁴ See Germano 1994.

to the early stages of development of the Great Perfection tradition and its literature through their study of the Dunhuang manuscripts, and have also offered a more nuanced hermeneutical approach to our understanding of the origins of the tradition.²⁵ The work of Karen Liljenberg, particularly her findings of some of the lost scriptures belonging to the *Eighteen Texts*, reveal the way in which some of these texts disappeared under new titles, hiding in plain sight, or were incorporated as parts of larger texts during the process of creation of the various rNying ma canons in the 14th century.²⁶ The recent work of scholars such as Cabezón and his translation of Rog ban Shes rab 'od's *Lamp of the Teachings* (*Grub mtha' so so'i bzhed tshul gzhung gsal bar ston pa chos 'byung grub mtha' chen po bstan pa'i sgron me*),²⁷ and Sur,²⁸ with his translation of Rong zom's *Disclosing the Great Vehicle Approach* (*Theg chen tshul 'jug*), have also been invaluable to our understanding of the early reception and interpretation of the early Great Perfection literature in the context of the emergence of the gSar ma traditions in a post-Imperial Tibet.

While the existence and importance of the *Eighteen Texts* has never been disputed by traditional rNying ma and modern Tibetan scholars alike, the nature and content of this collection have been a recurring and puzzling question. As we will see, there is no agreement as to the actual contents of the collection or even the actual number of texts that compose it. This problem is compounded by the fact that an actual complete collection of the *Eighteen Texts* cannot be found in any of the various versions of the *Collection of the Ancients* (*rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*) in existence. This raises a variety of questions: Why are there so many different lists of them containing different titles? Why are scholars such as Klong chen pa offering different lists of the *Eighteen Texts* within the same work? Were there different canons circulating around under the same name? And where are those texts? The purpose of this article is to try to offer some answers to these questions through a careful study of the reception history of this collection from its first mention in gNubs chen's 9th century *Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*, until the references to it by Klong chen pa in the 14th century, a time where its relevance had faded in favor of other textual and contemplative traditions within the Great Perfection

²⁵ van Schaik proposes the use of the notion of “convergence” instead of “influence” when approaching the issue of the origins of the Great Perfection, and its relationship to other traditions such as Chinese Chan. See Van Schaik 2012.

²⁶ See Liljenberg 2009 and 2012.

²⁷ See Cabezón 2013.

²⁸ See Sur 2017.

tradition. As I have already pointed out, my assessment of the various lists of texts points toward the fact that an actual fixed collection of eighteen texts never really existed, and the label of “eighteen” did not operate as a concrete textual reality, but as an ideal canon that helped the early Great Perfection define itself as different and unique from other Buddhist traditions.

*The Eighteen Texts (or is it Twenty?) in the 9th Century:
gNubs chen’s Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*

The oldest recorded reference to the existence of the *Eighteen Texts* as a collection can be found in the 9th century text *The Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*²⁹ (*bSam gtan mig sgron*), a treatise written by the Tibetan scholar gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye she. The *Lamp* is a remarkable text for many reasons,³⁰ but for the argument that I want to make in this paper, it is important since it is the earliest and the most comprehensive treatise describing the emergence during this period of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) as an independent vehicle (*theg pa*),³¹ different and superior to those imported from India and China.³²

The *Lamp* is a doxography or a classification of views that organizes the various forms of Buddhism that made their way into

²⁹ I will refer to the text from now on simply as the *Lamp*.

³⁰ The *Lamp* is one of the few treatises that has survived from the so-called Tibetan Dark Age (842–978 CE), the period of social, political, and economic instability that followed the collapse of the Tibetan Empire (618–842 CE) in the 9th century. gNubs chen’s text is also the most detailed account of the diversity of Buddhist traditions introduced in Tibet (from India, Central Asia, and China) up to the 10th century, and it includes the most comprehensive discussion of the relevant philosophical debates of the period in Tibet, such as the tension between sudden vs. gradual approaches to enlightenment, and a critique of the popular but transgressive tantric practices of Mahāyoga that had been mostly censured by the empire, but had spread widely after its collapse. The *Lamp* was also the focus of my Ph.D. dissertation, see Lopez 2014.

³¹ As Sam van Schaik has argued there are earlier mentions of the term *rdzogs chen* (as a ritual moment, as a framework for tantric practice, as a textual category, etc.), and the parallel evolution of the term *Atiyoga*, which ended up becoming synonymous, but the *Lamp* is the first datable text that mentions the Great Perfection as a separate Buddhist vehicle. See van Schaik 2004.

³² “Given what we have seen in the *Sūtra* and Gnubs-chen’s *Mun pa’i go cha*, we can safely say that *rdzogs-chen* had been articulated as an independent vehicle by the late ninth century and that what should be included in this *atiyoga* was being hotly contested,” Dalton, 2002: 129. The point that I want to make is that gNubs chen is not creating the label, but he is at the forefront in the defense of the Great Perfection as an independent vehicle, and not as part of the dyad generation/perfection stage defended in other tantric traditions.

Tibet during gNubs chen's time into four basic approaches to meditation:³³ Gradual approach (*tšen men rim gyis 'jug pa*), which describes the traditional Mahāyāna textual and scholastic tradition coming mainly from India; Instantaneous approach (*ston mun cig car 'jug pa*), represented by Chinese Chan; Mahāyoga (*rnal 'byor pa chen po*), a tradition that represented the new tantric developments that had become popular during this period all across Asia, starting in the 7th-8th century; and Atiyoga (*rdzogs pa chen po*),³⁴ which can be seen to a great extent as a unique continuation of some meditational experiences of the Mahāyoga tradition, as well as a rejection of its rhetoric, and in particular of its sexual and wrathful practices.

In the *Lamp*, gNubs chen uses the doxographical genre not only to passively organize the various forms of Buddhism that were being imported into Tibet, but also to actively and creatively engage in the construction of a unique Tibetan Buddhist view, with the Gradual Approach at the bottom of the contemplative path, and Atiyoga or the Great Perfection at the top. In the chapters dedicated to each of the traditions, gNubs chen systematically outlines the philosophical view of each tradition (*lta ba*), their contemplative practices (*sgom pa*), their ethical guidelines (*spyod pa*), and the final goal of their practices (*'bras bu*). But gNubs chen does not only articulate the views of each tradition through their philosophy and practices, but also defines the boundaries that separates them by outlining their distinctive lineages of teachers, as well as their very unique corpus of scriptures.

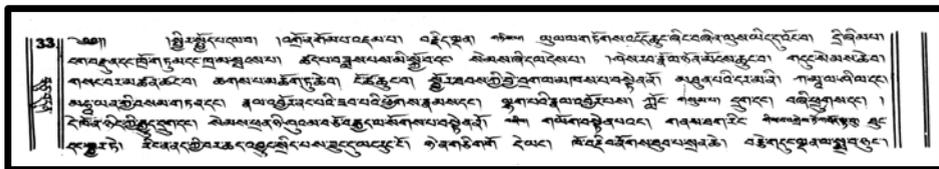
As I said, the *Lamp* has the oldest reference to the *Eighteen Texts* identified as a separate corpus of scriptures uniquely connected to the Great Perfection. The actual passage, in fact, makes a reference to all of the important scriptures that a meditator should take to a retreat in order to practice the contemplative techniques of each of the four traditions outlined in the *Lamp*:

“Regarding the harmonious Dharma [books that you should take with you to a retreat]: Kamalaśīla [’s *Bhāvanākrama*], [Hashang] Mahāyāna’s texts on contemplation, those of the profound Inner

³³ Jake Dalton (2005) traced some of the early historical developments of the doxographical tradition in India as well as in Tibet all the way up to gNubs chen, arguing that while in India the focus of doxographies were the organization of the constant ritual innovation within the tantric material, in Tibet, while this was also a concern, the focus shifted to doctrinal differences. This point becomes obvious in the *Lamp*, in which gNubs chen constructs his doxography around the understanding that different Buddhist traditions have of the notion of non-conceptuality (*mi rtog pa*), which allows him to position the Great Perfection away from ritual or contemplative contexts and engage the other traditions in the intellectual arena.

³⁴ gNubs chen offers an overview of this classification in chapter three of the *Lamp*.

Yoga; the *Klong drug*,³⁵ the *bZhi phrugs*³⁶ (whose commentary is like the primordial meaning), the *Six Tantras of Suchness*,³⁷ and *the twenty or eighteen minor [texts of the] Mind*³⁸



The page from gNubs chen’s *Lamp for the Eye in Meditation* with the first recorded mention to the *Eighteen Texts*

³⁵ This text could be the *Kun tu bzang po Klong drug pa’i rgyud* attributed to Vimalamitra, but, as Karmay pointed out, since the text is not actually quoted in the *Lamp*, “there is no means of verifying it.” He then adds, “Klong-chen rab-’byams uses it as one of the fundamental sources in his works, e.g. *Theg mchog mdzod*, ff. 190a5, 300a3 et passim; *Tshig don mdzod* ff. 4b2, 5b2, 6b3 et passim” in Karmay 2007: 97 n. 69. van Schaik, though, thinks that this text may be quoted in the *Lamp* under a slightly different name: “This is perhaps a commentary to the *mTsho Klong* (*Byang chub kyi sems rgya mtsho Klong dgu’i rgyud*, Tb.69), which is cited twice in the Atiyoga chapter. There is a commentary on the *Klong drug rgyud* attributed to Vimalamitra in the *bKa’ ma shin tu rgyas pa* (vol.100) but as the root text is one of the Seminal Heart tantras which were not in circulation until the eleventh century at the earliest, this is most unlikely to be the text referred to here,” in van Schaik 2004: 196.

³⁶ This is a text that I have not been able to identify. Karmay found a reference to it in Klong chen pa’s *gNas lugs mdzod*, f. 72a “*lta sgom spyod ’bras bzhi phrugs cig lhun grub tu ’byung ste*—View, contemplation, conduct and the result, the four will come naturally and simultaneously,” in Karmay 2007: 97 n. 70.

³⁷ Donati thinks that this commentary may “refer to the Three Outer Tantras of Kriyāyoga, Upayoga and Yoga and the Three Inner Tantras of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga. This conjecture is confirmed by one passage I found in dPa’ bo gtsug lag’s *mKhas pa’i dga’ ston*, vol. Tha, ff. 37b6-38a1; this passage, quoting a commentary to the *Guhya garbhatantra* written by rGyal ba g.Yung, relates that the teachings of the Three Outer Tantras of Kriyayoga, Upayoga and Yoga and of the Three Inner Tantras of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga are the same as the [six kinds of] teachings regarding Thusness (*de kho na nyid ston pa rnams dang don gcig go zhes rgyal ba g.yung bzhed to*.)” in Donati 2006: 151 n. 36. dPa’ bo gtsug lag’s *mKhas pa’i dga’ ston* also offers a list of old Tibetan texts that include a title of the same name by the translators dPal brtsegs and Chog ro Klu’i rgyal mtshan: “dpal brtsegs dang klu’i rgyal mtshan gyi brgal lan bzhi phrugs” in dpa’ bo gtsug lag phreng ba Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa, *A Scholar’s Feast* (*Chos ’Byung Mkhas Pa’i Dga’ Ston*), TBRC W7499, Vol. 1, p. 402.

³⁸ In Tibetan: “*mthun <gsum pa /> pa’i dar ma ni / ka m’a la shi la dang / (33.4) mah’a yan gyi bsam gtan dang / rnal ’byor nang pa’i zab pa’i phyogs rnams dang / lhag pa’i rnal ’byor pas / Klong drug dang / bzhi phrugs <gis ba ’gyel te ka don lta bu /> dang / (33.5) de kho na nyid kyi rgyud drug dang / sems phran nyi shu’am bco brgyad la sogs pa bsten no.*” Italics are mine. *Lamp* 1974: 33.4-33.5.

Several things make this quote important in the context of our study of the history of the *Eighteen Texts*. First, this is the only explicit reference to the *Eighteen Texts* as a literary corpus in the whole treatise. gNubs chen will quote extensively from this collection, particularly in the chapter dedicated to the Great Perfection tradition, but he will not refer to them as a group again. Second, gNubs chen's reference is surprisingly vague. Are there eighteen or twenty texts? Does he not know? Are there different opinions on this matter? gNubs chen does not offer a list of the texts that comprise this corpus, but a survey of the *Lamp* comparing gNubs chen's citations with later lists of the *Eighteen Texts* shows that most of the texts considered by the later tradition to be a part of the collection are included in it, although the list veers towards twenty more than eighteen, and some of the texts that ended up not making it in the list, like *The Small Hidden Grain* (*rGum chung*) and *The Universally Definitive Perfection* (*rDzogs pa spyi spyod*), are actually quoted more times than some of the established texts like *The Cuckoo of Awareness* (*Rig pa'i khu byug*). Here are the texts cited by gNubs chen, listed for comparative purposes following the later standard division between the *Five Early Translations* (1-5) and the *Thirteen Later ones* (6-18), plus an additional two texts that make this early corpus one of twenty texts:

1. *The Cuckoo of Awareness* (*Rig pa'i khu byug*, here as *Khu byug*)
2. *Great Potency* (*rTsal chen sprugs pa*, here as *bTsal chen sprugs pa*)
3. *The Great Soaring Garuda* (*Khyung chen lding ba*, here as *Khyung chen*)
4. *Meditation on the Enlightened Mind* (*Byang chub sems bsgom pa*, here as *Sems bsgom*, as well as its alternative title of *rDo la gser zhun*)
5. *The Never Declining Banner of the Great Sky* (*Mi nub rgyal mtshan*, here as *Nam mkha' che*)
6. *The Supreme Lord* (*rJe btsan dam pa*)
7. *The Wish-fulfilling Gem* (*Yid bzhin nor bu*)
8. *The Victorious Emergence of the Peak* (*rTse mo byung rgyal*)
9. *The Inlaid Jewels of Bliss* (*bDe ba 'phra bkod*)
10. *The King of the Sky* (*Nam mkha' rgyal po*)
11. *The Wheel of Life* (*Srog gi 'khor lo*)
12. *The Epitome* (*sPyi 'chings*, here as *sPyi chings* and *sPhyi bcangs*)
13. *The Infinity of Bliss* (*bDe 'byams*)
14. *The Quintessential King* (*Yang tig rgyal po* or *Mi 'gyur thig le tig* or *Byang chub sems tig*)
15. *The Marvelous* (*rMad du byung ba*)
16. *The Six Spheres* (*Thig le drug pa*)

17. *The Accomplishment of Meditation* (*bsGom don grub pa*, here as *don grub*)
18. *The Compendium* (*Kun 'dus*, here as *Rin po che kun 'dus rig pa*)
19. *The Universally Definitive Perfection* (*rDzogs pa spyi spyod*, here as *sPhyi bcod*)
20. *The Small Hidden Grain* (*sBas pa'i rgum chung*)

The fact that gNubs chen seems unsure as to the number of texts that are part of this collection points, I would argue, not to some sort of confusion on his part, but to the fact that the Great Perfection tradition is, at the time of gNubs chen, in its very early stages, with a nascent and fluid sets of ideas, practices, and scriptures. This nascent nature of the tradition as well as its scriptural corpus would also explain why gNubs chen refers to it as *sems phran* or minor texts of the mind, instead of *sems sde* or Mind Series. The concept of a “Mind Series” would only make sense in the context of the triad of Mind Series (*ems sde*), Space Series (*klong sde*) and the Secret Instruction Series (*man ngag sde*) traditions that was created later to classify and organize the various teachings and lineages that were within the Great Perfection and that at the time of the *Lamp* either were not well established to merit a reference to them, or, as I believe, had not yet emerged.³⁹ Finally, gNubs chen does not divide the corpus into the later accepted division between the *Five Earlier Translations* by Bai ro tsa na, and the *Thirteen Later Translations* by Vimalamitra.⁴⁰

³⁹ Sur argues that there is the possibility that the Mind, Space, and Secret Instruction series of the Great Perfection emerged at the same time, and that the fact that some scholars such as gNubs chen or Rong zom only mentioned Mind Series literature cannot be attributed to the absence of other scriptures, but to some particular lineage or intellectual allegiance (Sur, p. 322). I would argue that while the lack of contrary evidence is not sufficient evidence, a close analysis of the textual reception seems to point towards the Mind texts as the earliest layer of Great Perfection literature.

⁴⁰ gNubs chen does mention Bai ro tsa na and Vimalamitra in the *Lamp*, although their names appear as part of the interlinear notes and not as part of the main text. This creates an issue, since the authorship of the footnotes has been debated by scholars. van Schaik (Sam van Schaik 2004: 165–206, 197) and Esler consider them a work of the author, while I tend to think that they are the work of some of his early disciples. Karmay, in his pioneer study of the early Great Perfection, and the first serious study of the *Lamp*, was skeptical regarding gNubs chen's authorship of the interlinear notes, particularly since they seem to include a few anachronisms, like the use of the name gLang dar ma to refer to King 'U'i dum brtan (Karmay, 1988:2007, 59-60). As Yamaguchi (1996) already argued, the use of the derogative name gLang dar ma cannot be found in any of the manuscripts of the Dunhuang cave, which probably indicates a late Dark Age or early Tibetan

Despite all of these issues, there is no doubt that gNubs chen relies heavily on this early corpus of literature in his depiction of the Great Perfection as a separate Buddhist vehicle. gNubs chen is using the early corpus of the *Eighteen Texts* to separate the Great Perfection from the other vehicles, showing that their particular philosophical vision is preserved in a different literary corpus, with a different lineage of transmission. gNubs chen uses these texts, with their particular denial of tantric rhetoric and practice, its poetic bent, its deconstructive approach to discourse, its emphasis on spontaneity and naturalness (what David Germano has called “Pristine Tantra”) to articulate a different approach to Buddhist thought and to those of the other Buddhist vehicles discussed in the *Lamp*.

The Eighteen Texts in gNubs chen’s Lamp for the Eye in Meditation

Title	Number of quotes
1. <i>The Cuckoo of Awareness (Rig pa’i khu byug, here as Khu byug)</i>	2
2. <i>Great Potency (rTsal chen sprugs pa, here as bTsal chen sprugs pa)</i>	3
3. <i>The Great Soaring Garuda (Khyung chen lding ba, here as Khyung chen)</i>	19
4. <i>Meditation on the Enlightened Mind (Byang chub sems bsgom pa, here as Sems bsgom, as well as its alternative title of rDo la gser zhun)</i>	11
5. <i>The Never Declining Banner of the Great Sky (Mi nub rgyal mtshan, here as Nam mkha’ che)</i>	37
6. <i>The Supreme Lord (rJe btsan dam pa)</i>	2
7. <i>The Wish-fulfilling Gem (Yid bzhin nor bu)</i>	1

Renaissance period for the composition of the interlinear notes. Carmen Meinert (2004: 238 n. 599), and Esler (2012: 129) have offered other convincing historical and grammatical arguments that seem to confirm Karmay’s early suspicions regarding the authorship of the notes, attributing them to close disciples, or to the later Tibetan tradition. I agree with the prevalent assessment of the interlinear notes being written not by gNubs chen, but by some close disciples or early custodians of gNubs chen’s tradition (probably, early members of the Zur tradition).

8. <i>The Victorious Emergence of the Peak</i> (<i>rTse mo byung rgyal</i>)	19
9. <i>The Inlaid Jewels of Bliss</i> (<i>bDe ba 'phra bkod</i>)	7
10. <i>The King of the Sky</i> (<i>Nam mkha' rgyal po</i>)	12
11. <i>The Wheel of Life</i> (<i>Srog gi 'khor lo</i>)	5
12. <i>The Epitome</i> (<i>sPyi 'chings</i> , here as <i>sPyi chings</i> and <i>sPhyi bcangs</i>)	3
13. <i>The Infinity of Bliss</i> (<i>bDe 'byams</i>)	6
14. <i>The Quintessential King</i> (<i>Yang tig rgyal po</i> or <i>Mi 'gyur thig le tig</i> or <i>Byang chub sems tig</i>)	1
15. <i>The Marvelous</i> (<i>rMad du byung ba</i>)	43
16. <i>The Six Spheres</i> (<i>Thig le drug pa</i>)	3
17. <i>The Accomplishment of Meditation</i> (<i>bsGom don grub pa</i> , here as <i>don grub</i>)	2
18. <i>The Compendium</i> (<i>Kun 'dus</i> , here as <i>Rin po che kun 'dus rig pa</i>)	15
19. <i>The Universally Definitive Perfection</i> (<i>rDzogs pa spyi spyod</i> , here as <i>sPhyi bcod</i>)	3
20. <i>The Small Hidden Grain</i> (<i>sBas pa'i rgum chung</i>)	5

To conclude this section, though, I think it is also worth mentioning another clue that points toward the emergent nature of the Great Perfection as a separate vehicle at the time of gNubs chen's *Lamp*. While the *Eighteen Texts* play a key role in the articulation of the Great Perfection philosophical view, none of the texts in the corpus is the most mentioned text in the *Lamp*, nor even in the chapter dedicated to the Great Perfection. In particular, this honor goes to the *Sūtra of the Gathered Intentions* (*dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*), which is mentioned ninety-nine times. The most mentioned Mind Series text in the *Lamp* is the *Marvelous* (*rMad du byung ba*), which is quoted forty-three times. In chapter seven, which is dedicated to the Great Perfection, the *Marvelous* is quoted forty-one times, still, the *Sūtra of*

the Gathered Intentions is quoted forty-five times, and the quotations are much longer. Why would that be? There may be several reasons, but, as I have said, I believe that the *Lamp* presents a Great Perfection tradition in its very early stages, and while the early Mind Series literature helps gNubs chen express a unique vision for the tradition, the texts also lack the philosophical sophistication to articulate and argue its own positions against those of other Buddhist traditions with more historical pedigree (we could say that the rhetoric of denial can only get you so far in an argument!). That's why gNubs chen repeatedly uses tantric material, in this case the *Sūtra of the Gathered Intentions* (*dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*), which helps him make his case for the Great Perfection as a separate vehicle.

*The Eighteen Texts in the 11th and 12th Centuries:
Rong zom, Rog ban, and Nyang ral*

gNubs chen's 9th century *Lamp for the Eye in Meditation* reflects, as we have seen, the Great Perfection as well as the collection of texts that became known as the *Eighteen Texts* of the Mind Series literature in its very early stages. The corpus of texts is still not defined in its number ("twenty or eighteen"), nor in its specific content, since the *Lamp* does not offer an actual list. It seems that at the time of gNubs chen's writing, the Mind Series literature is vaguely defined but relatively cohesive in tone and content, and its various texts are still fairly independent of each other since gNubs chen cites them as separate texts throughout the *Lamp*. Over the next four centuries we will see a general consensus by rNying ma scholars about the existence of an early canon of Great Perfection texts under the label of the *Eighteen Texts*, but, as we will see, there will be a complete lack of agreement about its actual composition. A brief analysis of the references to this corpus of scriptures by three different rNying ma scholars who lived in the 11th and 12th centuries, Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po, Rog ban Shes rab 'od, and Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer, will allow us to explore a period in the reception history of the Mind Series literature in which its scriptures are in an intermediate or transitional period between their circulation as independent texts, and their transformation in the late 12th–early 13th century as chapters of *The All Sovereign King* (*Kun byed rgyal po*), a scripture that will incorporate the Eighteen Texts as part of a new and larger textual tradition that will also incorporate new scriptures and practices within an evolving Great Perfection tradition that was also competing at the time with the New Translation movements that started to develop in Tibet in the post-Dark Age period.

Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po's
Disclosing the Great Vehicle Approach

After gNubs chen, the most important figure in the transmission of the early Great Perfection literature is the great 11th century scholar Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po (1012-1088).⁴¹ Rong zom is one of the intellectual pillars of the early rNying ma tradition, and one of the most articulate defenders of the Great Perfection tradition in the early post-Empire period, when the teachings, lineages, and scriptures associated with the early translation period came under assault by the new translation movements (*gSar ma*), as we saw in an earlier reference to the indictment of bla ma Ye shes 'od and his nephew Pho brang Zhi ba 'od.

An important work for our understanding of the reception history of the *Eighteen Texts* is Rong zom's treatise *Disclosing the Great Vehicle Approach* (*Theg chen tshul 'jug*),⁴² which Dominic Sur, in his great study of the text, has described as a “systematic analysis of various types of Buddhist thought and practices that situates them in relation to the Old School's lightly distinguished Great Perfection tradition.” According to Sur, Rong zom's understanding of the Great Perfection tradition is based on the early Mind Series literature, although, as he points out, “the Approach nowhere refers to a Mind Series or Mind Class” corpus of texts,⁴³ neither does he offer a list of eighteen texts connected to this genre of literature, although he relies heavily on them in his presentation of the Great Perfection. Rong zom also does not mention the *All Sovereign King* as a text.

The chapter of *The Approach* that offers a discussion of the Great Perfection “is the longest of the text, containing one hundred and eight citations.” Of those one hundred and eight citations, fifty correspond “to five works of the so-called *Eighteen Works of the Mind Series* (*Sems sde bco brgyad*), which were becoming increasingly available (and systematized) in the tenth century.”⁴⁴ The texts that he quotes are mainly from what will become known as the *Five Early Translations* by Bai ro tsa na:⁴⁵ *The Great Garuda* (*Khyung chen lding ba*),

⁴¹ The dates of Rong zom, very much like the dates of gNubs chen, are quite uncertain, although scholars place him with some degree of certainty in the 11th century, 1012-1131. See Sur 2015: 13.

⁴² TBRC W15575.

⁴³ See Sur 2015: 322.

⁴⁴ See Sur 2015: 313.

⁴⁵ Regarding the use of Mind literature in Rong zom, I rely on Sur (2015: 314-315): “the fifth chapter of *The Approach* is the longest of the text, containing one hundred and eight citations that structure the chapter's predominantly

The Great Potency (rTsal chen sprugs pa), *The Cuckoo of Awareness (Rig pa khu byug)*,⁴⁶ *The Great Sky (Nam mkha' che)*, and *The Six Spheres (Thig le drug pa)*, with no references to the other texts mentioned by gNubs chen in the *Lamp* that were considered part of the corpus with the exception of *The Marvelous (rMad du byung ba)*, which he only quotes once. His range of quotations of the early Great Perfection literature, centered on the *Five Early Translations*, is not as broad as gNubs chen's, but it still reflects the relevance of the *Eighteen Texts* in articulating the doctrine and practices of the early Great Perfection tradition.

Rog ban Shes rab's Lamp of the Teachings

In the 12th century, Rog ban Shes rab (1166–1244) or Rog ban, wrote *The Text that Explains the Beliefs of the Different Philosophical Schools. The Great Dharma History and Doxography: A Lamp of the Teachings (Grub mtha' so so'i bzhed tshul gzhung gsal bar ston pa chos 'byung grub mtha' chen po bstan pa'i sgron me)*. Rog ban's treatise echoes the works of gNubs chen and Rong zom in which it is an attempt to establish

documentary domain and form the significant object of our attentions throughout this essay. These citations, which organize the discussion below, are categorized into three recognizable groups, with a more amorphous but discernible 'everything-else' group making a fourth. In the first group of citations we find fifty references to five different chapters the *Kun byed rgyal po*, each of which correspond to five works of so-called *Eighteen Works of the Mind Series (Sems sde bco brgyad)*, which were becoming increasingly available (and systematized) in the tenth century." Here I make a different interpretation of Rong zom's sources from the one presented by Sur in his outstanding work on *The Approach*. According to Sur, Rong zom is not quoting from the collection of scriptures that will become known as the *Eighteen Texts* of the Mind Series, but from the *All Sovereign King*, a text that will incorporate most of those eighteen texts as chapters of a larger scripture, offering a more traditional Buddha narrative and framework to the Mind Series teachings. The problem with this assumption is that Rong zom does not mention the *All Sovereign King* as a text. When he quotes from the Mind Series corpus, he does refer to them by their individual names such as the *Great Sky (Nam mkha' che)*, etc. Since Sur has found the exact quotes in the *All Sovereign King*, he assumes that Rong zom is quoting from the scripture (or an earlier version of it), but while this may be true, it would not make much sense that Rong zom does not refer to it by name. My argument is that at the time of Rong zom's writing, either the *All Sovereign King* has not been written, or that it has not yet supplanted the individual identity of the *Eighteen Texts*. It is possible that these texts may have circulated as a bundle of texts (as we find in some of the Dunhuang Manuscripts such as PT113), but at this time, they may not have lost yet their individual identity. For Sur's discussion on this topic, see Sur 2105: 328-29, also Higgins 2013: 33.

⁴⁶ As Sur points out (2015: 594 n. 1990), this text is referenced in *The Approach* under the name *rDo rje tshig drug pa*.

the legitimacy of the lineages and scriptures of the Great Perfection tradition in what it seems a not so welcoming intellectual environment in Tibet that looked with suspicion at scriptures that emerged during the post-Imperial period with dubious claims of Indian origins, and gave primacy to the new tantric scriptures that were being brought into Tibet by a diverse group of Tibetan translators.⁴⁷

As Cabezón points out in his translation of Rog ban’s work, “by the 12th century, the unwieldy Semde Tantras had already been systematized into ‘systems’ (*lugs*) that provided Great Perfection practitioners with the essential terminological, doctrinal, and technical instructions for the practice of Dzogchen”.⁴⁸ Rog ban, just as his contemporary, Rong zom, considers the Great Perfection to be the supreme Buddhist vehicle, and relies on Mind Series literature to make that case. Like Rong zom, he does not specifically mention the corpus of *Eighteen Texts*, and he quotes less frequently from them than gNubs chen and Rong zom, with only specific references to *The Great Garuḍa* (*Khyung chen lding ba*) and *The Great Sky* (*Nam mkha’ che*). In fact, many of the quotes are not attributed at all, and it is left to the reader to realize that he is citing from the Mind Series literature. A close reading of the text seems to point toward a transitional period when the *Eighteen Texts* existed as an independent group of closely-related texts, before the incorporation of those scriptures into the single text known as *The All Sovereign King* (*Kun byed rgyal po*), which will incorporate a diverse group of Mind Series literature beyond the early corpus of eighteen as individual chapters of a larger tantric text. That would explain the anonymity of many of the sources and the fact that many of them can be traced back to what would become the *All Sovereign King*.

Making a List and Checking it twice: Nyang ral Nyi ma ‘od zer and the Systematization of the Eighteen Texts of the Mind Series

The 12th century rNying ma scholar Nyang ral Nyi ma ‘od zer⁴⁹ is the first Tibetan author to offer a list of the *Eighteen Texts*, something that

⁴⁷ Like gNubs chen, Rog ban also organizes his explanation of each Buddhist vehicle by discussing 1) their philosophical view (*lta ba*); 2) their contemplative practices (*sgom pa*); their conduct (*spyod pa*); and 4) their goal (*bras bu*); Cabezón, p. 19. It is important to notice though, that Rog ban does not cite gNubs chen or any of his works.

⁴⁸ Cabezón 2013: 5-6.

⁴⁹ See Hirshberg 2016 for an excellent recent book on Nyang ral, which offers great insights on this figure and his role in the creation of early rNying ma identity.

he does not once, but actually twice, and with some significant difference between both lists. The two different lists can be found in the *Copper Continent* (*bKa' thang zangs gling ma*), and his *Religious History* (*Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud*). In both texts, the early Great Perfection texts are called the *Eighteen Great Scriptures* (*Lung chen po bco brgyad*), even though in the *Religious History* he only mentions seventeen of them. In neither of the lists does he make an explicit distinction between early and later translations, but this distinction is implicit in a later reference in the text.⁵⁰

*Nyang ral Nyi ma od' zer's Eighteen Texts
in The Copper Continent*⁵¹

1. *The Cuckoo of Awareness* (Tib. *Rig pa khu byug*, here as *Rig pa khu byug gi lung*)
2. *Great Potency* (Tib. *rTsal chen sprugs pa*, here as *Rig pa rTsal chen gi lung*)
3. *The Great Soaring Garuda* (Tib. *Khyung chen lding ba*, here as *lTa ba khyung chen gi lung*)
4. *Meditation on the Enlightened Mind* (Tib. *Byang chub sems sgom pa*, here as *rDo la gser zhun gi lung*)
5. *The Never Declining Banner of the Great Sky* (Tib. *Mi nub rgyal mtshan*, here as *Mi nub pa'i rgyal mtshan nam mkha' che*)
6. *The Marvelous* (Tib. *rMad du byung ba*, here as *Ye shes rmad byung ba'i lung*)
7. *The Accomplishment of Meditation* (Tib. *bsGom don grub pa'i lung*)

⁵⁰ There is a mention of the division between the *Five Early* and *Thirteen Later Translations*, although the attribution to Bai ro tsa na and Vimalamitra is not completely clear: "The king sent someone to find the yogi saying, "Find out who that yogi is!" The yogi was found sitting and drinking while flirting with a *chang* lady. When asked, "What is your name? Who is your teacher? What is the name of your teaching?" he answered, "I am Yudra Nyingpo. My teacher is Vairochana. My teaching is the sacred Great Perfection." This was reported to King Trisong Deutsen, who declared, "Invite him here! I must ask him for teachings!" Yudra Nyingpo was then placed on a throne of precious substances and offered a mandala of gold. The king and the close disciples received teachings from Master Virnalamitra in the morning and from Yudra Nyingpo in the afternoon. Thus, they received the *Five Early* and *Thirteen Later Translations* of the Great Perfection. As the teachings of the two masters turned out to be identical, the Tibetan ministers felt regret for having expelled Vairochana." See Kunsang 1999: 111.

⁵¹ The *Bka' thang zangs gling ma*, in the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo* Volume 1 pp. 17-206.

8. *The Supreme Lord* (Tib. *rJe btsan dam pa as rJe btsun dam pa'i lung*)
9. *The Quintessential King* (Tib. *Yang tig rgyal po*, here as *sKye med ti la ka'i lung* or the *Mi 'gyur thig le tig*)
10. *The Wheel of Life* (Tib. *Srog gi 'khor lo'i lung*)
11. *The Wish-fulfilling Gem* (Tib. *Yid bzhin nor bu'i lung*)
12. *The Compendium* (Tib. *Kun 'dus*, here as *Rin po che kun 'dus kyi lung*)
13. *The King of the Sky* (Tib. *Nam mkha' rgyal po*, here as *Nam mkha' che ba rgyal po'i lung*)
14. *The Victorious Emergence of the Peak* (Tib. *rTse mo byung rgyal gyi lung*)
15. *The Infinity of Bliss* (Tib. *bDe ba rab 'byams kyi lung*)
16. *The Inlaid Jewels of Bliss* (Tib. *bDe ba 'phra bkod as bDe ba phra bkod kyi lung*)
17. *The Great Treasure of Variety* (as *sNa tshogs gter chen kyi lung*)
18. *The Epitome of Teachings Scripture* (as *bKa' lung gi spyi chings dang lung*)

*Nyang ral Nyi ma od' zer's Eighteen Texts
in the Religious History*⁵²

1. *The Cuckoo of Awareness* (Tib. *Rig pa khu byug*, here as *Rig pa khu byug gi lung*)
2. *Great Potency* (Tib. *rTsal chen sprugs pa*, here as *Rig pa rTsal chen gi lung*)
3. *The Great Soaring Garuda* (Tib. *Khyung chen lding ba*, here as *lTa ba khyung chen gi lung*)
4. *Meditation on the Enlightened Mind* (Tib. *Byang chub sems sgom pa*, here as *rDo la gser zhun gi lung*)
5. *The Never Declining Banner of the Great Sky* (Tib. *Mi nub rgyal mtshan*, here as *Mi nub pa'i rgyal mtshan nam mkha' che*)
6. *Arriving at the Crucial Point* (Tib. *gNad du gyur pa*)
7. *The Supreme Lord* (Tib. *rJe btsan dam pa*)
8. *The Quintessential King* (Tib. *Yang ti rgyal po as Yang tig*)
9. *The Wheel of Life* (Tib. *Srog gi 'khor lo*)
10. *The Wish-fulfilling Gem* (Tib. *Yid bzhin nor bu*)
11. *The Compendium* (Tib. *Kun 'dus*)
12. *The King of the Sky* (Tib. *Nam mkha' rgyal po*)

⁵² In Nyang ral's *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud*, 320-321.

13. *The Victorious Emergence of the Peak* (Tib. *rTse mo byung rgyal*)
14. *The Infinity of Bliss* (Tib. *bDe 'byams*)
15. *The Inlaid Jewels of Bliss* (Tib. *bDe ba 'phra bkod*, here as *bDe ba phra bkod*)
16. *Great Realization* (Tib. *rTogs chen*)⁵³
17. *The Epitome* (Tib. *sPyi 'chings*, here as *Chings*)

The first five texts in both lists are identical and coincide with the *Five Early Translations* later attributed to Bai ro tsa na, but there are some differences in the later thirteen attributed to Vimalamitra. To begin with, Nyang ral's *Religious History* only lists seventeen of them. Neither of the lists includes the *Six Seminal Nuclei* (*Thig le drug pa*), and some of the titles in both lists are unusual. In the *Copper Continent*, we find the *The Great Treasure of Variety* (*sNa tshogs gter chen kyi lung*), and in the *Religious History* we find *Arriving at the Crucial Point* (*gNad du gyur ba*) and the *Great Realization* (*rTog chen*). These names may be alternative titles for the texts missing in the lists, but they are quite unusual and odd in the various lists of the *Eighteen Texts*.

An important contribution by Nyang ral is that he does not only finally offer a list (or lists, as we just saw) of the *Eighteen Texts*, but he also offers a narrative of how these texts made it into Tibet. In the *Copper Continent*, Nyang ral weaves a narrative about the introduction of the Great Perfection into Tibet that centers on the Emperor Khri srong lde btsan and the Indian figure of Śrī Siṃha:

King Trisong Deutsen was told that the two most intelligent in Tibet were Vairochana of Pagor, the son of Hedo of Pagor, and Lekdrub of Tsang, the son of Plain God of Tsang. He sent them his command, and they received ordination from Master Bodhisattva. They learned the skill of translation, and Master Padma gave instructions on magical powers. The king furnished them each with a drey of gold dust and a gold *patra* and sent them off to bring back the sacred Great Perfection from India. When the translators arrived in India they inquired about who was the most learned in the sacred Great Perfection. All the replies were in agreement that the master Shri Singha was the most learned. Having spoken in this way, Shri Singha took them into a house surrounded by nine walls and conferred the empowerment of direct anointment. He then placed a huge copper vessel upon a tripod, and the master sat himself upon it. He donned a cotton robe

⁵³ According to Germano, this could correspond to the *Bsgom don grub pa*, in Germano, *Mysticism and Rhetoric in the Great Perfection*, 357.

with lattice work, put a copper pipe to his mouth, and gave teachings.⁵⁴

After this narrative account of the historical context of the arrival of the Great Perfection teachings to Tibet, Nyang ral proceeds to list the *Eighteen Texts of the Mind Series* and their individual meaning:

Having spoken in this way, Shri Singha took them into a house surrounded by nine walls and conferred the empowerment of direct anointment. He then placed a huge copper vessel upon a tripod, and the master sat himself upon it. He donned a cotton robe with lattice work, put a copper pipe to his mouth, and gave teachings. [...] Shri Singha taught the *Eighteen Major Scriptures*. Since everything originates from awakened mind, he taught the *Awareness Cuckoo Scripture*. To outshine all effort and fabrication, he taught the *Great Strength of Awareness Scripture*. Since the nature of mind is perfected within dharmadhatu, he taught the *Great Garuda View Scripture*. Since the nature of meditation is perfected within space, he taught the *Pure Gold on Stone Scripture*. To perfect the nature of meditation, he taught the *Great Space Never-Waning Banner Scripture*. To resolve the nature of mind to be emptiness, he taught the *Wonderful Wisdom Scripture*. To demonstrate the means of meditation, he taught the *Meditation Accomplishment Scripture*. To demonstrate that the nature of mind is naturally dharmakaya, he taught the *Supreme King Scripture*. To demonstrate that the nature of mind is the Single Sphere, he taught the *Non-arising Tilaka Scripture*. To turn the wheel in the three states of existence, showing that the nature of mind is beyond birth and death, he taught the *Wheel of Life-Force Scripture*. To demonstrate that desirable qualities originate from the nature of mind, he taught the *Wish-Fulfilling Scripture*. To let all conceptual thinking rest in the state of dharmata, he taught the *All-Embodying Jewel Scripture*. To demonstrate in full detail that all the vehicles are perfected and originate in the nature of mind, he taught the *Great Space King Scripture*. To demonstrate that resting in the nature of mind, the state of Samantabhadra, is unsurpassed, the summit amongst all, he taught the *Spontaneous Summit Scripture*. To demonstrate that the meaning of the nature of mind is devoid of fabrications and naturally rests in the state of ease, he taught the *All-Encompassing Bliss Scripture*. To demonstrate that awakened mind remains untainted by the defects of emotional disturbances and is ornamented with the jewelry of qualities, he taught the *Jewel-Studded Bliss Scripture*. To demonstrate that all of samsara and nirvana originates within the expanse of awakened mind, he taught the *Variiegated Great Treasury Scripture*. To demonstrate and epitomize all the vehicles within awakened mind, he

⁵⁴ Kunsang 2004: 90-91.

taught the *Epitome of Teachings Scripture*. Thus, he taught eighteen volumes of scriptures.⁵⁵

What is compelling about this narrative is how the origin of these scriptures, as well as the Great Perfection tradition, is not only weaved into part of the most glorious period of the Tibetan Empire, but also that it is linked all the way back to India. Previous scholars had tried to legitimize the Great Perfection teachings as having Indian origins before gNubs chen's *Lamp*, for example, including a list of the Indian teachers responsible for the early Great Perfection teachings, but this is the first time we have a lengthy narrative that is presented as an historical account of the transmission of the tradition into Tibet. It is important to note, though, that Nyang ral does not mention the *All Sovereign King* in the text, which seems to reinforce the argument that the text was probably not around, or was not an important aspect of the tradition until after the 12th century, since none of the great rNying ma scholars of the period (Rong zom, Rog ban, and Nyang ral) mention it.

*Clay Pots, Deerskin Hoods, and Goat's Milk Ink: Master Śrī Simha,
Bai ro tsa na, and the Eighteen Texts in the 13th Century*

The most detailed narrative account of the transmission of the *Eighteen Texts* into Tibet can be found in the 13th century text the *Mask of Bai ro tsa na*, (*Bairo'i 'dra 'bag chen mo*), which is included as the last volume (in fact as the last text) in the *Bairo'i rgyud 'bum*,⁵⁶ an anomalous collection of rNying ma literature that, unlike other canonical collections, includes only texts belonging to the Great Perfection tradition (no Mahāyoga or Anuyoga texts are included).⁵⁷ As we have seen, Nyang ral offers two lists of the texts that composed the corpus, and he also offers a narrative that links their transmission to the Emperor Khri srong lde btsan, as well as Bai ro tsa na. *The Mask of Bai ro tsa na* will also offer a comprehensive list as well as a narrative account, but there are important differences. As we will see, the composition of the list in *The Mask of Bai ro tsa na* and in Nyang ral's works is slightly different, and the narrative is much more developed in *The Mask* than in Nyang ral's *Copper Continent*.

⁵⁵ Kunsang 2004: 90-93 passim.

⁵⁶ Leh 1971: Vol. 8, 405-605. The list begins on p. 519.4; for an English translation see Palmo 2004.

⁵⁷ Karmay summarized the *Mask of Bai ro tsa na* in (2007 [1998]: 18), and argues that although the text probably took its present form in the 13th century, it contains some parts that are probably later.

The different narrative focus can be easily explained since Nyang ral's *Copper Continent* is attempting to create a narrative framework for the rNying ma tradition as a whole that focuses on Padmasambhava as the central transmitter of the rNying ma teachings into Tibet. *The Mask of Bai ro tsa na*, on the other hand, is trying to do the same, but, this time, establishing the Tibetan translator Bai ro tsa na as the central figure for the tradition.

The Mask of Bai ro tsa na seems to operate at two levels. On the one hand, it offers a biography of the extraordinary life of this unique Tibetan translator and of his trips to India in search of texts and teachings. On the other hand, it is an attempt to establish the legitimacy of the Great Perfection Tradition by offering an incredibly detailed narrative of the uninterrupted lineage of the Great Perfection teachings that goes not only back to the Buddha Sakyamuni himself, but also to their emergence in the celestial land of Akanishta.⁵⁸ In this sense, it seems that *The Mask* is trying to develop not only an historical, but also a mythological framework for the transmission of the teachings that links them to a primordial Buddha.

According to *The Mask*, the transmission of the Great Perfection teachings to Tibet begins with the Emperor Khri song lde btsan, who in a former life had been born in India as a monk called Avadhuti and had practiced Atiyoga. The Emperor realized that the Great Perfection is a teaching that transcends all other doctrines and that it should be brought to Tibet. In order to do so he sends two monks to India, Bai ro tsa na and Legs grub, who, once in India, meet with the main holder of the lineage, Master Śrī Simha.

The actual account of the transmission, although similar in content to that of Nyang ral, has enough differences that it warrants its full citation here:

Every day they listened to the Secret Mantra teachings based on the result from the later seven scholars and others. And every night they listened to Shri Singha's explanations on the pith instructions of the effortless Great Perfection, the heart of the doctrine.

⁵⁸ Here, I am reminded of John McRae (2003: 8) study of Chinese Chan lineages: "[L]ineage assertions are as wrong as they are strong." And as McRae has pointed out in his discussion of the emergence of the Chan tradition, the establishment of lineages "were polemical tools of self-assertion, not critical evaluations of chronological fact according to some modern concept of historical accuracy. To the extent that any lineage assertion is significant, it is also a misrepresentation; lineage assertions that can be shown to be historically accurate are also inevitably inconsequential as statements of religious identity," McRae 2003: xix.

Inside his room Master Shri Singha put a clay pot on top of three big stones and surrounded it with a net. He sat inside the pot and had the opening covered with a big lid on which a pan filled with water was placed. A pipe ran through a hole in the pot and crossed through a cleft in the wall outside of the house. At midnight, Vairotsana and Lekdrub listened outside as Shri Singha whispered the teachings through the tube. They each had on a big deerskin hood, carried loads on their shoulders, held walking sticks, wore their clothes backward, and had put on worn-out pairs of boots the wrong way around. Lekdrub wrote down the teachings in the waning moonlight with white goats' milk, while Vairotsana fully understood them by a mere indication and perfected the doctrine in his mind.

As a sign that the doctrine would come to Tibet, Shri Singha taught *Cuckoo of Awareness* (Tib. *Rig pa'i khu byug*). To express that everything is perfect, he taught *Shaking of Great Power* (Tib. *rTsal chen sprugs pa*). To express the meaning of meditation, he taught *Sixfold Sphere* (Tib. *Thig le drug pa*). To express the conclusion of the view and conduct of all the vehicles, he taught *Soaring Garuda* (Tib. *Khyung chen lding ba*). To show the superiority of Ati over the other vehicles, he taught the view of *Never-Waning Banner* (Tib. *Mi nub rgyal mtshan*). Then he asked, "Noble sons, are you satisfied?" And they answered, "We are overjoyed!"

Then, to show the unity of all philosophical views, he taught *Wish-Fulfilling Gem* (Tib. *Yid bzhin nor bu*). To show the greatness of the teachings and instructions, he taught *Supreme Lord* (Tib. *rJe btsan dam pa*). To indicate the need to recognize earlier and later flaws and qualities, he taught *King of Mental Action* (Tib. *Spyi gcod rgyal po*). To indicate the need to rely on the three types of knowledge, he taught *All-Embodying Jewel* (Tib. *Kun 'dus*). These are the four minor teachings.

To indicate that all knowledge should depend on the teachings, he taught *Infinite Bliss* (Tib. *Bde 'byams*). To show that the fruition is included in the body, speech, and mind, he taught the *Wheel of Life* (Tib. *Srog gi 'khor lo*). To indicate the need to depend on example, meaning, and symbol, he explained *Commentary on Mind* (Tib. *Yang tig rgyal po*) and *King of Space* (Tib. *Nam mkha' rgyal po*). These are the four medium teachings.

Indicating how to help others through the provisional and definitive meaning, he taught *Jewel-Studded Bliss* (Tib. *bDe ba 'phra bkod*). To indicate the need of distinguishing all vehicles, he taught *Universal Bondage* (Tib. *Spyi chings*). To avoid the arising of logical contradictions, he taught *Pure Gold on Stone* (Tib. *rDo la gser zhun = Byang chub sems bsgom pa*). And because the conduct and the precepts are the yogi's life-force, he taught *Spontaneous Summit* (Tib. *rTse mo byung rgyal*). These are the four greater classes.

To check whether a teaching is mistaken or valid, he taught the *Marvelous* (Tib. *rMad du byung ba*), and asked, "Are you satisfied with this?" They answered, "We are not satisfied yet. Please give us

the tantras and oral instructions that the Buddha taught on these pith instructions!” Upon their request, Shri Singha explained the Eighteen Tantras with the pointing out instructions and asked, “Are you satisfied now?” Lekdrub, because he wanted to impress the king, said, “I am satisfied,” and left. On the way (back to Tibet) he was killed by border guards and died at the age of forty-four.⁵⁹

The list as presented in the *Mask of Bai ro tsa na* is, then, as follows:

1. *The Cuckoo of Awareness* (*Rig pa khu byug*)
2. *Great Potency* (*rTsal chen sprugs pa*)
3. *The Six Spheres* (*Thig le drug pa*)
4. *The Great Soaring Garuda* (*Khyung chen lding ba*)
5. *The Never Declining Banner of the Great Sky* (*Mi nub rgyal mtshan*)

The Four Small Texts - (Tib. *Chung ba bzhi*)

6. *The Wish-fulfilling Gem* (*Yid bzhin nor bu*)
7. *The Supreme Lord* (*rJe btsan dam pa*)
8. *The Universally Definitive Perfection* (*rDzogs pa spyi gcod spyod*, here as *Spyi gcod rgyal po*)
9. *The Compendium* (*Kun 'dus*, here as *Kun 'dus rig pa*)

The Four Middle Texts (Tib. *'Bring po bzhi*)

10. *The Infinity of Bliss* (*bDe 'byam*)
11. *The Wheel of Life* (*Srog gi 'khor lo*)
12. *The Essence of Bodhicitta* (the *Byang chub sems tig*, here as *Sems gi tig*)
13. *The King of the Sky* (*Nam mkha' rgyal po*)

The Four Great Sections (Tib. *Che phyogs bzhi*)

14. *The Inlaid Jewels of Bliss* (*bDe ba 'phra bkod*)
15. *The Epitome* (*sPyi chings*)
16. *Gold Refined from Ore* (*rDo la gser zhun*, another name for the *Byang chub sems bsgom pa*)
17. *The Victorious Emergence of the Peak* (*rTse mo byung rgyal*)
18. *The Marvelous* (*rMad du byung ba*)

⁵⁹ From Jinba 2004: 118.

There are several interesting aspects to the account, the almost eccentric transmission itself, with Master Śrī Siṃha sitting inside a clay pot and transmitting the teachings through a pipe being one of them, but let us focus here on the actual list put forward in the narrative. To begin with, *The Mask* offers a slightly different list of texts from those offered by Nyang ral. If we compare *The Mask* with Nyang ral's *Copper Continent*, we see that the *Mask* doesn't include the *The Efficacious Meditation* (*bsGom don grub pa'i lung*) or *The Great Treasure of Variety*, instead including *The Six Spheres* and the *Essence of Bodhicitta* (*Sems gi tig*). Also, although *The Mask* will make a reference later in the text to the *Five Early Translations* attributed to Bai ro tsa na, and the *Thirteen Later Translations* by Vimalamitra, the account here offers a different classification with an unlabeled group of five that largely corresponds to the *Five Early Translations*, followed by a group of Four Small (*Chung ba bzhi*), Four Middle (*'Bring po bzhi*), and Four Great (*Che phyogs bzhi*) texts.

An important aspect for our study of the reception history of the *Eighteen Texts* is that *The Mask* does mention twice the *All Sovereign King*, which signals a key transitional point in the history of the Mind Series literature in which the *Eighteen Texts* as an independent collection and the *All Sovereign King*, the tantra that will end up collecting and replacing the *Eighteen Texts* as the key literature of the Mind Series, are mentioned in the same narrative. The first reference places Bai ro tsa na as translating the *All Sovereign King* (*All-Creating Monarch* in Ani Jinba's translation):

Of the tantric scriptural Dharma, he translated the Tantra of Yamantaka's Words, Precious Discourse Tantra, King of Mastery Tantra, Five Tantras including Great Space Tantra, the Marvelous, All-Creating Monarch Tantra [i.e. The All Sovereign King], Ten Sutras, and Ocean Expanse Instructions.⁶⁰

The second reference is to gNyags Jñānakumara, who received the transmission of the text from gYu sgra sNying po:

From Yudra [Nyingpo], [Nyang] Jnana received the *Five Early Translations* as well as the *Thirteen Later Translations*. He received the pith instructions of the Eighteen Tantras of the Mind Class, the earlier and final tantras of the All-Creating Monarch, and the Root Scripture, and Commentary Sutras.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Jinba 2004:148.

⁶¹ Ibid., 212.

The Mask, then, marks an important transitional moment in the transmission of the *Eighteen Texts*, one that will signal its importance as the key texts of the early Great Perfection tradition, but one that also points to its decline by introducing its successor, the *All Sovereign King*.

All Hail to the All Sovereign King:

The lDe'u jo sras and the Decline of the Eighteen Texts as a Corpus

An important reference for our understanding of the history of the early Great Perfection literature in general, and the *Eighteen Texts* in particular, can be found in the *lDe'u jo sras* history,⁶² a text composed in the first half of the 13th century,⁶³ and that, as van der Kuijp has pointed out in his study of the text, is among the earliest Tibetan histories to have included an account of Buddhism in India as well as of its introduction to Tibet. The text refers to the *Eighteen Texts* as the “eighteen minor [texts] of the Mind Section,” which are the root of the Mind Section (*sems phyogs rtsa ba sems smad bco brgyad*).⁶⁴ The text also offers a clear distinction between the *Five Early Translations* and the *Thirteen Later* ones. Here is the list:

Five Early Translations (lNga 'gyur lnga'o)

⁶² van der Kuijp (1992) wrote a seminal article in the history of the two *lDe'u* histories. The text is “ambiguously titled and undated; the editor ascribes it, for no self-evident reason, to a certain *lDe'u Jo-sras* and entitles it as *lDe'u chos-'byung*,” p. 468.

⁶³ The other *lDe'u* history, the *mKhas pa lDe'u*, written in the second half of the 13th century, also offers a list of Mind Series texts, but the reference is more vague, with only an enumeration of some of the texts that include a pretty standard version of the *Five Early Translations* (with the exception of the *Yul kun 'jug pa* instead of the *Nam mkha' che*). 1) *The Cuckoo of Awareness* (*Rig pa khu byug*), 2) *Great Potency* (*rTsal chen sprugs pa as rTsal chen sprug pa*), 3) *Yul kun nas 'jug pa* (Bg. 3), 4) *The Great Soaring Garuda* (*Khyung chen ldng ba*, here as the *Khyung chen*), 5) *Meditation on the Enlightened Mind* (*Byang chub sems sgom pa*), 6) *The Never Declining Banner of the Great Sky* (*Mi nub rgyal mtshan*, here as *Mi nub rgyal mtshan nam mkha' che*), 7) *The Marvelous* (*rMad byung ba*), and 8) *Man ngag rgya mtsho'i Klong* (there are two versions of this unusual text in Tb. 69 and Bg. 56).

⁶⁴ See *lDe'u chos 'byung* (W20831: 58-59) “*sems phyogs la rgyud du grags pa spyir mang yang ma nor ba rtsa ba'i rgyud kun byed rgyal po / bshad pa'i rgyud mdo bcu / sems phyogs rtsa ba sems smad bco brgyad yin te / nam ka che dang / rTsal chen dang khyung chen dang rig pa khu yug dang / byang chub sems bsgom pa dang lnga ni lnga 'gyur lnga'o / byang chub sems mu gu dang / tig dang kun 'dus bde 'jam gnas yar 'debs / nam ka'i rgyal po / rdzogs pa spyir gcod / rtse mo byung rgyal / rje gtsun dam pa / srog gi 'khor lo / bde ba phra bkod de la sogs pa [59] rnam phyis 'gyur bcu gsum zhes bya'o*”.

1. *The Never Declining Banner of the Great Sky* (Mi nub rgyal mtshan, here as Nam ka che)
2. *Great Potency* (rTsal chen sprugs pa, here as rTsal chen)
3. *The Great Soaring Garuda* (Khyung chen lding ba, here as Khyung chen)
4. *The Cuckoo of Awareness* (Rig pa'i khu byug, here as Rig pa khu yug)
5. *Meditation on the Enlightened Mind* (Byang chub sems bsgom pa, here as Byang chub sems bsgom pa)

Thirteen Later Translations (Phyis 'gyur bcu gsum zhes bya'o)

6. *Byang chub sems myu gu* (this text is in Tk. 29 within a collection of the *Thirteen Later Translations*)
7. *Tig* (I have not been able to identify this text, which could refer to the *Yang tig rgyal po* or the *Thig le drug pa*)
8. *The Compendium* (Kun 'dus, here as Kun 'dus)
9. *The Infinity of Bliss* (bDe ba rab 'byams kyi lung, here as bDe 'jam)
10. *Gnas yar 'debs* (I have not been able to identify this text)
11. *The King of the Sky* (Nam mkha' rgyal po, here as Nam ka'i rgyal po)
12. *The Universally Definitive Perfection* (rDzogs pa spyi gcod spyod, here as rdzogs pa spyir gcod)
13. *The Victorious Emergence of the Peak* (rTse mo byung rgyal gyi lung, here as rTse mo byung rgyal)
14. *The Supreme Lord* (rJe btsan dam pa, here as rJe gtsun dam pa)
15. *The Wheel of Life* (Srog gi 'khor lo'i lung, here as Srog gi 'khor lo)
16. *The Inlaid Jewels of Bliss* (bDe ba 'phra bkod, here as bDe ba phra bkod)

The *Five Early Translations* correspond with what by this time seems like a standard, accepted list of texts, but the *Thirteen Later Translations* is a little unusual, and does not include texts like the *Epitome* (*Spyi chings*), the *Six Spheres* (*Thig le drug pa*, although it does mention a text by the name of "Tig," which could be a reference to it), or the *Efficacious Meditation* (*bsGom don grub pa*), including instead other unusual titles such as the *gNas yar 'debs*, which I have not been able to locate.

The most important point made in the text, though, is its statement that among all of the scriptures said to belong to the Mind Section, there is another text that is considered to be central to the tradition, the *All Sovereign King*: "As for the Mind Section, generally, many are said to be tantras [of this section], but without mistake, the

Root tantra is the *All Sovereign King*.”⁶⁵ So while the *lDe’u jo sras* acknowledged the historical importance of the *Eighteen Texts*, the texts also reveal a shift in the importance towards the *All Sovereign King*, which seems to have become by this time the central text of the Mind Series tradition.

How are we to explain the differences between *The Mask of Bai ro tsa na* and the *lDe’u jo sras*, both written in the 13th century? I would argue that by the 13th century the Great Perfection tradition as a whole is evolving and incorporating new teachings and scriptures, particularly those of the Seminal Heart (*snying thig*), which means that the early Mind Series is becoming, gradually, a thing of the past. Those scriptures are also being compiled into a single, larger text, the *All Sovereign King*, which will transform a diverse group of poetic exhortations, short in practical details and long in rhetoric, into a more traditional tantric scripture, with a defined Buddha narrative centered around the figure of the All Good (Tib. Kun tu bzang po, Skt. Samantabhadra) and a ritual framework. As the Great Perfection tradition was growing and becoming more diverse, there was a push to organize and structure the diverse groups of early teachings and the *All Sovereign King* did just that by transforming all of those early texts into chapters of a larger, more cohesive book. The different treatment of the *Eighteen Texts* between the *Mask of Bai ro tsa na* and the *lDe’u jo sras* could also be explained when taking into account their implicit audiences. As Cabezón has pointed out, the *lDe’u*, as a history that was trying to insert Tibetan Buddhism within the larger framework of Buddhism in India, took “a more conciliatory approach by arguing that the Old and New teachings, although perhaps using different nomenclature, were essentially the same.”⁶⁶ *The Mask of Bai ro tsa na*, instead, was trying to assert the supremacy of the Great Perfection not only from the developments of the New schools, but also from other developments within the rNying ma tradition, and therefore would still be more attached to a traditional presentation of the *Eighteen Texts* as a collection of independent texts.

*Trying to Make Sense of it All: Klong chen pa and the reception of the
Eighteen Texts in the 14th Century*

The 14th century is period of intense intellectual activity, with all of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism trying to make sense of their own

⁶⁵ In the original *lDe’u jo sras*: “*sems phyogs la rgyud du grags pa spyir mang yang ma nor ba rtsa ba’i rgyud kun byed rgyal po*,” p. 58.

⁶⁶ See Cabezón 2013: 8.

scriptural traditions. This is the period when the New Translation schools collect and systematize for the first time their scriptures into the two collections of the *bKa' 'gyur*, or the words of the Buddha, and the *bsTan 'gyur*, its commentaries.⁶⁷ As a response to the canon building project of the New Translation Schools (*gSar ma*), the rNying ma School created its own canon, known as *The Collected Tantras of the Ancients* (*rNying ma rgyud 'bum*), of which there will be different editions.⁶⁸

It is also during this century that one of the most important figures in the history of the rNying ma tradition, Klong chen rab 'byams Dri med 'od zer, looked back at the received legacy of the Great Perfection tradition and tried to make sense of it. Klong chen pa was a prolific scholar, and he reflects on the nature of the early Great Perfection Tradition and in its literature in many of his works. Klong chen pa is perfectly aware that there were many discrepancies in the historical description as well as well as the lists of the *Eighteen Texts* in rNying ma literature. Klong chen pa's corpus offers several references to the *Eighteen Texts*, and we can find interspersed throughout his collected works up to seven different lists and, in some cases, he even offers two different lists within the same text.

An interesting example of this can be found in the *Treasury of Spiritual and Philosophical Systems* (*Grub mtha' mdzod*), in which Klong chen pa offers two sets of lists. The first list, actually, includes a total of twenty-one texts, divided between the standard *Five Early Translations* (*sNga 'gyur lnga*), the *Thirteen Later Translations* (*Phyi 'gyur bcu gsum*), and then he adds three more texts to the list, the *All Sovereign King*, the *Marvelous* (*rMad byung*, which was traditionally seen as one of the eighteen), and the *Ten Sūtras* (*mDo bcu*) to round it up to twenty-one. Here is the list:⁶⁹

"The Five Early Translations" (*sNga 'gyur lnga*)

1. *The Cuckoo of Awareness* (*Rig pa'i khu byug*)
2. *Great Potency* (*rTsal chen sprugs pa*)
3. *The Great Soaring Garuda* (*Khyung chen lding ba*)
4. *Meditation on the Enlightened Mind* (*Byang chub sems bsgom pa*, although the title here is *rDo la gser zhun*)
5. *The Never Declining Banner of the Great Sky* (*Mi nub rgyal mtshan*, here as *Mi nub pa'i rgyal mtshan nam mkha' che*)

⁶⁷ For an account of the process see Schaeffer 2001.

⁶⁸ See Germano 2002 and Davidson 2005.

⁶⁹ See *Grub mtha' mdzod*, fol. 204, pp. 1169-1170.

The *Thirteen Later Translations* (*Phyir 'gyur bcu gsum*)

6. *The Victorious Emergence of the Peak* (*rTse mo byung rgyal*)
7. *The King of the Sky* (*Nam mkha' rgyal po*)
8. *The Inlaid Jewels of Bliss* (*bDe ba 'phra bkod here as bDe ba 'phrul bkod*)
9. *The Epitome* (*sPyi chings, here as rDzogs pa spyi chings*)
10. *The Quintessential King* (*Yang tig rgyal po, here as Byang chub sems tig*)
11. *The Infinity of Bliss* (*bDe 'byams, here as bDe bar 'byams*)
12. *The Wheel of Life* (*Srog gi 'khor lo*)
13. *The Six Spheres* (*Thig le drug pa*)
14. *The Universally Definitive Perfection* (*rDzogs pa spyi gcod spyod*)
15. *The Wish-fulfilling Gem* (*Yid bzhin nor bu*)
16. *The Compendium* (*Kun 'dus, here as Kun 'dus rig pa*)
17. *The Supreme Lord* (*rJe btsan dam pa*)
18. *The Accomplishment of Meditation* (*sGom don grub pa*)

And he adds the following three to transform the list of eighteen into one of twenty-one ("de dag gi steng du be ros sngar bsgyur ba'i kun byed/ rmad byung/ mdo bcu gsum bsdoms pas sems sde nyer gcig go"):

19. *The All Creating King* (*Kun byed*)
20. *The Marvelous* (*rMad byung*)
21. *The Ten Sūtras* (*mDo bcu*)

As we can see, the lists accept the difference between the traditional five and thirteen divisions, while adding another layer to incorporate later texts such as the *All Sovereign King* that have become central to the tradition in later centuries. It is also important to point out how Klong chen pa adds gNyags Jñānakumara and gYu sgra sNying po as translators or, at least, essential to the transmission of the *Thirteen Later Translations*.

The second list can be found later in the same work and it is described as the "Eighteen Sectioned Transmissions" (*lung bam po bco brgyad*):⁷⁰

1. *The Cuckoo of Awareness* (*Rig pa'i khu byug*)

⁷⁰ *Grub mtha'mdzod*, fol. 284/pp. 1173-1175. He concludes the list by saying, "These are called the general tantras, since they teach the essence of the definitive meaning in its entirety" ('di dag tu nges pa'i don gyi snying po rnams yongs su tshang bar bstan pas/ spyi'i rgyud du rnam par gzhas pa yin no").

2. *Great Potency* (*rTsal chen sprugs pa*)
3. *The Great Soaring Garuda* (*Khyung chen lding ba, here as Khyung chen rdzogs pa*)
4. *Meditation on the Enlightened Mind* (*Byang chub sems bsgom pa, here as rDo la gser zhun*)
5. *The Never Declining Banner of the Great Sky* (*Mi nub rgyal mtshan*)

6. *The Supreme Lord* (*rJe btsan dam pa, here as Ye shes dam pa*)
7. *The Wish-fulfilling Gem* (*Yid bzhin nor bu*)
8. *The Victorious Emergence of the Peak* (*rTse mo byung rgyal*)
9. *The Inlaid Jewels of Bliss* (*bDe ba 'phra bkod*)
10. *The King of the Sky* (*Nam mkha' rgyal po*)
11. *The Wheel of Life* (*Srog gi 'khor lo*)
12. *The Epitome* (*sPyi chings, here as Lhun rdzogs spyi chings*)
13. *The Infinity of Bliss* (*Bde 'byams, here as bDe bar rab 'byams*)
14. *The Quintessential King* (*Yang tig rgyal po*)
15. *The Marvelous* (*rMad du byung ba, here as rMad byung rgyal po*)
16. *The Six Spheres* (*Thig le drug pa, here as Thig le kun 'dus*)
17. *The Tantra of the Edge and the Center of the Sky* (*Nam mkha' mtha' dbus kyi rgyud, this is an unusual text*)

Klong chen pa does not offer a difference between the early and the later translations, and does not add the three additional texts to round the collection up to twenty-one. In fact, he does not offer a complete list of the eighteen and somehow only mentions seventeen. The contents of the lists are quite similar, although the order of the *Thirteen Texts* is different, and the *Marvelous* is here considered one of the eighteen, unlike in the previous list. How does Klong chen pa, then, reconcile the existence of two different lists within the same text with slightly different titles, a slightly different order, and even expanding the list in one case to twenty-one? He goes on to argue that the lists are different, since, in fact, there are two completely different sets of *Eighteen texts*:

"Though some of the listed titles for "the eighteen sectioned scriptures" (*Lung bam po bco brgyad*) are similar to the titles in "the eighteen subsequent mind series texts (*Sems smad bco brgyad*), in fact they differ in terms of being earlier and later, their length, and their translators (into Tibetan)."⁷¹

⁷¹ See Germano, *Mysticism and Rhetoric*: 94 (unpublished), and *Grub mtha' mdzod*, fol. 284/pp. 1169-1170.

It is difficult to corroborate Klong chen pa’s assertion that there were two different sets of *Eighteen Texts* since we cannot extrapolate the contents of the texts from their titles. Germano suggests that “Longchenpa’s presentation derives from the confusion of this repetition of titles and the existence of various rubrics for the set, rather than that he had access to two distinct bodies of literature with the specified contents (though this remains a possibility.)”⁷²

I would also add that the assertion points toward the fluidity of those texts that may have preserved titles, but they may have evolved, grown, and developed differently depending on their lines of transmission, and may have changed as they were being transmitted by different lineages. Nevertheless, what seems obvious when reading Klong chen pa’s works is that by the 14th century the Mind Series tradition is being relegated in importance in favor of new scriptures and practices belonging to the Seminal Heart, in which Klong chen pa plays a central role.

Finding the Needle in the Haystack: Looking for the Eighteen Texts in the Various rNying ma rgyud ’bum Collections

Prior to the 14th century, our understanding of the *Eighteen Texts* as a corpus, but also as individual texts, was mostly possible through the various references to them in other works that we have explored in this article. The problem with this approach, though, is that we don’t have access to the actual texts. As Klong chen pa argued, there may have been titles within the collection with the same names, but with very different contents. So, when gNubs chen and Rong zom referred to the *Never Declining Banner*, for example, they may have been talking about two different texts with the same title, something not uncommon in Tibetan culture.

After the 14th century, though, after the emergence of different canonical collections of the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients*, we finally have access to the actual texts of the early Great Perfection tradition and we can add a new layer to our understanding of the nature and transmission of the *Eighteen Texts*. What we find is, at first, quite puzzling, since an actual collection of *Eighteen Texts* is nowhere to be found in any of the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients* collections. How is this possible? If the texts played such a central role during the early development of the Great Perfection, and the collection is constantly cited by important rNying ma scholars, how is it that we cannot find

⁷² See Germano, *Ibid.*, 95 (unpublished).

it in any of the canonical editions? As I pointed out in the introduction to this article, a close examination of the various canons and the lack of a full set of the *Eighteen Texts* in any of them, gives more credence to the possibility that there never was an established collection of eighteen texts in the first place. Here, I will limit my examination of those collections to the *Bai ro'i rgyud 'bum* and the mTshams brag edition of the rNying ma canon. The *Bai ro'i rgyud 'bum*, as I have pointed out, is a collection of rNying ma literature that only includes Great Perfection texts, and excludes Anuyoga and Mahāyoga literature. His exclusive focus on Great Perfection literature makes it an obvious place to search for a collection so important for its early history.

In the *Bai ro'i rgyud 'bum*, there is a collection of the the *Five Early Translations* (*rDzogs pa chen po snga 'gyur lnga*) in volume 5, but it only contains four of the texts, without the standard *Mi nub rgyal mtshan*. A version of this text can be found in volume 2 (Bg. 52), and there are versions of the texts in the same volume (Bg. 49-53, see list below).⁷³ It is interesting, though, that many of the *Thirteen Later Translations* are not included here, and the ones included are spread in various volumes. In volume 1 we find the *rTse mo byung rgyal* (Bg. 16), and *bDe ba 'phra bkod* (Bg. 21). Volume 2 has also a version of the *rMad du byung ba* in Bg. 43 and B.g 44, but the following ten texts are missing:

1. *The Supreme Lord* (*rJe btsan dam pa*)
2. *The Wish-fulfilling Gem* (*Yid bzhin nor bu*)
3. *The King of the Sky* (*Nam mkha' rgyal po*)
4. *The Wheel of Life* (*Srog gi 'khor lo*)
5. *The Epitome* (*sPyi 'chings*)
6. *The Infinity of Bliss* (*bDe 'byams*)
7. *The Quintessential King* (*Yang tig rgyal po*)

⁷³ It is also interesting that in Vol. 1 there is a series of twelve texts that "according to the introductory material to Bg.1, [...] appears to be Śrī Singha's esoteric instructions on the [Cuckoo of Awareness];" see Weinberger description of the first volume on the [Tibetan Himalayan Library](#). There are commentaries on some other texts of the *Five Early Translations*. The texts are: 1) *The Cuckoo of Awareness* (*Rig pa'i khu byug* as *Byang chub sems rig pa khu byug*, Vol. 5 Bg. 116), 2) *Great Potency* (*rTsal chen sprugs pa*, here as *Byang chub sems rtsal chen sprugs pa*, Vol. 5 Bg. 117), 3) *The Great Soaring Garuda* (*Khyung chen lding ba*, here as *Byang chub sems khyung chen*, Vol. 5 Bg. 118), 4) *Meditation on the Enlightened Mind* (*Byang chub sems bsgom pa*, Vol. 5 Bg. 119), 5) *The Never Declining Banner of the Great Sky* (*Mi nub rgyal mtshan*, Bg. 52), 6) *The Victorious Emergence of the Peak* (*rTse mo byung rgyal*, here as *Byang chub sems lta ba mkha' mnyam gyi rgyal rtse mo byung rgyal*, Vol. 1 Bg. 16), 7) *The Inlaid Jewels of Bliss* (*bDe ba 'phra bkod*, here as *Byang chub sems bde ba 'phra bkod*, Vol. 1 Bg. 21), 8) *The Marvelous* (*rMad du byung ba* in Bg. 43 and Bg. 44). The *Bai ro'i rgyud 'bum* also includes *The Universally Definitive Perfection* (*rDzogs pa spyi gcod* (*spyod*), Vol. 1 Bg. 15).

8. *The Six Spheres (Thig le drug pa)*
9. *The Accomplishment of Meditation (bsGom don grub pa)*
10. *The Compendium (Kun 'dus)*

In most of the other collections, the absence of these texts is not as dramatic as in this collection, but we find a similar pattern of inconsistency, with some texts missing, and also some of them scattered in different volumes and not as a single collection, or as part of other texts, mainly included as chapters of the *All Sovereign King*.

In the mTshams brag edition, many of the *Eighteen Texts* are not the earliest versions of the texts but longer versions of them. This is particularly interesting in the *Five Earlier Translations*, where only one of them is the earlier, shorter version. *The Five Earlier Translations* are in volume 1 (Tb. 19-23) but with the exception of the *Byang chub sems bsgom pa*, they are longer versions of the text. Most of the *Thirteen Later Translations* are also found in the same volume, although three texts with *The Marvelous (rMad du byung ba)* in their title are in vol. 2 (Tb. 54-56), and the *Six Spheres (Thig le drug pa)* is in vol. 5 Tb 124.⁷⁴ The three texts missing are: *The Wish-fulfilling Gem (Yid bzhin nor bu)*, *The Epitome (sPyi 'chings)*, and *The Accomplishment of Meditation (bsGom don grub pa)*. The *Eighteen Texts* as found in the mTsams brag edition are:

1. *The Cuckoo of Awareness (Rig pa khu byug, Tb. 19)*
2. *Great Potency (rTsal chen sprugs pa, Tb. 20)*
3. *The Great Soaring Garuda (Khyung chen lding ba, Tb. 21)*
4. *Meditation on the Enlightened Mind (Byang chub sems bsgom pa, Tb. 22)*
5. *The Never Declining Banner of the Great Sky (Mi nub rgyal mtshan, Tb. 23)*
6. *The Supreme Lord (rJe btsan dam pa, Tb. 25)*
7. *The Quintessential King (Yang tig rgyal po, here as Mi 'gyur ba'i thig le tig, Tb. 26)*
8. *The Wheel of Life (Srog gi 'khor lo, Tb. 27)*
9. *The King of the Sky (Nam mkha' rgyal po also as Nam mkha'i rgyal po, Tb. 28)*
10. *The Victorious Emergence of the Peak (rTse mo byung rgyal, Tb. 29)*
11. *The Infinity of Bliss (bDe 'jams, Tb. 30)*
12. *The Inlaid Jewels of Bliss (bDe ba 'phra bkod, here as bDe ba phra bkod, Tb. 31)*

⁷⁴ See Liljenberg 2012.

13. *The Compendium* (Kun 'dus, Tb. 32)
14. *The Universally Definitive Perfection* (rDzogs pa spyi gcod spyod, Tb. 35)
15. *The Marvelous* (rMad du byung ba, Tb. 54 / 55/ 56)

The Six Spheres (Thig le drug pa) is included in the text *Nyi zla dang mnyam pa dri ma med pa'i rgyud* (Tb. 40)

What does this mean? How can there be constant references in rNying ma literature to this collection of texts, considered central to its early development, only to not have any complete record of it?

*When a Number is not a Number:
The Eighteen Texts as an Idea*

The confusion about the nature and actual content of the *Eighteen Texts* has been as obvious to traditional rNying ma scholars as to modern ones. Samten Karmay, in his groundbreaking study of Great Perfection literature, synthesizes this feeling, stating that: "Considerable confusion reigns over this list among the rNying ma pa works. Each claims to have eighteen, but often gives only sixteen or seventeen [...] The titles also vary from one source to another."⁷⁵ Germano has worked extensively in trying to map out the various lists and references to the *Eighteen Texts* in early Great Perfection literature.⁷⁶ Recent work by Karen Liljenberg has done very valuable work locating some of the *Eighteen Texts* that scholars have considered to be missing or lost in some of the editions of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*. In two articles, she found four of the texts that scholars had not been able to locate, hiding in plain sight, under different titles, or incorporated into larger texts. Those texts are the *Six Spheres* (Thig le drug pa), the *Epitome* (sPyi chings), the *Accomplishment of Meditation* (bsGom pa don grub), and the *Wish-fulfilling Gem* (Yi bzhin nor bu).

The "disappearance" of some of these texts could be explained by the fact that many of the *Eighteen Texts* ended up being incorporated into the larger and more popular *All Sovereign King*, transforming many of the independent texts into chapters of this tantra. But the lack of consistency among the various lists, and the remarkable differences between some of the texts that bear the same title, may also warrant a different approach to our study of this literature.

⁷⁵ Karmay 1988: 23-24.

⁷⁶ In his unpublished manuscript *Mysticism and Rhetoric in the Great Perfection*.

I would, in fact, argue that the discrepancies of the various lists can be explained by simply accepting that there was never a collection of *Eighteen Texts*, and that the collection operated more as an ideal than as a physical reality. As David Gray argued in his article “On the Very Idea of a Tantric Canon”:

Perhaps one of the most important and persistent ideas that underlies the tantric traditions of Buddhism is the notion that a complete collection of tantric scriptures [...] or Collection of Tantras (Tantrapīṭaka), either did exist in the past, and/or continues to exist in an alternate level of reality. This notion was advanced as an important legitimating ideology at the initial stage of the development of tantric traditions and their literature, and it has remained a widespread belief up until the present day [...] This belief, and the myths that express it, had a significant impact on the ways in which tantric traditions constructed their histories and identities, and in the ways in which they organized and understood their canons of literature.⁷⁷

The closer we examine the various lists, their discrepancies, and its absence as a complete collection in the canon, the more sense it makes that the strength of the idea of an early corpus of eighteen texts does not reside in its actual content, which as we have seen differs from author to author (sometimes even for the same author) and from period to period, but the strength lies in the “idea” that there is a closed canon transmitted by an Indian figure (Śrī Siṃha) to his Tibetan disciples. The notion of the eighteen operates as a framework (Gray calls this an “empty signifier”) that allows the early Great Perfection tradition to group a nascent but varied corpus of works under one umbrella and distinguish themselves from other Buddhist traditions. The most obvious similarity is in the Eighteen Tantras of Mahāyoga,⁷⁸ a collection that the early Great Perfection, with its connections to that tradition, may have tried to emulate in order to achieve legitimacy. But as Sur has also pointed out, eighteen also has important symbolic value for the Buddhist tradition, since it “evokes a sense of completeness. There are eighteen sciences (*aṣṭadaśavidyāsthāna*) to comprise knowledge, eighteen instruments (*rol mo’i bye brag*) to comprise music, eighteen mainstream Buddhist schools (*aṣṭadaśānikāya*) to comprise orthodoxy,” etc.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ See Gray 2009: 1-2.

⁷⁸ See Almqvist 2014 and Eastman 1981.

⁷⁹ In fact, Sur (2015: 315 n. 622) also hints at the possibility of eighteen as a symbolic number when referring to the *Eighteen Texts* of the Mind Series: “It seems to me,

In conclusion, looking for the “original” texts, I believe, should not guide us into thinking that we can somehow “recover” the original versions of these texts or an original lost collection. These texts were, for the most part, works in progress, an inspiration for later generations of scholars that rewrote, changed, expanded, and commented on what we should see as a literary genre and not simply as a literary corpus or canon.

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and I am not certain of this, that eighteen operates symbolically – as a cipher, as it were.” Gray (2009: 13) also points out in his article the importance of other symbolic numbers such as one hundred thousand within the Buddhist tradition: “This is because the label ‘one hundred thousand’ quickly came to function in esoteric Buddhist discourse as an empty signifier, a signifier without a signified. As Ernesto Laclau argued, such signifiers are ‘signifiers of lack, an absent totality.’” Almogi (2013) makes the same argument about the Eighteen Mahāyoga Tantric Cycles.

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The Great Perfection in the Early Biographies of the Northern Treasure Tradition: An Introduction to and Translation of *The Life of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan**

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The corpus that constitutes the scriptures of the Northern Treasure Tradition (*Byang gter*) was revealed by a series of treasure revelators¹ who lived between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries in Tibet. While the bulk of these sacred writings are preoccupied with normative *Mahāyoga* cycles² that focus on specific Buddhist divinities, the Great Perfection (*rDzogs chen*) anthology entitled *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra*, which was revealed by Rigs 'dzin³ rGod ldem (1337–1409), is the most celebrated of the treasures belonging to this northern tradition.⁴ In a recent, thorough study of the five volumes of *The Unimpeded*, Katarina Turpeinen has offered a masterful analysis of the internal themes and divisions of the anthology and has shed light on the relationship

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¹ Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem is the founding treasure revealer, but bZang po grags pa (14th c.) preceded him and many others followed him including: 'Jam dbyangs bla ma (14th c.), bsTan gnyis gling pa (148–1535), Legs ldan rdo rje (1512–1580), Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542), bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550–1603), Gar dbang rdo rje (1640–1685), and sKal bzang padma dbang phyug (1720–1770).

² For a detailed list of the ritual cycles of the Northern Treasure Tradition, see Turpeinen 2015, pp. 22–23.

³ In most other contexts, this word is spelled “rig 'dzin,” which means “awareness-holder.” While there are, in fact, twelve instances of this spelling of the term in *The Collected Biographies and Prophecies of the Northern Treasure Tradition* (Padma las 'brel rtsal 1983), none of them appears in the biographies of the nine patriarchs used for this article. On the other hand, there are sixty-six separate appearances of “rigs 'dzin,” which I take to mean something more like “holder of the lineage” or “holder of the family lineage.”

⁴ More precisely, the first four volumes of the anthology are entitled *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* (*Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*), and the fifth volume is entitled *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* (*Ka dag rang byung rang shar*). It is, however, customary to refer to the entire anthology as *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* or simply *The Unimpeded*.

between its content and earlier Great Perfection literature.⁵ She has identified, for example, strong parallels between the content of *The Unimpeded* and *The Seminal Heart of the Dākinīs* (*mKha' 'gro snying tig*), which was revealed by Tshul khriṃs rdo rje (1291–1317) and later included in *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts* (*sNyīng tig ya bzhi*) by the great Klong chen pa (1308–1364).⁶ These resemblances strongly suggest that Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem must have been familiar with a wide range of Seminal Heart teachings, perhaps including those of Klong chen pa himself.

In what follows, I will offer a summary and analysis of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem's training in the Great Perfection based on the fifteenth and sixteenth century biographies of rGod ldem and his direct disciples.⁷ While the biography of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem does not offer enough evidence to fully account for the Seminal Heart content of *The Unimpeded*, much can be inferred with the aid of the biographies of his disciples. I will then offer a wealth of evidence regarding the role of the Great Perfection in the biographies of eight patriarchs who carried the Northern Treasures through the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It is fitting to conclude this study with a translation of the biography of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1454–1541) for a number of reasons. First among them is the fact that he received a much wider training in the Seminal Heart than any of his predecessors. However, in addition to that, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's life is a meaningful stopping point because he was the last of the illustrious patriarchs to be claimed both by the branch of the Northern Treasure Tradition that remained in Ngam ring and the branch that was later established at rDo rje brag Monastery in Central Tibet.

Before proceeding, it will be helpful to briefly describe the Great Perfection and the various rubrics that are employed to distinguish its internal categories. I prefer characterizing the Great Perfection as a post-tantric tradition of Tibetan Buddhism in that it was originally distinguished by its simple, free-form practices that in some sense "came after" the complex ritual of *Mahāyoga* Tantra involving deity yoga, visualizations of mandalas, chanting of mantras, and a host of often wrathful, Buddhist divinities. The developmental history of the Great Perfection can be described as a process, beginning in the eighth century, by which "funerary" elements with strong affinities to the

⁵ See Turpeinen 2015.

⁶ Turpeinen 2015, pp. 210-229. For an introduction to the life of Klong chen pa, see Germano 2005b.

⁷ Methodologically speaking, this is a historiographic study of the Great Perfection as it is discussed in a specific set of narratives preserved in *The Collected Biographies and Prophecies of the Northern Treasure Tradition*. For a more complete description of this collection, see Valentine 2016, pp. 133-134.

Yogini Tantras are gradually introduced to an earlier “pristine” tradition that focused on simplicity and was characterized by the absence of these funerary elements.⁸ This process of transformation is reflected in the following system of classification, which is drawn from *The Collected Tantras of the Ancients* (*rNying ma rgyud 'bum*) and accounts for all of the major developments within the Great Perfection prior to the fourteenth century.⁹

The Three Series: Mind Series (*Sems sde*), Space Series (*Klong sde*), and Esoteric Precept Series (*Man ngag sde*)

The Four Cycles: External Cycle (*Phyi skor*), Internal Cycle (*Nang skor*), Secret Cycle (*gSang skor*), and Unsurpassed Secret Cycle (*Bla na med pa'i gsang skor*), which is also known as the Seminal Heart (*sNying thig*)

The Three Piths: Transcendent Pith (*A ti*), Crown Pith (*sPyi ti*), and Ultra Pith (*Yang ti*)

The Mind Series includes the texts that are most representative of the pristine tradition, while the Space Series, Esoteric Precept Series, and the first three of the Four Cycles demonstrate an increasing degree of funerary elements. The Unsurpassed Secret Cycle, which is synonymous with the Seminal Heart, is the tradition in which the funerary elements are the most completely integrated.¹⁰ The grouping of the Three Piths breaks somewhat from this progressive scheme; it will be explained in more detail below as it pertains to the training of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem.

While the earliest of the scriptures of the Seminal Heart, particularly *The Seventeen Tantras* (*rGyud bcu bdun*), are found within *The Collected Tantras of the Ancients*, the vast majority of the literature—those attributed to Padma las 'brel rtsal (1291–1315), Klong chen pa, Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem, rDo rje gling pa (1346–1405), Padma gling pa (1450–1521), etc.—are not included in this canon. These treasures and many, many more are canonized to an extent in 'Jam mgon kong sprul's (1813–1899) *The Great Treasury of Rediscovered Teachings* (*Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*).¹¹

⁸ This method for explaining the nature of the Great Perfection and its internal classifications is drawn from Germano 2005a, pp. 2–13.

⁹ Germano 2005a, p. 7.

¹⁰ Germano 2005a, p. 14.

¹¹ Schwiieger points out that this compendium does not comprehensively contain all of the treasure texts of all of the treasure revealers. Instead, it houses important samples from each along with the manuals that are required for training in each

While the Great Perfection anthology of the Northern Treasure Tradition includes extensive preliminary practices, subtle body yogas, alchemical yogas, cutting practices, and instructions for liberation through wearing amulets, the core of the compendium is constituted by the oral transmissions of three separate masters—Vairocana (8th c.), Padmasambhava (8th c.), and Vimalamitra (8th–9th c.). Tradition maintains that these three received different parts of the Great Perfection from Śrī Siṃha (8thc.) in India and brought them separately to Tibet, where they were transmitted to Khri srong lde btsan (742–796; r. 756–796) and his court and also concealed as treasure.¹² The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana are primarily concerned with a type of formless meditation or contemplation called Breakthrough (*khregs chod*), which is representative of the pristine aspects of the early Great Perfection found in the Mind Series.¹³ The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava, on the other hand, are representative of the Seminal Heart in that they focus on the visionary practice called Direct Transcendence (*thod rgal*), which integrates the purity and spontaneity of the Great Perfection with a full spectrum of funerary imagery.¹⁴ Lastly, The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra is a unified, scholarly elucidation of the Seminal Heart by way of eleven topics, which are the universal ground, the arising of samsara, Buddha nature, the location of wisdom in the human body, the pathways of wisdom, the gateways of wisdom, the objective sphere, the method of practice, the signs of accomplishment, the intermediate states, and liberation.¹⁵ According to Turpeinen, The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra is just one example within the anthology of material that was directly borrowed from preexisting Seminal Heart literature attributed to figures such as mKhas pa nyi 'bum (1158–1213).¹⁶ In fact, although there are certainly innovative elements that distinguish *The Unimpeded* from other Seminal Heart cycles, it is inconceivable that this anthology could have been compiled without access to an extensive collection of earlier Great Perfection literature, including scriptures belonging to the Seminal Heart. The guiding question for the following investigation is, therefore, what evidence is there in the early biographies of the Northern Treasure Tradition to corroborate the notion that Rigs 'dzin rGod lde m had access to such a wide range of Great Perfection teachings?

According to the fifteenth century biography of Rigs 'dzin rGod

cycle. See Schwieger 2010, pp. 329-331.

¹² Turpeinen 2015, p. 170.

¹³ Turpeinen 2015, pp. 170-183.

¹⁴ Turpeinen 2015, pp. 183-193.

¹⁵ Turpeinen 2015, pp. 193-198.

¹⁶ Turpeinen 2015, pp. 194-195.

Idem, which was written by one of his direct disciples (i.e., Se ston Nyi ma bzang po, 14th–15th c.), the founding revelator of the Northern Treasure Tradition was descended from a lineage of De gyin hor masters who practiced *The Brahmin's Tradition of the Great Perfection* (*Bram ze'i skor*).¹⁷ Although his father died before he began his spiritual training, the biography leads one to believe that *The Brahmin's Tradition* may have been among the teachings that were transmitted to Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem by a pair of benefactors from the Se clan—brothers named dPal chen 'bum pa (14th c.) and Legs pa ba (14th c.)—who took it upon themselves to educate the fatherless child in his family's traditions.¹⁸ In *The Collected Tantras of the Ancients*, this corpus of texts is categorized as belonging to the Ultra Pith, which is the highest of the Three Piths of the Great Perfection. *The Brahmin's Tradition* appears to have developed parallel to the Seminal Heart in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but the spiritual lineage of the tradition is traced much further back in history to Vimalamitra (8th–9th c.), who was an Indian of the Brahmin caste.¹⁹

Later, at the age of twenty-four, just prior to the start of his career as a revelator, Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem received the treasures of Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192) and his reincarnation, Gu ru Chos dbang (1212–1270), from lCang ma ba (14th c.) and sNang ldan rgyal po (14th c.) respectively.²⁰ The only transmission that is mentioned by name, *Embodiment of the Master's Secret* (*Bla ma gsang 'dus*), is not a Great Perfection text; it is, however, an integral part of the yearly *Mahāyoga* ritual cycle at monasteries that are affiliated with rDo rje brag, the Nyingmapa “mother” monastery that has been the epicenter of the Northern Treasure Tradition since the seventeenth century.²¹ The language of the biography, however, suggests that Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem received the entirety—or at least large quantities—of the treasuries of Nyang ral and Gu ru Chos dbang, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that he received their Great Perfection treasures at that time. Within *The Collected Tantras of the Ancients*, the revealed

¹⁷ Nyi ma bzang po 1983, p. 59. Because there is only this single mention of the cycle in the entire biographical collection, it is unclear which specific texts of *The Brahmin's Tradition* were held by Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem's forefathers. For a list of the texts in this cycle, see Germano 2005a, pp. 47–52. For a detailed summary of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem's biography, see Herweg 1994.

¹⁸ Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 66. The biography does not actually state that these benefactors taught Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem the Brahmin's Tradition; it is only implied.

¹⁹ Germano 2005a, pp. 24–25. For a discussion of the rNying ma pa masters of the Rong Tradition who held the Brahmin's Tradition of the Great Perfection as early as the twelfth century, see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, pp. 650–655.

²⁰ Nyi ma bzang po 1983, p. 68.

²¹ Boord 1993, p. 32.

scriptures of Nyang ral and Gu ru Chos dbang are found in the sections dedicated to the Crown Pith as well as the Ultra Pith. Unlike *The Brahmin's Tradition*, however, the Ultra Pith treasures of Nyang ral and Gu ru Chos dbang are traced through Padmasambhava, rather than Vimalamitra.²²

Since two of the Three Piths appear to have been among Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection influences, a brief explanation of this system of categorization and its content is warranted. The Crown Pith²³ is best understood as an attempt by Nyang ral to pull together a collection of teachings that preserve and champion the pristine elements of the Great Perfection that originally distinguished this post-tantric tradition from the elaborate ritualism and increasingly wrathful imagery of *Mahāyoga* Tantra.²⁴ From this perspective, the Crown Pith is conceived as the highest set of Great Perfection teachings and as specifically superior to the Transcendent Pith, which is presumably a general term signifying the entire range of earlier traditions that had assimilated various funerary practices and motifs. Later, Nyang ral and Gu ru Chos dbang championed what came to be known as the Ultra Pith, which is in fact characterized by the same funerary elements that were exorcised from the Crown Pith. It has been hypothesized that the popularity of the funerary-infused Great Perfection teachings, particularly those of the Seminal Heart, was significant enough to lead Nyang ral to abandon the objectives of the Crown Pith and to recognize its inferiority to the Ultra Pith teachings.²⁵

There are interesting parallels between these Ultra Pith influences and Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem's *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra*. For example, two of the major divisions within *The Unimpeded* are, as discussed above, The Oral Transmissions of Vimalamitra and the Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava, who are also the primary sources of Ultra Pith. And, while the funerary components of *The Brahmin's Tradition* are significantly less developed than what is found in standard Seminal Heart sources, the Padmasambhava-Ultra Pith contains funerary content borrowed directly from *The Totally Radiant Seminal Nucleus (Thig le kun gsal)*, a Secret Cycle text that is significantly closer in content to the Seminal Heart.²⁶ Nevertheless, there are significant elements of the Seminal Heart—such as the practice of Direct Transcendence—that are featured in *the Unimpeded* that are not found in the Ultra Pith. It is

²² Germano 2005a, p. 24.

²³ For an explanation of the view of the Crown Pith, see Achard 2015.

²⁴ Germano 2005a, pp. 23-24.

²⁵ Germano 2005a, p. 27.

²⁶ Germano 2005a, pp. 16-17, 27.

possible that Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem later received these Seminal Heart teachings as part of his training in the Great Perfection with Brag lung pa mKhas btsun rin chen dpal (14th c.) at the age of twenty-five.²⁷ Until this master is identified, however, one can only speculate on this matter because the biography does not mention any specific Great Perfection rubrics or texts that were received from Rinchen Pel.

There are other passages in the early biographies, however, that acknowledge that Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem had been exposed to the Seminal Heart. In one of the last episodes of rGod ldem's life in his own biography, it is reported that just before his death, one could see the signs of his attainments—including his possession of experiential knowledge of the “two Seminal Hearts” (*snying tig rnam pa gnyis*)—in his facial expression.²⁸ Then, in the biography of rNam rgyal mgon po (1399–1424), Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem's son, shortly after his first exposure to the Great Perfection at the age of six, the elders of the community are reported to have gone before rGod ldem and made an official request for rNam rgyal mgon po to be trained as the next patriarch of the burgeoning treasure community.²⁹ Their request included a detailed list of the transmissions that he would need to receive, including obvious cycles like *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra*, which would be expected since it is the quintessential teaching of the Northern Treasure Tradition, but also the treasures of Gu ru Chos dbang and the two Seminal Hearts (*snying tig rnam pa gnyis*).³⁰ In a similar passage in the biography of rDo rje mgon po (14th c.) and Rin chen grags pa (14th c.), a pair of brothers who were among rGod ldem's most trusted disciples, this reference to the two Seminal Hearts is clarified: “Thus, [Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem] gave them the set of empowerments, quintessential teachings, authorizations, and demonstrations for [his own] Great Perfection teachings [i.e., *The Unimpeded*]. Other than that, he gave them the entirety of *The Vimalamitra Seminal Heart (Bhi ma la'i snying tig)* and *The Seminal Heart of the Dakinis (mKha' 'gro snying tig)*.”³¹ While these passages do not help us understand when and from whom Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem could have received this training, together they do constitute a strong case for concluding that he was considered by the early biographers of the tradition to be a master of a significant set of Seminal Heart teachings that predated his own revelations.

The biographies of six patriarchs of the early Northern Treasure

²⁷ Nyi ma bzang po 1983, p. 69.

²⁸ Nyi ma bzang po 1983, p. 145.

²⁹ Sangs rgyas dpal bzang 1983, pp. 177-178.

³⁰ Sangs rgyas dpal bzang 1983, p. 177.

³¹ Sangs rgyas dpal bzang 1983, p. 189.

Tradition who followed immediately after Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem are gathered together in a single text entitled *The Garland of Light* ('*Od kyi 'phreng ba*).³² The biographies of this collection fall into two groups, starting with those that recount the episodes involving five individuals with close ties to rGod ldem and his direct disciples: rNam rgyal mgon po (i.e., rGod ldem's son), rDo rje dpal (i.e., rGod ldem's maternal nephew), Byams pa bshes gnyen (i.e., rDo rje dpal's nephew), rDo rje mgon po (i.e., rGod ldem's primary disciple who helped translated the treasure scrolls), and Ngag dbang grags pa (i.e., the nephew of rDo rje mgon po). The collection concludes with the biography of Sangs rgyas dpal bzang (15th c.), and it is rather obvious that *The Garland of Light* is intended to explain how this final patriarch, who is a clan outsider, legitimately inherited the authority of the tradition that had been invested in the previous five patriarchs. The six biographies are united in that they present *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* as the heart and soul of the Northern Treasure Tradition. However, throughout the tenures of the first five patriarchs, the tradition appears to have remained focused largely on *The Unimpeded* with minimal emphasis on preexisting scriptures, such as *The Vimalamitra Seminal Heart*, *The Seminal Heart of the Dākinīs*, and the treasures of Gu ru Chos dbang, but these cycles evidently held some importance within the tradition from the very beginning. The biography of Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, on the other hand, is much more explicit regarding the details of the various Great Perfection transmissions its protagonist acquired.

Sangs rgyas dpal bzang had already received an extensive and eclectic training—featuring the quintessential teachings of the Jonangpa and Sakyapa traditions—before receiving his first Great Perfection transmission: *The Bindu Cycle* (*Thig le*), which he received from 'Phags mchog Rin chen bzang po (15th c.).³³ Shortly after this first introduction to the Great Perfection, Sangs rgyas dpal bzang developed a desire for *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra*, which lead him on a quest to the two epicenters of the Northern Treasure Tradition, Ri bo dpal 'bar and bKra bzang, where he studied with Byams pa bshes gnyen and Ngag dbang grags pa respectively. The language of the biography suggests that Sangs rgyas dpal bzang

³² For a translation of the entirety of this text, see Valentine 2017, pp. 146-165.

³³ I have not definitively identified this person or this cycle; neither are mentioned anywhere else in *The Collected Biographies and Prophecies of the Northern Treasure Tradition*. There are many treasure texts with the word "Bindu" (*thig le*) in the title found in *The Great Treasury of Rediscovered Teachings* by 'Jam mgon kong sprul. For a searchable table of contents, see the online database at rtz.tsadra.org. Elsewhere it is stated that the "Bindu Cycle" of the Great Perfection is also the name for the collection of teachings that Mañjuśrīmitra transmitted to Śrī Siṃha, who then categorized those teaching into the Four Cycles: Outer, Inner, Secret, and Unsurpassed Secret. See Kunsang 2012, p. 136.

received transmissions for all of the Northern Treasures, beginning with *The Unimpeded*, from both of these masters, thus uniting these two lineages into one. Ngag dbang grags pa is also the first to transmit Seminal Heart teachings to Sangs rgyas dpal bzang. From him, he received what is unhelpfully entitled *The Seminal Heart of the Old Translations* (sNying tig snga 'gyur gyi bskor).³⁴

Shortly after this, he received *The Seminal Heart of the Dākinīs* and *The Seminal Heart of Vimalamitra* from mThu chen rgya mtsho (15th c.) in sPa gro in Western Bhutan.³⁵ From this same master, he also received *The Seventeen Tantras, The Supreme Vehicle of Indestructible Clear Light* ('Od gsal rdo rje snying po'i theg mchog), and *The Four Profound Tomes* (Zab mo'i po ti bzhi).³⁶ This passage is meant to convey the idea that Sangs rgyas dpal bzang received the entirety of the Seminal Heart teachings that predated Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem—up to and including the works of Klong chen pa—from this master in Bhutan. In fact, when Sangs rgyas dpal bzang passes this set of teachings to his heart-disciple, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, we find the first explicit mention of Dri med 'od zer (i.e., Klong chen pa) and his Seminal Heart compositions: *The Quintessence of the Dākinīs* (mKha' 'gro yang tig), *The Quintessence of the Guru* (Bla ma yang tig), *The Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle* (Theg mchog mdzod), and *The Profound Flavor in Four Parts* (Zab pa pod bzhi).³⁷ Presumably at some later date, Sangs rgyas dpal bzang also received Padma las 'brel rtsal's *The Seminal Heart of the Dākinīs*, Sar paṅ phyogs med's³⁸ *Mañjuśrī's Great Perfection* ('Jam dpal rdzogs chen), and Nyang ral's *The Stages of the Path of Secret Mantra* (gSang sngags lam rim), for he also transmitted these cycles to Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan.³⁹

Lastly, Sangs rgyas dpal bzang also received the Father-Tantra (*Pha rgyud*) of *The Stainless Moon* (Dri med zla shel), the Mother-Tantra (*Ma rgyud*) of *The Blazing Brilliant Expanse* (Klong gsal 'bar ma), *The Non-*

³⁴ Sangs rgyas dpal bzang 1982, p. 200.

³⁵ Immediately following his reception of the *Seminal Heart of Vimalamitra*, the biography includes an opaque statement (Tib: rin po che rnam pa gsum la gnang ngo) that either means that he had now received transmission directly from the three precious masters—Byams pa bshes gnyen, Ngag dbang grags pa, and mThu chen rgya mtsho—or that he had now received the Great Perfections teachings of the three precious masters—Vairocana, Vimalamitra, and Padmasambhava—who acquired the teachings in India from Śrī Siṃha and transmitted them to Tibet. For details, see Sangs rgyas dpal bzang 1983, p. 200.

³⁶ This is a four-part compendium of Great Perfection teachings said to be compiled by Vimalamitra. See Germano 1992, pp. 31-32.

³⁷ See the translation after this introduction or see Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, p. 214.

³⁸ For a brief biography of this treasure revealer, see Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Taye 2011, p. 181.

³⁹ Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, p. 215.

Dual Tantras (gNyis med rgyud), and *The Twenty-one Miniscule Tantras* (rGyud bu chung nyi shu rtsa gcig) of *The Blazing Brilliant Expanse Cycle of the Great Perfection* (rDzogs pa chen po klong gsal) from Gu ru Chos kyi rdo rje who was residing at sTag tshang seng ge bsam 'grub.⁴⁰ This is a treasure cycle that was revealed by Shes rab me 'bar (1267–1326) but later translated from the treasure script by rDo rje gling pa (1346–1405), a contemporary of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem.⁴¹ From this list of teachings, it is evident that Sangs rgyas dpal bzang had a voracious desire to acquire a wide range of Great Perfection transmissions, which was likely the reason for his journey to Bhutan. His biography also suggests that while he received some of the early Seminal Heart materials from his two Byang gter teachers who gave him *The Unimpeded*, it was necessary to find other masters from whom he could receive a more thorough training in the teachings of Klong chen pa. It appears, therefore, that Sangs rgyas dpal bzang may have been the first of the patriarchs to be known as a master of not only *The Unimpeded* on the Northern Treasure Tradition, but also of the Seminal Heart in its full breadth and depth.

Among the early hagiographies of the patriarchs of the Northern Treasure Tradition, the autobiography of Chos rgyal bsod nams (1442–1509), which is written entirely in verse, is an outlier.⁴² Chos rgyal bsod nams was born in Southern Mustang in what is now Nepal and does not appear to have been a very important figure in Byang. He trained with various teachers from different sects (e.g., rNying ma pa and Shangs pa) while travelling extensively through Northern India, the Kathmandu Valley, and Tibet. In 1465, he trained with the head of the 'Bri khung Order, Rin chen dpal bzang po (1421/22–1467), and received the name by which he is most well known: Chos rgyal bsod nams.⁴³ He then proceeded to sTag tshang seng ge in Bhutan, which is where Sangs rgyas dpal bzang travelled to receive *The Blazing Brilliant Expanse Cycle of the Great Perfection* as discussed in the previous paragraph. It is here that Chos rgyal bsod nams received his first taste of the highest teachings of the rNying ma pa Order. Surprisingly, however, he received extensive training not in the treasures of Shes rab

⁴⁰ Sangs rgyas dpal bzang 1983, p. 202.

⁴¹ For a discussion of these texts and Shes rab me 'bar (1267–1326), see Ehrhard 2007, p. 88, note 20. When Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan receives transmissions from Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, events recorded in the recipients' biography, Shes rab me 'bar is mentioned by name. See Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, p. 214.

⁴² Unless otherwise stated, the details of the life of Chos rgyal bsod nams have been drawn from his autobiography. See Chos rgyal bsod nams 1983, pp. 235–250.

⁴³ For a brief discussion of Chos rgyal bsod nams's life that includes this encounter with Rin chen dpal bzang po, which is based on the Fifth Dalai Lama's record of received teachings, see Ehrhard 2012, p. 87.

me 'bar, but in *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* from one sPrul sku Dharma ra dza (15th c.), about whom virtually nothing is known.⁴⁴ The following year (1467), he finally traveled to bKra bzang, where he received a complete training while serving Sangs rgyas dpal bzang. Despite his relationship with this master who resided at the epicenter of the Northern Treasure Tradition, it is suggested in the autobiography that his relationship with sPrul sku Dharma ra dza was the more significant connection.⁴⁵ When Chos rgyal bsod noms departed Byang, he travelled to Bodhgaya, where he appears to have remained until his death in 1509. While the autobiography of Chos rgyal bsod noms does not increase our knowledge of the various cycles of Great Perfection teachings that were circulating among the patriarchs of the Northern Treasure Tradition in the fifteenth century, it is interesting to know that as early as 1467 it was possible to receive transmission of *The Unimpeded* in Bhutan. This suggests that the fame of this cycle began to spread well before the establishment of rDo rje brag and its Byang gter ritual program in the seventeenth century.

In the biography of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan called *Dispelling the Darkness that Shrouds Meaning*, the translation of which follows this introduction, we find that the protagonist was similar to his teacher, Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, in that both appear to have had an insatiable desire to encyclopedically collect scriptural transmissions. Unlike Sangs rgyas dpal bzang and Chos rgyal bsod noms who were clan outsiders, however, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan was of the Mes family, which had strong familial connections to the Northern Treasure Tradition.⁴⁶ His father was Byams pa bshes gnyen, who was the nephew-disciple of Mes ston rDo rje dpal (14th–15th c.), who was in turn the nephew-disciple of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem himself.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁴ Chos rgyal bsod noms 1989, p. 241. In *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung* (18th c.), there is a small section dedicated to the life of Chos rgyal bsod noms in the chapter that discusses the abbatial succession of rDo rje brag Monastery. Therein his connection with sPrul sku Dharma ra dza is not mentioned, which results in the impression that Sangs rgyas dpal bzang was his only Byang gter teacher. See Gur u bkra shis 1990, p. 672.

⁴⁵ At the end of his autobiography, when Chos rgyal bsod noms is summing himself up, he refers to himself as a follower of sPrul sku Dharma ra dza, and does not mention Sangs rgyas dpal bzang at all. See Chos rgyal bsod noms 1983, p. 247.

⁴⁶ The following passage from *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung* (18th c.) explains the name of this lineage of teachers: "The progenitor of the family jabbed his staff into a rock in southern Sa dmar, and it caught fire. There were many signs of his attainment, such as the handprints and footprints left in the rock. Thus, he was known as 'Mes ston' or 'he who teaches with fire.'" See Gur u bkra shis 1990, p. 672.

⁴⁷ In the section of *The Garland of Light* that is dedicated to the life of Byams pa bshes gnyen, which as I have mentioned above appears to be directly concerned with establishing the authority of Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, mention of the familial connection between Byams pa bshes gnyen and rDo rje dpal is suspiciously absent.

patriarchs of the Mes family, who were seated at the estate of bDe grol in Ngam ring, remained influential in the area through at least the seventeenth century.⁴⁸

The biography places special emphasis on Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's three meetings with Thang stong rgyal po (1361–1486), who was a wildly famous saint from Byang.⁴⁹ It is from this master that Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan received training in Mahāmudrā, a “post-tantric” tradition of the Kagyupa.⁵⁰ While Thang stong rgyal po is known to have held the Northern Treasures, these were not among the teachings passed to Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan.⁵¹ The bulk of his early training in rNying ma pa *Mahāyoga*, however, was received from Mes ston mGon po rdo rje (15th c.), to whom Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan was deeply dedicated.⁵² He also received extensive training in the tantric tradition of the “new” (*gSar ma*) schools, including the Sa skya pa, which was also prevalent in Ngam ring at the time.

Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan then met Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, and his affinity for the teachings of the Great Perfection were awakened. He served this master for a significant length of time, and Sangs rgyas dpal bzang apparently transmitted every teaching he held to Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan. In fact, the list of teachings that were transmitted to Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan from this master reflects the order in which these cycles were obtained throughout Sangs rgyas dpal bzang's life. But, in the places where Sangs rgyas dpal bzang's biography is vague, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's biography clarifies the details. For example, it is in the exchange between these two masters that one finds the only mention of *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* (*Ka dag rang byung rang shar*), the actual title of the fifth volume of the Great Perfection anthology of the Northern

See Sangs rgyas dpal bzang 1983, pp. 185-188.

⁴⁸ Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717), the fourth incarnation of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem, records his interactions with members of both the Se and Mes clans during his pilgrimage to Ngam ring in 1690. See Padma 'phrin las, pp. 549-630.

⁴⁹ Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, pp. 209-210.

⁵⁰ The first meeting obviously occurred while Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan was very young, but the other meetings that include transmissions of Mahāmudrā and Severance (*gcod*) teachings likely transpired much later. However, the biography places all three meetings with Thang stong rgyal po together, just before discussing Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's other training activities, which presumably reflects the importance of the master when the biography was written.

⁵¹ There is an interesting parallel here because Thang stong rgyal po's mother consulted Don yod rgyal mtshan (14th–15th c.), who held the Northern Treasures and would later transmit them to him, while he was an infant. See Sterns 2007, pp. 105 and 494-495, note 324.

⁵² The biography does not explain why Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan does not train with his own father, Byams pa bshes gnyen, who was a lineage-holder of the Northern Treasures.

Treasure Tradition, in any of these early biographies.⁵³ We can thus conclude that by the time he had finished training with Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan was also well informed about a wide range of Seminal Heart teachings and was on his way to becoming a master himself.

Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan returned to his family estate of bDe grol after completing his training with Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, but he continued to collect a wide range of transmissions, including Great Perfection teachings, from other masters. He acquired the treasures of Gu ru Chos dbang from sPos rin chos rje gZhon nu dbang chen (15th–16th c.), including *The Great Perfection of the Buddha Samyoga* (*rDzogs chen sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor*).⁵⁴ From sPang ston gSang sngags rdo rje (15th c.), he acquired the treasures of Kun skyong gling pa (1396–1477),⁵⁵ such as *The Seminal-Heart Great Perfection of Vajrasattva* (*rDzogs chen rdor sems snying tig*), the treasures of rDo rje gling pa, such as *The Great Compassionate One's Ocean of Victors* (*Thugs rje chen po rgyal ba rgya mtsho*), and those revealed by U rgyan gling pa (b. 1323), such as *The Chronicles of Padmasambhava* (*Padma thang yig*), *The Testament of Padmasambhava* (*Padma bka' chams*) and *The Likeness of Vairocana* (*Bai ro'i 'dra 'bag*).⁵⁶ At this stage in his life, it is already clear that Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's training in and knowledge of the Great Perfection surpassed that of Sangs rgyas dpal bzang.

Perhaps the most interesting connections discussed in the biography are those between Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, Shākya bzang po (16th c.), and bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480–1535). The later hagiography of the Northern Treasure Tradition⁵⁷ stresses that Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan passed his authority to Shākya bzang po, who in

⁵³ Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, p. 213.

⁵⁴ Nam mkha' bsod nams 1993, p. 216.

⁵⁵ For a brief biography of this treasure revealer, see Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Taye 2011, p. 142.

⁵⁶ Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, p. 216. gSang sngags rdo rje appears in a list of sixteenth century luminaries, which includes bsTan gnyis gling pa and Shākya bzang po, who were held in high regard by the King of Mang yul gung thang, Nyi zla grags pa (1514–1560). For a translation of the relevant passage, see Ehrhard 1997, p. 340. For a short biography of gSang sngags rdo rje, see Everding 2004, p. 268, note 2.

⁵⁷ Here I am referring to the hagiographies that were written after the establishment of rDo rje brag Monastery and the enthroning of the incarnations of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem at that location. Boord's account of the history of the Northern Treasure tradition prioritizes the narratives of authority of the later historiographic tradition despite being based on both earlier and later sources. See Boord 2013, pp. 31–63. Boord's account is valuable in that it accurately reflects how the tradition sees itself today, which is relevant for modern scholars and practitioners alike. I understand the earlier biographies, emphasized herein, not as "corrective" historiographies, but as "complementary" narratives.

turn was the teacher of Legs ldan rdo rje, the first reincarnation of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem in the incarnational series that was eventually enthroned at rDo rje brag in Central Tibet. But, while Shākya bzang po and bsTan gnyis gling pa are listed as the foremost of his disciples, they were also both important teachers who transmitted large numbers of teachings to Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan. The treasure cycles of Padma gling pa, such as *The Great Perfection Compendium of the Realization of Samantabhadra* (*rDzogs chen kun bzang dgongs pa kun 'dus*), were foremost amongst the texts received from Shākya bzang po.⁵⁸ From him he also received the treasures of bDung bu Byang chub gling pa (14th c.), such as *The Great Perfection Mind Treasure of Samantabhadra* (*rDzogs chen kun bzang thugs gter*).⁵⁹

bsTan gnyis gling pa, on the other hand, was himself a master of the Northern Treasure Tradition, and he had already revealed treasures that would eventually constitute a “branch” of the treasure tradition.⁶⁰ While Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan received a wide range of transmissions from this master, the most interesting by far were Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem's *The Unimpeded* and bsTan gnyis gling pa's own treasures such as *The Uncontaminated Aggregates of the Great Perfection* (*rDzogs chen phung po zag med*)⁶¹ and *The Extensively Profound Vajravārahī* (*Phag mo zab rgya*).⁶² This later text is significant in that bsTan gnyis gling pa revealed it at Ri bo dpal 'bar, the most important southern outpost of the Northern Treasure Tradition that was established with the blessing of the King of Mang yul gung thang during Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem's lifetime.

Thus, while Sangs rgyas dpal bzang exceeded his predecessors by acquiring a wider range of preexisting Seminal Heart and other Great Perfection transmissions, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan was able to exceed him largely because of his meaningful connections with famous, itinerant treasure revealers. From them he was able to obtain a more complete collection of Great Perfection treasure cycles as well as new treasures belonging to the Northern Tradition. Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, however, was also a dedicated practitioner of the Great

⁵⁸ Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, pp. 216-217.

⁵⁹ For a brief biography of this treasure revealer, see Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Taye 2011, p. 216-217.

⁶⁰ For an introduction to the life of bsTan gnyis gling pa, see Solmsdorf 2014, pp. 26-34.

⁶¹ One of bsTan gnyis gling pa's other Great Perfection texts, *Quintessence of Wisdom Liberated through Seeing* (*Yang tig ye shes mthong grol*) has been analyzed in great detail; see Achard 2004, pp. 58-97. The structure of the cycle is very similar to that of *The Unimpeded*; compare with Turpeinen 2015.

⁶² Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, pp. 217-218. The revelation of this text was very important in the treasure career of bsTan gnyis gling pa. For details, see Achard 2004, pp. 61-62.

Perfection. Later in life, he completed a three-year meditation retreat that focused entirely on acquiring experiential realization of his Great Perfection training.

Before proceeding to the translation of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's biography, it will be helpful to discuss the underlying agenda that animates the text. As the title, *Dispelling the Darkness that Shrouds Meaning*, is meant to suggest, there was an earlier biography of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan as well as oral accounts of his life that were judged to be misleading, and this new text was authored because certain issues needed to be clarified. Without having access to this former work, it is impossible to know every way in which it differed from *Dispelling the Darkness*. There are, however, two large sections of the revised biography that could not have been in the earlier text, and these sections illuminate the underlying agenda of the biography. Toward the end of the biography, there are two different accounts of the final months of the life of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, the experience of his death, and the days following his passing. The first is likely the testimony of rDo rje 'dzin pa bSam bgrub rgyal mtshan (15th–16th c.), who, according to the colophon, requested for the biography to be written and supplied the biographer, Nam mkha' bsod nams (16th c.), with many of the details that were required to author the text.⁶³ The second is the account of Se ston 'Dzam gling chos grags (16th c.), who was the reigning patriarch at the original epicenter of the Northern Treasure Tradition, bKra bzang, when the biography was written.⁶⁴ Both bSam bgrub rgyal mtshan and 'Dzam gling chos grags were close disciples of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan.

The updated elements of the biography have at least two goals. The first is to discredit rumors regarding bad omens after the death of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan that might cause those of little faith to doubt the spiritual accomplishments of the biography's protagonist. The second is to establish as fact that the mantle of authority of the Northern Treasure Tradition passed to Se ston 'Dzam gling chos grags. This is a controversial assertion because the later hagiography of the tradition stresses, as discussed above, the link between Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and Shākya bzang po for it was this lineage that was eventually reestablished at rDo rje brag in Central Tibet. Interestingly, *Dispelling the Darkness* resoundingly confirms that Shākya bzang po was first among Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's disciples. However, in 'Dzam gling chos grags's account of his master's final months, he reports that Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's only regret was that he knew

⁶³ For the entire section, see Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, pp. 225-227. For the colophon, see p. 234.

⁶⁴ For the entire section, see Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, pp. 227-232.

that he would never again see Shākya bzang po, who was traveling through mNga' ris at the time of his decline.⁶⁵ 'Dzam gling chos grags was present, however, and he assumed leadership responsibilities after the passing of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan.

Ultimately, 'Dzam gling chos grags's ascendancy is not very surprising. Among the nineteen disciples who are explicitly listed in Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's biography, the three most important were Shākya bzang po, bsTan gnyis gling pa, and gSang sngags rdo rje.⁶⁶ All three of these figures were not simply his disciples, but individuals with whom Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan maintained reciprocal relationships. They were also, like Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, heavily involved with either the revelation of treasures, the propagation of recently revealed treasures, or both. Moreover, Shākya bzang po, bsTan gnyis gling pa, and gSang sngags rdo rje were all well-travelled and well-known in many different regions of Tibet—all three maintained relations with the court of Mang yul gung thang, for example—and none of them were native to Ngam ring. While these three lamas were first among his disciples in terms of their close relationship with Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and in terms of their fame, it is unlikely that any of them were expected to permanently settle in Ngam ring and act as the regional patriarch of the Northern Treasure Tradition.⁶⁷

Similarly, Legs ldan rdo rje (1512–1580), who is extremely important for the Central Tibetan Tradition, appears in *Dispelling the Darkness*, but in a surprisingly diminished role. According to seventeenth century biographical accounts, before meeting Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, Legs ldan rdo rje had already been identified by Kong chen rin po che (15th–16th c.) as a “speech emanation” (*gsung gi sprul pa*) of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms (8th c.), one of Padmasambhava's Tibetan disciples during the era of treasure concealment.⁶⁸ Legs ldan rdo rje, Shākya bzang po, and Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan were together at bDe grol in Ngam ring in 1527, and it was at this time that Legs ldan rdo rje developed the intention to become a master and preserver of the Northern Treasure Tradition.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, p. 227.

⁶⁶ The complete list of disciples is very impressive. See Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, pp. 222-223.

⁶⁷ According to Boord, Shākya bzang po accumulated disciples in Mustang and Ngam ring; see Boord 2013, pp. 65-66. These passages of Boord should not be interpreted to mean that Shākya bzang po was seated at bDe grol as its patriarch. At least from the perspective of *Dispelling the Darkness*, Shākya bzang po was as much a disciple of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan as he was a master.

⁶⁸ For a discussion of this identification, see Valentine 2013, pp. 148-148.

⁶⁹ Boord 2013, p. 46.

Nevertheless, Legs ldan rdo rje departed for Central Tibet where he stayed, presumably until after the passing of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan. Later in life, Legs ldan rdo rje returned to bKra bzang, where he finally remembered his previous life as Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem.⁷⁰ He then settled at gSang sngags theg mchog gling in Ngam ring,⁷¹ which was constructed by bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550–1603) and destroyed prior to 1690.⁷² None of this information is reflected in *Dispelling the Darkness*, which was written in 1556. Perhaps this is because Legs ldan rdo rje had not yet returned and established his authority in the region. Regardless, the author of the biography, while very respectful of the famous itinerant treasure revealers of his day, is more concerned with buttressing the authority of 'Dzam gling chos grags, a master of a clan with deep roots in the Northern Treasure Tradition in particular and Ngam ring in general.

From this perspective, the thesis statement of *Dispelling the Darkness* is not that 'Dzam gling chos grags, who is listed fourth among Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's disciples, legitimately usurped the authority that rightfully belonged to Shākya bzang po. Rather, the proposition is that 'Dzam gling chos grags succeeded Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan as the leading regional patriarch of the Northern Treasure Tradition lineages of Ngam ring. The authority that had been wielded by Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan of the Mes clan from the family estate of bDe grol did not pass into the hands of Mes ston rDo rje bsod nam (15th c.), who is listed sixth among the disciples. That authority was consolidated at bKra bzang, the original epicenter of the Northern Treasure Tradition, by Se ston 'Dzam gling chos grags of the Se clan. Despite their irrelevance within the Central Tibetan tradition, the patriarchs of this ancient hereditary lineage of the rNying ma pa were intimately involved in the life of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem before and during his revelatory escapades and were among the revelator's closest disciples.⁷³ They also maintained transmission lineages of the Northern Treasures through at least the seventeenth century.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Valentine 2013, pp. 152-153.

⁷¹ Boord 2013, p. 47.

⁷² Padma 'phrin las, p. 551.

⁷³ In Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem's own biography, the only explicit transmission of *The Unimpeded* is given to a group of fifteen male and female disciples who remain unnamed except for two patriarchs of the Se lineage of the tradition: Se ston Thugs rje rgyal mtshan (14th–15th c.) and the author of the biography, Se ston Nyi ma bzang po. See the relevant passage in Nyi ma bzang po 1983, p. 143.

⁷⁴ Evidence of the power struggle between the Mes and the Se families can be found in the autobiography of Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717), the fourth incarnation of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem. When he traveled from rDo rje brag in Central Tibet to Ngam ring in 1690, he encountered a large number of the descendants of both the Mes and Se families featured in Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's biography. He noticed

Principle Personages

De gyin hor Lineage of the Northern Treasure Tradition – Seated at bKra bzang in Ngam ring

Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem	1337–1409	Primary Treasure Revealer
rNam rgyal mgon po	1399–1424	Son of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem

Mes Lineage of the Northern Treasure Tradition – Seated at bDe grol in Ngam ring by the 16th c.

Mes ston dpal ba	rDo rje 14th–15th c.	Maternal Nephew of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem
Byams gnyen	pa bshes 15thc.	Nephew of rDo rje dpal ba
Mes ston rdo rje	mGon po 15th c.	Teacher of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan
Nam mtshan	mkha' rgyal 1454–1541	Son of Byams pa bshes gnyen
Mes ston bsod nams	rDo rje 15th c.	Primary Mes Disciple of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan

Lineage of the Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem's Disciples – Resided at bKra bzang by the mid-15th c.

rDo rje mgon po	14th c.	Primary Disciple of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem, no familial relationship to Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem
Rin chen gags pa	14th c.	Brother of rDo rje mgon po
Ngag pa	dbang gags 15thc.	Son of Rin chen gags pa

Se Patriarchs of the Northern Treasure Tradition – Seated at bKra

that there is still a rivalry between the two families that are seated respectively at bDe grol and bKra bzang, and he attempted—without much success—to mediate a peaceful settlement between the two parties. For the record of Padma 'phrin las's pilgrimage to Ngam ring in 1690, see Padma 'phrin las, pp. 549-630.

bzang by 16th c.

dPal chen 'bum pa	14th c.	Teacher of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem
Legs pa ba	14th c.	Teacher of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem
Se ston Thugs rje rgyal mtshan	14th–15th c.	Disciple of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem
Se ston Nyi ma bzang po	14th–15th c.	Disciple and Biographer of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem
Se ston 'Dzam gling chos grags	16th c.	Disciple of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan

Northern Treasure Lineage - Seated at rDo rje brag in Central Tibet after 1632

Shākya bzang po	16th c.	Teacher-Disciple of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan
Padma dbang rgyal	1487–1542	Disciple of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and Shākya bzang po
Legs ldan rdo rje	1512–1580	Disciple of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and Shākya bzang po
bKra shis stobs rgyal	1550–1603	Reincarnation of Padma dbang rgyal, Disciple of Legs ldan rdo rje
Ngag gi dbang po	1580–1639	Son of bKra shis stobs rgyal, Reincarnation of Legs ldan rdo rje
Padma 'phrin las	1641–1717	Reincarnation of Ngag gi dbang po
sKal bzang padma dbang phyug	1720–1771	Reincarnation of Padma 'phrin las

Miscellaneous Patriarch of the Northern Treasure Tradition

bZang po grags pa	14th c.	Treasure revealer who indirectly passed his treasures materials to Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem
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'Jam dbyangs bla ma	14th c.	Reincarnation of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem
Sangs rgyas dpal bzang	b. 15th c.	Disciple of Ngag dbang grags pa and Byams pa bshes gnyen, Reincarnation of rNam rgyal mgon po
sPrul sku Dharma ra dza	15th c.	Transmitted <i>The Unimpeded</i> to Chos rgyal bsod nams in Bhutan
Chos rgyal bsod nams	1442–1509	Disciple of Dharma ra dza and Sangs rgyas dpal bzang
bSam bgrub rgyal mtshan	15th–16th c.	Disciple of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, Involved with Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's Biography
bsTan gnyis gling pa	1480–1535	Teacher-Disciple of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, Later Revealer of Northern Treasures
Gar dbang rdo rje	1640–1685	Later Revealer of Northern Treasures

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Dispelling the Darkness that Shrouds Meaning The Life of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, the Heart-Disciple⁷⁵

[208] Praises to the Guru!

You abide in the expanse of the *Dharmakāya*, and
 Raise the victory banner of the *Sambhogakāya* like the sun and
 the moon.
 Your *Nirmāṇakāya* are like the ten million emanating rays of
 light.
 Homage to you, my lama who is endowed with the three *kaya*-
 bodies!

From your oceanic liberation story,
 The following is like a few drops of water for the fields [of this
 world].
 I have carefully gathered them by cupping my mind like hands
 [under a dripping spring].
 But, [it is enough to] satiate the longing of the faithful ones.

Indeed, this is the liberation story of my guru, who is known as the
 Venerable Holy One, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1454–1541).
 There is a clan-lineage of successive realized masters that begins

⁷⁵ I am grateful to Kinley Drukpa for his assistance in translating a few of the more difficult passages in this text during our meetings in Queens and Manhattan, NY (2014–2016).

with Mes ston rDo rje dpal (14th–15th c.) of the Sa dmar ba clan. [Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's] father, Byams pa bshes gnyen (15th c.), was the nephew-heir of this master, and he was a practitioner of mantras and a yogin. He was an expert in cycles such as the *Ancestral Vajrakīla* (*pha chos rdo rje phur pa mdo lugs*), and he had many good personality traits. [209] His mother was of the Sa dmar 'da' pa [lineage]. She was known as dPon mo Nam mkha' rgyal mo, and she was modest and respectful in private and public. My lama was born to the couple in the year of the Male-Wood-Dog (1454). While he was residing in his mother's womb, her body was pleasantly healthy and meditative equanimity awakened within her mental continuum. She didn't experience any discomfort when he was born. When he was a young child, he proved to be mentally fit and he grew faster than [his siblings]. He was endowed with many wonderful qualities [that come easy in this] tradition. By the time he reached seven or eight years of age, he learned to read and write, and he understood effortlessly. It was clear that he was awakening habitual tendencies learned in his former lives.

My lama met the saint named Thang stong rgyal po (1361–1486) three times. [210] The first time was when he was very young. His mother carried him to the meeting. She put a measure of white butter on top of a choice cut of meat and gave it as an offering. The great saintly lord spoke many prophecies like the following: "This [offering demonstrates] an auspicious connection. [This child] will churn the profound dharma and yield true meaning that is similar to this purified butter!" He also named the child dGe bsnyen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan. The practice commentary (*khrid*) for *Five-fold Mahāmudrā* (*phyag rgya chen po lnga ldan*) was foremost among the transmissions given to my lama by the saint during their second meeting. During their final meeting, the saint gave him many teachings, such as the practice commentary for Severance (*gcod*) and the empowerments for *Opening the Door of the Sky* (*Nam mkha' sgo 'byed*). He received continuous blessings from the master.

Mes ston mGon po rdo rje (15th c.) was one of the precious lord's elders. From him, he received the empowerment for the *Ancestral Vajrakīla*, the procedures (*lam gyi rim pa*) for liberating activity (*grol byed*), *The Kīla Root Text Cycle* (*Phur pa rtsas skor*), *The Great Tantra of the Secret Cycle* (*gSang skor gyi rgyud chen mo*), *The Explanatory Tantras and the Indian Commentaries of Pema* (*Padma rgya 'grel*), *The Five-fold Secret Tantra* (*gSang rgyud sde lnga*), the liturgical procedures for those, the expulsion rites of accumulated action (*las tshogs phyir bzlog*), the protection from hail rites, the oral instructions for the four aspects of familiarization practice, and the subtle teachings regarding the generation and completion stages of deity yoga. [211] He listened to these teachings and practiced them earnestly. As a result, in his heart

he came to adore Mes ston mGon po rdo rje like an elder brother.
The lord expressed [his gratitude] in the following lines of verse:

He had the nature of the mind of all the victors of the three
times, and
His discipline, who could criticize even a fraction?
How could one measure the profundity of his intentions?
One cannot grasp the extent of his kindness.

To my kind lama, mGon po rdo rje,
Who spoke so kindly to this prostrated devotee,
With the ancestors in mind as I venerate you, I go to you for
refuge.

I grasp onto that protector, who with the empowerments,
reading transmissions, and quintessential instructions,
Took this servant with disciplined mind into your care,
Because I am in awe of you out of respect, I am nourished by
my memory of you.

Having transmitted the teachings verbally to me, the old gods
were engendered in the beginning, and
When I perform *The Ancestral Vajrakīla*,
Maturation occurs because of my deep connection with the
preparation and the primary practices.

Then, as I progress through the stages that bring about
liberation, and
I learn the truth of cyclic existence, impermanence, and the
pursuit of riches,
As well as suffering, karma, and fruition, and through seeking
refuge, the purification of the defilements and the
accumulation of merit,
By means of the one hundred syllable refuge practice, the
mandala practice, [212]
Guru Yoga practice, and my prayers,
Through these preliminary practices, I became a suitable
vessel.

After that, you gave me the three: *The Ancestral Vajrakīla*,
The secret cycles and the shown cycles, and
You explained each one of them in detail.
In your inconceivable manner, you enumerated the Tantras,
the root texts, and their commentaries,

The sādhana practices, the empowerments, the quintessential instructions, the accumulation practices, and
The oral directions for each.

To me in particular, you gave the cycle for the path to liberation
The commentary on the great secret Tantra of Padma,
The five classes of Tantras and the explanation of those, and
The liturgical procedures for all that, the accumulation practices, the expulsion rites,
The quintessential instructions for the hail protection rites,
The oral instructions for each of the familiarization practices,
The single points for the profound final birth, and
You put the oral transmissions in the center of my mind!

Then, before the one who resided at rDzong phu named bKra shis dpal bzang (15th c.), who was an expert in all types of Tantra, including the Yoga-tantras, he received many transmissions, such as those for *Trinity of Splendor, Peak, and Space* (dPal rtse dbyings gsum), *The Twelve Core Practices* (sByong dkyil bcu gnyis), *The Five Pronouncements* (gSungs gra lnga), *Vajravali* (Bla med kyi rdo rje 'phrengs ba), and *The Ultra-secret Hayagrīva* (sNying ma'i rta mgrin yang gsang). [213]

Then, he went to go see the protector chaplain, Dharma-Lord Sangs rgyas bzang po (15th c.), perform the eight-day offering ceremony. He witnessed the lord's entry into the chapel dressed as a lordly Brahmin with four faces. As a result of witnessing his performance, he became very faithful [in this master]. He then received empowerments for teachings such as *One Hundred Thousand Precepts of the Sakya* (Sa skya bka' 'bum), *Hevajra* (Kye rdo rje), *Cakrasaṃvara* (bDe mchog), *Bhairava of the Ra Lineage* ('Jigs byed ra lugs), *Face of Protector Gur* (mGon po gur zhal), *Kīla of the [Sakya] Lineage* (Phur pa lugs), and *Shunning the White Demoness* (dKar bdud lcam bral).

Then, [he met] the Precious Sangs rgyas dpal bzang (15th c.), who was the rebirth of rNam rgyal mgon po (1399–1424), the son of the treasure revealer Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem. He had great faith in this teacher, and his affinities to the teachings of the Great Perfection were awakened. As he attended to this master's needs at various holy locations, such as sKu 'bum rnam rgyal,⁷⁶ he received the following transmissions: the Northern Treasure Tradition's Great Perfection anthology that includes *The Unimpeded* and *The Self-Emergent and Self-Arisen* (Rang byung rang shar), *The Self-Emergent and Self-Arisen Eight*

⁷⁶ This is where Sangs rgyas dpal bzang completed a one-year retreat dedicated to practicing the cycle of the Eight Herukas. While impressive, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan completed a three-year retreat practicing the same cycle. This location is also important for the Sa skya pa. For details, see Padma 'phrin las, pp. 556.

Herukas (*bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar*), the peaceful guru cycle entitled *The Master of Awareness that Embodies the Lineage* (*Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub*), *The Azure Heart Practice of the Wrathful One* (*Thugs bsgrubs drag po mthing kha*), *The Bodhicitta Authorization* (*Byang chub sems pa'i spyod dbang*), and all of the treasure cycles [that were revealed by bZang po grags pa (14th c.)] at Grom pa rgyang, such as the prophetic cycles like *The Great [Treasure] Certificate* (*bsKul byang chen mo*), [214] *The Inventory of the Northern Treasures*⁷⁷ (*Kha byang gter gyi bang mdzod*), *The Seminal Certificate on the Key Points*⁷⁸ (*sNying byang gnad kyi them bu*), and *The Seven Topics of the Seminal Heart* (*sNying tig don bdun*); [he also received] *The Great Compassionate One that Self-Liberates the Passions* (*Thugs rje chen po nyon mongs rang grol*), *The Iron Treasury Kīla* (*Phur pa lcags khang ma*) cycles [of the Northern Treasure Tradition], such as *The Great Supreme Kīla* (*Phur pa che mchog*) and *The Wrathful Mantra Kīla* (*Phur pa drag sngags*), cycles for the collected empowerments (*dbang bsdud*) of texts such as *The Seven Points of Connection* (*rTen 'brel chos bdun*), the cycles for protective utterances (*bKa' bsrung*), such as *The Tiger-Mounted Protector* (*mGon po stag zhon*), and the teaching cycles of 'Dzeng rdo dkar po that were extracted from sKra bzang rlung bseng.

In brief, he also received the Heart-Treasures of Zang zang lha brag, *The Seminal-Heart of Radiant Light of the Great Perfection* (*rDzogs chen 'od gsal snying tig*) that was revealed by lCe sgom pa, the teaching cycles of the treasure revealer Dri med 'od zer [(i.e., Klong chen pa)], such as *The Quintessence of the Dakinīs* (*mKha' 'gro yang tig*), *The Quintessence of the Guru* (*Bla ma yang tig*), *The Seventeen Tantras of Vimalamitra* (*Bi ma la'i rgyud bcu bdun*), *The Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle* (*Theg mchog mdzod*), and *The Profound Flavor in Four Parts* (*Zab pa pod bzhi*). Regarding the treasure cycles of the treasure revealer known as Shes rab me 'bar (1267–1326), he received the Father-Tantra (*Pha rgyud*) of *The Stainless Moon* (*Dri med zla shel*), the Mother-Tantra (*Ma rgyud*) of *The Blazing Brilliant Expanse* (*Klong gsal 'bar ma*), *The Non-Dual Tantras* (*gNyi med rgyud*), and *The Twenty-one Miniscule Tantras* (*rGyud bu chung nyi shu rtsa gcig*). He also received the treasure teachings of the revealer Padma las 'brel rtsal (1291–1315) called *The Seminal Heart of the Dakinīs*, [215] the treasure teaching of the revealer Sar paṅ phyogs med called *Mañjuśrī's Great Perfection* (*'Jam dpal rdzogs chen*), *The Stages of the Path of Secret Mantra* (*gSang sngags lam rim*) that was discovered

⁷⁷ This text as well as the next two as treasures passed indirectly from bZang po grags pa to Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem. For details, see Valentine 2016. Turpeinen lists this as a prophetic text but notes that it is not currently in any known collection; see Turpeinen 2015, p. 15.

⁷⁸ Turpeinen points out that this text can be found in *Collected Biographies and Prophecies of the Northern Treasure Tradition*; see Turpeinen 2015, p. 15.

by the treasure revealer Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192), and all of *The Wrathful Black Vajravārahi* (*Phag mo khros nag*) and *The Wrathful Red* (*Drag po dmar po*). In brief, Sangs rgyas dpal bzang gave the entirety of the vast and profound teachings that he possessed to Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, who subsequently held onto them.

Later, when he had reached his thirties, he was invited to bDe grol. Up until [his master] attained nirvāṇa, he focused on being his attendant. After [Sangs rgyas dpal bzang] passed into nirvāṇa, however, [Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan] performed the fire ceremonies for the lineage. Without interruption [by any other possible patriarch], he performed the lineage offerings for the Fifteenth Day of the New Year ceremony. Indeed, during the performance of every tea ceremony, it was he who scattered the offering without fail. It was to this lama, [Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan] alone that we prayed without fail. Indeed, he had the blessings of the lineage. This lama was like a spreading, expansive cloud that accomplished great benefit for migratory beings.

At one point, the Precious One went together with his disciples to practice in solitary retreat. [216] He performed the yoga of vase breathing, while remaining in a state of undisturbed and clear awareness. For fourteen days he did absolutely nothing else, [it was clear that he had no] hunger or thirst. During this time in retreat, many thoughts were formulated [in his mind] regarding the tutelary deities.

Then, he went before the one named sPos rin chos rje gZhon nu dbang chen (15th–16th c.) and received the primary treasure teachings of Gu ru Chos dbang (1212–1270), such as *The Completely Perfected and Secret Heruka* (*bKa' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs*), the cycles for large audiences (*bskor phal che ba*), such as *The Great Empowerment Practice* (*sGrub dbang chen mo*), *The Assembled Secret Guru* (*Bla ma gsang 'dus*), *The Great Perfection of the Buddha Samyoga* (*rDzogs chen sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor*), and *The Glorious and Genderless Protector* (*dPal mgon ma ning*).

Then, in the presence of sPang ston gSang sngags rdo rje (15th c.), he received an extensive version of *The Eight Herukas*, such as the empowerment and sādhana practice for *The Completely Perfected Secret Eight Herukas* (*bKa' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs*). He also received the treasure cycle of Kun skyong gling pa (1396–1477) called *The Seminal-Heart Great Perfection of Vajrasattoa* (*rDzogs chen rdor sems snying tig*), rDo rje gling pa's (1346–1405) treasure cycle entitled *The Great Compassionate One's Ocean of Victors* (*Thugs rje chen po rgyal ba rgya mtsho*), and especially U rgyan gling pa's (b. 1323)⁷⁹ treasure called *The*

⁷⁹ For brief biographies of Kun skyong gling pa, rDo rje gling pa, and U rgyan gling pa, see Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Taye 2011, pp. 140-143, 149-152, and 122-

Chronicles of Padmasambhava (Padma thang yig), and such teachings as *The Testament of Padmasambhava (Padma bka' chams)* and *The Likeness of Vairocana (Bai ro'i 'dra 'bag)*.

Then, although Shākya bzang po became one of his disciples and manifested great faith [in my master], it had also been written in the prophecies of Padma [gling pa] that, [217] “he would receive these teachings that were spoken far away.” Thus, [Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan received from Shākya bzang po] with quick apprehension the treasure cycles of Padma gling pa⁸⁰ (1450–1521), such as *The Great Perfection Compendium of the Realization of Samantabhadra (rDzogs chen kun bzang dgongs pa kun 'dus)*, the cycle for *The Three-Faced Six-Armed Wrathful Red (Drag dmar zhal gsum phyag drug)*, *Vajrapāni Tamer of All Haughty Beings (Phyag rdor dregs pa)*, *The Vajra Garland Life-Guidance (Tshe khrid rdo rje 'phreng ba)*, *The Life and Songs of Padma gling pa (Padma gling pa'i rnam thar mgur 'bum)*, the treasure cycles of bDung bu Byang chub gling pa (14th c.), such as *The Red Lance of Vaiśravaṇa (rNam sras mdung dmar can)*, *The Great Perfection Mind Treasure of Samantabhadra (rDogs chen kun bzang thugs gter)*, *The Regent's Great Tantras of the Northern Treasure Tradition (Byang gter gyi rgyal tshab rgyud chen)*, such as *The Peaceful and Wrathful Guru (Gu ru zhi drag)*, *The Avalokiteśvara (sPyan ras gzigs)*, *The Mañjuṣa (Jam dbyangs)*, *The Vajrapāni (Phyag rdor)*, and *The Ultra Kūla (Yang phur)*, then there was the cycle for *The Thirty Haughty Beings (Dregs pa sun bcu)*, *The Leisurely Heart Practice (Thugs sgrub kyi dal gyi sgrubs)*, and *The Vase Consecration (bum sgrub)*. For a great many of these, he received the pith instructions (*gdams ngag*). ARRET

Then, the treasure revealer named bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480–1535) came from around mNga' ris to Ngam ring. This treasure revealer gave the empowerments for *The Unimpeded (Zangs thal)* to [Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan]. Having mingled their minds into a single stream, he received the treasure revealer's own biography and songs (*gter bton rang gi rnam mgur*), *The Uncontaminated Aggregates of the Great Perfection (rDzogs chen phung po zag med)*, *The Quintessence of Sight-Liberating Wisdom (Yang tig ye shes mthong grol)*, [218] *The Mahāmudrā of Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance (Phyag chen ma rig mun sel)*, *The Cutters Sword of Knowledge (gCod yul shes rab ral gri)*, *The Spells of Yama (gShin rje 'joms byed)*, *The Compendium of Subjugating Mantras (Drag sngags kun 'dus)*, *The Compendium of Vaiśravaṇa, the Lord of Wealth (rNam sras nor bdag kun 'dus)*, *The Compendium of the Buddha's Realization (Sangs rgyas dgongs pa*

126, respectively.

⁸⁰ It is interesting that the dates for Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and Padma gling pa are nearly identical. However, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's connection with Padma gling pa is only made indirectly through transmission connections. For a study of the life and significance of Padma gling pa, see Aris 1989 and Harding 2003.

'*dus pa*), and *The Extensively Profound Vajravārāhī* (*Phag mo zab rgya*) that was discovered at Ri bo dpal 'bar in Mang yul.

Then, before Chos rje rin po che U rgyan 'bras dpungs pa (d. u.), who was known as the rDo rje rgyal po, he received many transmissions, such *Yama, Angel of Dawn* (*gShin rje 'char kha sprin gyi shugs can*) and *The Vase of Amṛta* (*bDud rtsi bum pa*). Then, he received many teachings from the monastic preceptor of the 'Phags sde ba named 'Phags chen dge 'dun lhun grub, such as *The Life and Songs of Mi la ras pa* (*rJe btsun mi la'i rnam mgur*) and *The Life and Songs of rGyal ba yang dgon pa*, together with *Practicing in the Mountains in Three Parts* (*Ro chos bkor gsum cha lag*).

He also received many teachings from 'Phags chen grags pa rgya mtsho, such as *The Avalokiteśvara with One Thousand Arms and One Thousand Eyes* (*sPyan ras gzigs phyag stong spyan stong*), the liturgical methods for fasting (*smyung gnas kyi chog sgrigs*), *The Great Mind Training* (*Blo byung chen mo*), and *The Holy Compendium of Reverential Mantras* (*Dam chos ma ni bka' 'bum*). [219] He also received many teachings from his own paternal uncle named Byams chen rdo rje, such as *The Great Instructions of the Mother for Cutting* (*Ma gi gcod khrid*), which was composed by Chos rje legs mchog, and *The Compendium of Reverential Mantras* (*Ma ni bka' 'bum*).

Really, he received Sūtra and Tantra teachings of both the Old and the New Schools from just about every known person at that time. For the details, one should see his transmission records. By listening to those lamas like that, he established a connection with empowerments and teachings of those kind ones. The precious one himself praised those lamas in the following stanzas.

§⁸¹

I faithfully praise with my body, speech, and mind
 The unchanging reality of the *Dharmakāya* Samantabhadra,
 The peaceful and wrathful deities of the five families of the
Sambhogakāya,
 The supreme *Nirmāṇakāya* manifestation of Padmasambhava,
 and
 His spiritual son, my root lama, Sangs rgyas dpal bzang.

To he who has brought to its completion the practice of secret
 mantra and attained enlightenment
 mGon po rdo rje, who has opened the three doors of divinity,

⁸¹ Nam mkha' bsod nams 1983, p. 219. There is a section marker on this page. The others are inserted for clarity.

and

Has kindly given me the ancestral teachings of Rigs 'dzin rGod
Idem though himself and my father, Byams dpal bshes gnyen,
To the feet of the great kind ones—the lord and his son—that
grasped the teachings of mantra-vehicle,
To those powerful ones possessed of blessings, I bow and pray!

To the famously fearless one who changed his appearance,
Who made efforts to train his mind in the supreme golden
light, [220]

To the one that experienced the single taste of pleasure and
pain, the iron bridge maker, Thang stong rgyal po,
To his disciples, such as the incomparable Grags pa rgyal
mtshan (d. u.),
To those holy and great lamas, I pray with faith!

To the profound men and women who were renowned for
their virtue,

To Rin chen bzang po (15th c.), who was exalted with respect
to migratory beings,

To the spontaneously assembled community, the superior
ones, that fully developed compassion,

To those like bSod nam dpal bzang (15th c.), who increased
my roots of knowledge,

Who were emanations of the noble ones, I pray!

To those of purifying light, like Mañjuśrī, that adhere to the
teachings and the three trainings,

Who fulfill the wishes of migratory beings from the precious
vase of the teachings,

To the treasury of good sayings regarding the goodness, and
the example of enlightenment,

To those such as bKra shis dpal bzang, who are the lamp of the
teachings,

To those supreme scholars, I pray!

Then he did a three-year practice retreat in gDan thog focusing on *The Great Royal Sādhana of the Eight Herukas* (*rGyal du sgrub chen bka' brgyad*). As for his signs of attainment, during the winter celebration of the Great Miracle [of the Buddha], he heard a sound and went to investigate. [221] There was a small white *kri ma*, and in it he saw the clear varieties of light, the eight auspicious signs, and various other signs. He was able to make the expected offerings constantly without

being cold.⁸² A white sapling sprouted from a vase and sprang up to become a tree. These were among the outer signs. There were also inner signs like his freedom from sickness. And people said, for example, that his spiritual wind would neither come nor go [while he was meditating].

Then, in the abodes that are all around bKra bzang, such as dBu gsum, he practiced Cutting (*gcod*) together with a precious servant, he practiced at the hundred different springs (*chu mig brgya rtsa*) and the one hundred charnel grounds (*gnyan khrod brgya rtsa*). His mind and phenomena thus mingled as one and he achieved conquest of the three realms of gods, demons, and humans. In brief, he reached the end of experiential practice completely through the three types of practice.

Then, in the primary temple at bDe grol he performed the three-year, three-month, three-day retreat focusing on the practice of the Great Perfection. From that point forward, he could see the nature of reality. Because he now had experiential understanding of the four visions (*snang bzhi*), signs of his attainment manifested one after another. [222] In short, his body was fully matured, endowed with all seven qualities attributed to a high birth, such as longevity, which are positive indications from the perspective of the teachings. And, his senses, such as sight and hearing, were operating with clarity. Even as he was progressing in age, reaching his nineties, his manner, physical well-being, and so forth were still good. He appeared to be in better health than others who were younger. Regarding his inner qualities, although they were concealed within him, to be sure he had inconceivably good control over his [internal] qualities, such as vision and insight, recollection and confidence, renunciation and discriminating wisdom.

Like the fruits of his attainment, his disciples were arrayed around him. Among them were the Emanation and Treasure Revealer Shākya bzang po, Treasure Revealer bsTan gnyis gling pa, gSang sngags rdo rje, the great practitioner of bKra bzang named Se ston 'Dzam gling chos grags, the mantra-holder of lHong named bSod nam bkra shis, and Mes ston rDo rje bsod nam (15th c.). [223] Then there were the two brothers, dGe slong Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542) and Chos rje Legs ldan pa (1512–1580). The elder indeed discovered treasure, and both brothers were lamas of the 'Bri khung. Then there was the one who maintained the cave-dwelling lineages of the region called rGyal mkhar tshe, named Chos rje Padma tshe bdag rgyal po. Then there were the brothers: the one seated at Blo bo, Chos rje 'chi Nu bSod nam rab rgyas pa from Ne rings, and the one seated at the primary establishment belonging to Saint Thang stong rgyal po. Then there was

⁸² I have not been able to determine what a "kri ma" might be.

dPal ldan blo gros who was seated at sPang khang and Rigs 'dzin mGon po don 'grub. These were actual disciples of Padma gling pa who had come to the sacred sites of sTag po gangs ra. Then there were the brothers: the one seated at Ra chung named Thog sdugs Sangs rgyas seng ge and the other was Chos rje rin po che Dam chos pa. The elder of these was appointed as the minister (*ti sri*) of the lHo pa region. The younger was among the students who [Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan] established at monasteries like bKra bzang. Then there was the heart-son (*thugs sras*) of bsTan gnyis gling pa, the great ascetic practitioner named Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan,⁸³ [224] who was accepted as a disciple at the center at Ri bo che. Then, there were students such as Lama Nam mkha' dpal ldan from Dang ra ba and Bya btang Nam mkha' dpal bzang from Nyang stod. Indeed, he nourished all of them with advice, guidance, and empowerments. There were students in every kingdom; the number cannot be calculated!

§

Because his life was long and his enlightened activities were expansive, he was unrivaled in his accomplishments spreading the essential teachings, such as the Great Perfection, in the ten directions. Having essentially completed his activities that were meant for this world, he decided to pass beyond misery. Because his superficial body did not reveal itself as sick, his retinue did not realize that there were signs of his impending transcendence. Indeed, in that year, before the arrival of the annual thread-ceremony (*dus mdos*), when he received the request asserting that his presence was required as before, he said, "I will not make it there this year." Indeed, no one grasped the truth of this statement.

[225] On the 27th of the month, I [i.e., bSam bgrub rgyal mtshan, 15th–16th c.] went before him in order to receive his blessings. When it was time for me to depart, he said, "I will not meet with you again in this world after now. Cultivate your practice of the tutelary deities and be more beneficial to sentient beings!" I tried to meet with him again and again, but I was not able. Nevertheless, I pray that we will meet in the highest pure land in the next life. Then I returned home. He indeed made it to the day before the annual thread-cross ceremony, which was the day of the new moon at the end of the month. In short, he remained alive until his 88th year, but on the 30th day of the 11th month of the Iron-Female-Ox Year (1541), he departed for the Pure Land accompanied by [auspicious] sounds, sights, and fragrances.

On the first day of the new month, I went to examine the corpse. In

⁸³ Obviously, this must be a different Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan.

two holes in the flesh, there were significant pools of white essence (*byang sems dkar po*) and there was a definite protrusion on the top of his head. It was as if there were dewdrops in the dry grass of his hair. This was witnessed by all who were there, and thus everyone began to speak of his power [226]. On the day when the garment was offered [into the fire], there were a few inauspicious signs, such as windy weather. Although there were [only] a few trainees with wrong views that spoke erroneously about the events [at the time], later [others] would perform some unfortunate actions as a result of [the confused understanding] of those omens. But, throughout that period of time, [there were others] that understood the signs clearly.

Some suggested that the corpse should be burned immediately, for this would reveal the wondrously relics. Others said that if they were to request their own relics immediately, this would indeed show signs that [the lama] had experiential understanding of the teachings. But, they noted that there was a great number of the lama's paternal relatives and that they would have [their own] considerations and turn away the hands of others. The number of people making requests would be very large.

The matriarch named lHa lcam dbon mo (16th c.) and a few faithful disciples who relied upon their connection with the mind stream [of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan] said that it would be very auspicious to distribute relics.⁸⁴ Despite the fact that it would take a long time and require a multitude of relics, it would be in accordance with the intentions of the lama himself. Because their wishes were expressed in private, there weren't many who witnessed what transpired. Even I heard about it much later and then went to collect a share of the relics. [227] However, lHa lcam dbon mo [evidently] never said she would distribute all of the relics. There did happen to be a portion of powerful corpse ash, and I saved some. Much later, there was a time when I could not stop a bad hailstorm by any other means. However, when I released some of the corpse ash, the hail immediately halted. The nature of this blessing augmented my earlier faith and resulted in great conviction.

§

Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan was particularly pleased with Lord bsGrub chen, the great practitioner (*rJe bsgrubs chen*) named [Se ston] Chos rje 'Dzam gling chos grags. [The following account of the apparent

⁸⁴ This woman must have been someone very significant at bDe grol; perhaps she was Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's wife or sister. The passage highlights the fact that women were important within this tradition despite the fact that they rarely appear in the biographies of the patriarchs. For a discussion of the role of women in the early tradition, see Valentine 2015, pp. 133-134.

decline and death of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan was received from Lord bsGrub chen.] In the summer of the Ox-Year (1541), before his transcendence that winter, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan said: "Until the end of this year, I will remain here. I will continue only to the border between the years. I have seen this clearly. The astrological chances for this confluence of events (*'phel tshan*) this year are great. My mind is focused on Lord Drang [i.e., Shākya bzang po], and my only remaining mental fixation is because the two of us will not meet again. All of my other goals, I have achieved." On another occasion, I said, "You should go to mNga' ris to see Lord Shākya bzang po." He responded, "Although that would make me happy, I must remain here for the duration. [228] Whoever has not come to see this body [of mine], should come do so quickly."

Some mistakenly reported on the twenty-fifth day of the eleventh month that he had come down with a cough that diminished his physical form.⁸⁵ Others mistakenly reported that on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month, there had been bad swelling of the body caused by a water-born illness and that he was sleeping both day and night. Really, he was only making it appear as if his physical form was fatigued.

Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan sent a sealed message to me, Lord bsGrub chen, stating, "I will not remain [much longer in this world]. Come [to me]!" On the 18th day, I arrived and prostrated before him. He said, "I have completed the activity of training disciples in this world, and I will no longer reside here when we reach the border between this year and the next. All of you should embrace renunciation and take up virtuous actions. Apply yourself to the practice of the Great Perfection!" He opened the way, by means of the entire catalog of oral lineage teachings for each one of his disciples. There were prophecies about the number of disciples that he would have that would benefit others. To his sons and nephews he spoke about the ways to practice the dharma.⁸⁶ To Lord bsGrub chen himself, he said, "You have attained single-pointedness in your prayers. I will bless you continuously!" [229]

In his final oral teaching, he advised, "As the Tiger-Year (1542) is

⁸⁵ The events recorded in this paragraph and the next are not presented in strict sequential order. In the first paragraph, he appears to be discussing two prevalent, but mistaken, views that arose on those particular days. The second paragraph begins his sequential presentation of the events as 'Dzam gling chos grags experienced them.

⁸⁶ Neither Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's wife nor any sons, daughters, or nephews are explicitly named. However, "Mes ston" rDo rje bsod nams is listed as one of his closest disciples and may have been a blood relation considering his title. This line might also be referring to his close disciples in general who are like sons and nephews.

almost here, apply yourselves to spiritual activity." But, because of his great compassion, he remained in a state of great delight and his blessings billowed forth again and again. I stayed on my cushion and attended him day and night, abandoning sleep. Repeatedly I visualized the master giving the consecration that liberates conceptuality, his resounding voice, and the oral lineage. On the 27th day of the month, I broke off the practice for the observance of the holy day dedicated to Sangs rgyas dpal bzang.

Back on the eighteenth of the month, when I was thinking of going [to bDe grol], the minister (*sde pa*) arrived at bKra bzang.⁸⁷ We met, and he said, "You should not stay here at the estate. This body of mine has become decrepit, so there is no need for me to [attend the thread-cross ceremony]. I would be happy if you were to release yourself from atop your cushion until the thread-cross ceremony." Over and over again he demanded that I answer his question: "Which day will it be observed?" I responded that it would be on the twenty-ninth.

As soon as I got up [from my meditation], the suitable disciples, [including me], were called to see [Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan]. Students from near and far, as well as faithful and trustworthy patrons were called to attend [the ailing master]. [230] He performed activities that completely satisfied [their needs]. Then, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan said, "It is our custom to perform spiritual activities that clear away impediments through expulsion rites; we issue forth protective benedictions that are intended to extend life. But, you will not expel the approach of my death, and I will not be pleased to hear protective benedictions [issued on my behalf].

"Regarding Lord bsGrub chen and his powerful son, there are signs that they have attained experiential realization of the tantric deities. You should beseech the two of them for advice regarding practice. They will do this, giving the details to whoever requests them. Their inconceivability fills my eyes with tears. By the ever-pure enlightened one and my own ancestral fathers of the Mes lineage, I have met with the enlightened guru in my own life. If you practice every day of your life, your spiritual attainment will never be weak and there will be great benefit for others. If you are very [intent on achieving these goals], then conduct yourself accordingly."

Early in the evening, when he was feeling exhausted, he said, "Later tonight, I will depart through the door of the lama lineage." From within a state of delight, at dawn on the 30th of the month, having offered food to the meditational deities, he erected his body in the

⁸⁷ Again, the sequence of events is broken so that 'Dzam gling chos grags can tell of the auspicious activities that led him to be present at Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's side in his final days.

seven-pointed posture of Vairocana, [231] completed his prayers to the lineage of the victor's intention, offered pointing out instructions, and then departed for the primordial realm at daybreak.

Immediately, a tremendous amount of white mind-fluid began to emerge from both of his nostrils. At sunrise, there were rainbows mixed with white rays of light above the corpse. A dome of multi-colored, rainbow light formed in the sky above. I, Lord bsGrub chen, beckoned others to the room [to witness the signs]. During that first day, there were natural sounds of thunder in the east. My companions and I heard these ourselves [while observing] the emergence of red mind-fluid [from the corpse]. Then, the fortunate students departed to tend to the needs of the faithful male and female householders by meeting with whoever [was in need]. Then, his six disciples and I sent out the invitations that were required for the funerary services. [232] Recognizing that there was great warmth within the heart of the corpse, I exclaimed aloud, "Miraculous!" I was told that the services began on the first of the month with the offering of garments into the fire and continued until the actual prayers of commemoration on the third day. At that time, I went before the lord who had transcended and performed the eulogy, which was simply amazing.

I, [Nam mkha' bsod nams dpal—the author of this text], have inserted this [account of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's passing] without alteration of what [was provided by Lord bsGrub chen].

§

My lama, the venerable one from Sa dmar,
The great man named Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan,
From the time he was born in this realm during the Year of the
Male-Wood-Dog (1454),
Up until he transcended misery during the Year of the Female-
Iron-Ox (1541),
Is summarized in this brief liberation story.

There were good signs when he was residing inside his
mother's womb, and
He was born pleasantly, without pain.
His faculties were clear, and his mind was lovely to behold.
He easily understood customs and developed great wisdom
and faith.
Even while a youth, he knew how to read, write, and so forth.

Having depended well on many learned and practiced
masters, [233]

Such as his own ancestors, like rDo rje mgon po,⁸⁸
 He attained the perfection, which is reflected in the ocean of
 teachings of the Sūtras and Secret Tantras.

In particular, he served well the lotus feet of Sangs rgyas dpal
 bzang,
 The rebirth of the supreme lama (i.e., rNam rgyal mgon po),
 From whom he received the oral teachings like a vessel that
 could hold all things.
 He practiced while being an attendant of the lama for a long
 time.
 They mingled their minds as one, and he became the heart-son
 [of Sangs rgyas dpal bzang].

For a long time you kindled the lamp of the teachings of
 The highest of the vehicles, the Great Perfection, A ti Yoga,
 Wielded the teachings and the Heart-Treasures of Zang zang,
 Clarified many instructions for the *bKa' ma* and *gTer ma*
 teachings, and
 Because of that, you are the lord of the teachings!

You opened the treasury of the profound teachings, and
 You were a guide for the fortunate ones.
 You appointed many regents to hold the teachings,
 To be the lamps that clear away ignorance in this time of
 degeneration.

You remained close for nearly ninety years, and
 Your good activity was beneficial for all nine forms of beings,
 and so
 You were kind without rival, and
 I faithfully worship at your lotus feet! [234]

Indeed your life story is vastly expansive like the sky, and so
 How could I—even with my pure intentions—fathom [its
 measure]?
 However, it is only through faith and great effort and
 By way of my own observations and of what I heard from
 others, that

⁸⁸ Although we do not have exact dates for rDo rje mgon po, who was one of Rigs 'dzin rGod ldem's primary disciples outside of his immediate family, it is unlikely that he taught Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan as this verse suggests. It is more likely that this was meant to read mGon po rdo rje, who was one of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's teachers within the Mes clan.

I was able to devote my mind to [capturing a glimpse] of the rare star that appears [in the light] of day.

To those disciples who have faith in this great being,
He has happily displayed [a life] that is an aide for their devotion, and
Since some people are confused [about the nature of his life], please guard [against them].

All of these wholesome accumulations starting with [the authorship of this text],
I dedicate them to the goal of completing the intentions of the glorious lama!

May I follow him closely through all my series of births!

§

Regarding this abridged version of *The Life of the Holy Lama, the Heart-Disciple, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan*, a few disciples with unwavering faith in the holy lama requested [for the text to be created]. Of note within this group that made the request was rDo rje 'dzin pa bSam bgrub rgyal mtshan, the heart-son of the lama. From his mouth, many of the details emerged. Depending upon the nephew-disciple of the lama, a scribe named rDo rje bdud 'dul ba (d. u.), Nam mkha' bsod nams dpal (16th c.), who was a Sa skya pa monk and a member of the Awareness-Holder's retinue, authored [this abridged biography] in the year of the Female-Fire-Snake (1556), known [astrologically] as *Piṅgalā* (*dmar ser can*),⁸⁹ on the twentieth day of the fourth month. This occurred at the estate at the holy site of bKra bzang.⁹⁰



⁸⁹ The word "piṅgalā" refers to an auburn color.

⁹⁰ The translation of the colophon would not have been possible without the generous assistance received from Christopher Bell and David DiValerio.

Tales of Realization – Narratives in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection Revelation¹

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1. Introduction

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's anthology *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* is one of the landmarks of the fourteenth century Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) and contributed to the final consolidation of the tradition. The anthology is a treasure (*gter*) revelation that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337-1408)² is famed to have discovered in a cave at the Mountain That Resembles a Heap of Poisonous Snakes (Dug sprul spung 'dra), in the region of Byang. rGod ldem was an itinerant, married tantric yogi, whose treasure propagation started the Northern Treasures (*Byang gter*) tradition. It developed from a family centered enterprise into an influential monastic tradition based in the rDo rje brag monastery at the outskirts of Lhasa and sustaining close connections with the government of the Dalai Lamas.³

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² For the life of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem phru can), see the main Tibetan hagiography *The Ray of Sunlight* (*Nyi ma'i od zer*) by Nyi ma bzang po and a Master's Thesis by Jurgen Herweg, *The Hagiography of Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can and Three Historic Questions Emerging from It*.

³ The Great Fifth Dalai Lama was actively involved with the Northern Treasures and received the teachings of *The Unimpeded Realization* from several Northern Treasures masters such as Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol and Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po, the III incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. It was probably the Great Fifth's support that rendered rDo rje brag as one of the six main monasteries of the rNying ma tradition (Valentine, *The Lords of the Northern Treasures*, 58, 216). See also Valentine, "The Family and Legacy in the Early Northern Treasure Tradition."

The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra (*Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*) is a heterogeneous compilation that contains a large variety of literary genres, topics, practices, speakers and texts attributed to various authors. However, all the disparate elements are integrated into an artfully constructed whole and the main tool of integration is narratives. How do narratives integrate the texts and topics of rGod ldem's anthology? What other goals do they accomplish? What are the major themes and gems among the narratives and how do they function in the context of the anthology? These are some of the central questions considered in this paper. The survey begins by outlining the broader context of *The Unimpeded Realization* and Tibetan treasure anthologies. Then, the inquiry focuses on the most important elements of narrative integration in rGod ldem's anthology.

This paper argues that the narrative dynamics in *The Unimpeded Realization* are guided by an overarching narrative theme, the vision of Samantabhadra, which is a compassionate plan or agenda of the primordial Buddha to benefit the world. The anthology's narratives also further the myth of Padmasambhava as the most important *rdzogs chen* master of the imperial period and create a continuum from Samantabhadra to Padmasambhava and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. These three figures form three poles of gravity in the narrative framework of the anthology.

The bulk of the paper is devoted to analyzing two prominent narratives that describe a disciple's transformative progress on the *rdzogs chen* path. *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* relates Padmasambhava's training under Śrī Siṃha and *Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* describes Ye shes mtsho rgyal's training under Padmasambhava, including their visionary experiences and dialogues with their masters. These fascinating narratives portray a vision of how to practice the Great Perfection teachings of the anthology and illustrate several important themes such as the gradual path to enlightenment, nature of realization and guru-disciple relationships. The pressing question here is whether the visionary training of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal is that of direct transcendence because it contains substantial variations from the standard presentation of the practice. This paper will compare and analyze the visionary training in the two narratives with doctrinal presentations of direct transcendence in prescriptive texts to ascertain whether the narratives might contain alternative accounts of the practice.

2. *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra and Tibetan Treasure Anthologies*

The Tibetan treasure tradition produced among its many contributions a distinctive type of literature: treasure anthologies. One of the prominent treasure anthologies is the work at hand, the four volumes of *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra*. rGod ldem's Great Perfection revelation also contains one more volume, *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* (*Ka dag rang byung rang shar*), that is variously considered as the fifth volume of *The Unimpeded Realization* or a separate work.⁴ Since it is part of rGod ldem's Great Perfection revelation, it seems reasonable to discuss it in this paper as belonging to a single, distinctively *rdzogs chen* collection.

Following Anne Ferry, this paper defines an anthology as a collection of individual texts that the compiler aims to fashion into something of a different kind.⁵ The literary format of treasure revelation entails that the 127 texts (2945 folio sides) of rGod ldem's anthology are attributed to various divine, semi-historical and historical authors so that rGod ldem is credited merely for their discovery. From the historical-critical perspective, rGod ldem can be regarded as the compiler of the anthology with probable extensive authorial contribution.

As treasure anthologies in general, the character of rGod ldem's anthology is notably heterogeneous in that it contains a variety of texts, genres, topics and voices. The impressive variety of literature in *The Unimpeded Realization* includes such texts as empowerment manuals, meditation instructions, commentaries, rituals, philosophical treatises, narratives, oral transmissions attributed to imperial period figures Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana, Buddha-

⁴ Most practice commentaries (*khrid*) on *The Unimpeded Realization* treat *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* as a separate work with the notable exception of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol's *Island of Liberation* which regards them as a single anthology (see Stéphane Arguillère's paper in this same issue of *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*). The *Received Teachings* of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama also discusses *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* together with *The Unimpeded Realization* undoubtedly due to the influence of Zur chen who was his teacher. It seems that there were several strands of thought regarding this matter reflected also in the modern editions of the anthology. The gNas chung block print edition by Chos rje Śākya yar 'phel (19th century) leaves out *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity*, while the A 'dzom chos gar blocks carved through efforts of A 'dzom 'brug pa (1842-1924) regard *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* as a cycle and fifth volume of *The Unimpeded Realization*. In the rDo rje brag monastery in exile, they were transmitted together as a single anthology by the late sTag lung rTse sprul rin po che, which is how he received them in rDo rje brag in Tibet.

⁵ Ferry, *Tradition and the Individual Poem*, 2, 31.

voiced tantras, instructions on dying and liberation through wearing texts that are said to be of divine origin. The practices range from tantric preliminaries to deity yoga, completion stage subtle body yogas, severance (*gcod*) and *rdzogs chen* contemplation, and the narratives contain biographical, transmissional, metaphorical and cosmogonic narratives. However, despite the heterogeneity, all these elements are unified into a single whole with a distinctive character and vision, which reflects a strong editorial hand in the process of creating the anthology.

This type of incorporation of such a variety of genres, practices, topics and literary agents into a single anthology is uncommon in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist literature. This is not to say that there are no anthologies in Indian and Tibetan literature, but other existing anthologies are of different character. Anthologies of poetry are unified only by virtue of belonging to the genre of poetry. Similarly, various collections on different topics such as *Kriyāsaṃgraha* (rituals), *Dhāraṇī-saṃgraha* (*dhāraṇīs*) or *Nispannayogāvalī* (instructions on making maṇḍalas) only contain a particular kind of genre of texts. Cycles of Indian tantric literature, which could also be regarded a type of anthology, are centered on a single practice system. Finally, there are the collected works (*gsung 'bum*) of prominent Tibetan authors, but they are written by a single author and are not strictly speaking anthologies as defined in this paper. Unlike all these examples, the Tibetan treasure anthologies of the rNying ma tradition are distinctly heterogeneous, containing many different genres, topics, practices and authors as well as multiple layers of voices: divine, mythical, semi-historical and historical. In the absence of a single unifying genre, practice or author, we may wonder what unifies the treasure anthologies. In the case of *The Unimpeded Realization*, it is mainly narratives that integrate the contents into a particular kind of anthology.

Why did rNying ma treasure authors produce these unique types of anthologies? Some of the reasons undoubtedly pertain to transmissional purposes. Combining all the necessary texts for the practice and study of a particular revealed Great Perfection (or Mahāyoga) system into a single package makes it easier to transmit and preserves the transmission for future generations. Secondly, such anthologies accommodate both Buddha-voiced tantras and texts grounded in the historical time by human authors, thus conveniently managing the divide between scripture and commentary. For this very reason, anthologies help to negotiate and authorize Tibetan voices. In Renaissance Tibet (11th-14th century), the standard for scriptural authenticity for Buddha-voiced texts was an Indian Buddhist origin. This is evident, for example, in the debate concerning *The Secret Nucleus Tantra* (*Guhya-garbhatantra*, *rGyud gsang ba snying*

po), which the critics considered to be an authentic Vajrayāna scripture only after the Sanskrit original was recovered in bSam yas. In this intellectual climate, treasure anthologies found a solution to legitimate the ongoing scriptural production of tantras through the mechanism of treasure revelation. The Tibetan voices are disguised as divine or Indian agents and presented in a continuum of a single transmission together with the Buddha-voiced speakers and legendary Indian masters of the imperial period. rGod ldem's anthology contains a good example of this approach in the way Samantabhadra's authority is transmitted to Padmasambhava and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. This will be discussed below.

Anthologies of this type became popular among the Great Perfection authors from around the fourteenth century. Sangs rgyas gling pa revealed *Condensing the Realization of the Guru* (*Bla ma dgongs 'dus*) in 1364, just two years before Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's revelation and a couple of decades earlier Klong chen pa compiled *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts* (*sNying thig ya bzhi*). The latter is only partly a treasure revelation by Tshul khrim rdo rje and partly Klong chen pa's self-declared composition, but it nevertheless illustrates the novel tendency to present Great Perfection materials in the form of an anthology.

The format of an anthology is well suited for the character of the Great Perfection, which started off largely as a metaperspective to Buddhist thought and practice. One agenda in the early Great Perfection tradition was to critique the complex sexual and violent practices of Indian Buddhist tantra, occasionally going as far as denying the idea of practice altogether as a contrivance upon the natural state, although it seems that many of the early Great Perfection authors were engaged in Mahāyoga practice.⁶ However, as all deconstructive projects, the early Great Perfection could only thrive upon the host that it criticized, and even though various practices eventually found their way into the tradition (and indeed, it became a tradition), the Great Perfection, at least to some extent, retained its character as metaperspective that frequently discussed and related to other Buddhist traditions and practices, defining itself as superior to the preceding traditions. Since the format of an anthology accommodates many heterogeneous topics, practices and approaches, it presents a fertile landscape for the *rdzogs chen* metaperspective to integrate different tantric and sūtric practices, topics and ideas under the umbrella of the Great Perfection philosophical view.

⁶ For a detailed analysis of early Great Perfection, see David Germano, "Architecture and Absence in the Great Perfection," Jacob Dalton, *The Gathering of Intentions* (Chapter 2) and "The Development of Perfection" and Sam van Schaik "Early Days of the Great Perfection."

3. Narrative Integration

The multitude of texts, topics, genres and practices in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *Unimpeded Realization* gives the anthology a very heterogeneous, even scattered outlook at first glance. However, upon closer examination it becomes clear that the anthology is a skillfully integrated literary whole. Facilitated by the character of *rdzogs chen* as metaperspective, the multitude of topics and elements are integrated in the general framework of the Great Perfection and the particular vision of *The Unimpeded Realization* via unifying themes, narratives and ideas.

The main thread that weaves the disparate elements together is narratives. The narratives comprise eleven percent of the anthology (331 folio sides) and are dispersed through 35 texts. They can be divided into six categories:

(1) Cosmogonic narratives (14 folio sides) relate the origin of the universe and its two trajectories of cyclic existence and transcendence.

(2) Transmission narratives (108 folio sides) present the lineage of the teachings originating from the primordial recognition of Samantabhadra to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem himself.

(3) Wrathful narratives (7 folio sides) depict Padmasambhava's activities of taming demons in India.

(4) Transformation narratives (92 folio sides) portray Padmasambhava's and Ye shes mtsho rgyal's biographies in terms of their meditative and visionary experiences.

(5) Prophecies (66 folio sides) discuss rGod ldem and his time, and

(6) Metaphorical narratives (44 folio sides) present symbolic stories and decode their meaning.

The anthology also contains an overarching narrative theme that envelops all these different types of narratives. This theme is the vision of Samantabhadra, which connects all the threads of the anthology back to the Primordial Buddha and his vision to help the world.

The vision of Samantabhadra is a narrative theme distinctive to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's anthology and the foundation of the narrative integration in *The Unimpeded Realization*. After detailing the vision of Samantabhadra, this paper examines how the transmission narratives integrate the various Great Perfection teachings associated with the legendary masters of the imperial period into a framework that establishes Padmasambhava as superior. In addition to Samantabhadra and Padmasambhava, prophecies establish Rig 'dzin rGod ldem as the third pole of gravity in the narrative dynamics of the anthology, transferring Samantabhadra's vision to Tibet and his authority to rGod ldem. After discussing the narrative context of the anthology, this paper will focus on the two transformation narratives that de-

scribe the training of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal under their masters. These important narratives culminate the anthology's particular take on the nature of *rdzogs chen* training and visionary experience.

3.1. The Vision of Samantabhadra

The most important unifying theme in *The Unimpeded Realization* is the vision of Samantabhadra. In general, Samantabhadra has a special relationship with the Great Perfection tradition. He is the primordial Buddha who attains enlightenment in the first instances of cosmogonic manifestation and he is the figure of uncontrived primordial wisdom standing against the principles of dry scholasticism and complicated ritualism. The vision of Samantabhadra in *The Unimpeded Realization* is a subtle, yet obvious theme that the reader may not realize at first, but when it is understood, the contents of the anthology are revealed in new light. The key is the very title of the anthology: *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*, which I have translated as *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra*. *dGongs pa*, however, is an interesting word and difficult to translate. Even though in the anthology it usually refers to Samantabhadra's wisdom or *realization*, on several occasions it signifies Samantabhadra's intention, plan or *vision*.

The narrative theme of Samantabhadra's vision refers to Samantabhadra's compassionate plan to benefit the world through his emanations and teachings. One reason why it may take a long time for the reader to put the pieces of the puzzle together is that the vision of Samantabhadra is spelled out only in *The Root Tantra of Unimpeded Realization*,⁷ although its meaning envelopes the entire anthology. All the texts, agents and topics of the anthology work together: the texts are the literary heritage of Samantabhadra's intention to enlighten beings, the divine agents are integrated into Samantabhadra's maṇḍala, and history of Buddhism is reconfigured as involving the activity of Samantabhadra's emanations.

⁷ *dGongs pa zang thal rtsa ba'i rgyud/ dGongs pa zang thal gyi sgron ma'i rtsa ba ngo bo dang dbyings bstan pa, The Unimpeded Realization* (from here on UR) III:455-475.

3.1.1. *The Vision of Samantabhadra in cosmogonic narratives*

The vision of Samantabhadra stretches back to the first moments of cosmogony, when Samantabhadra attains enlightenment merely upon recognizing the very first manifestations as self-display (*rang snang*) or his own projections inseparable from himself. The cosmogonic narratives in the anthology are related in eighteen texts and many of them depict the typical Seminal Heart (*sNying thig*) view on the manifestation of the ground (*gzhi snang*) or the emergence of first appearances from the ground of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.⁸ The Seminal Heart of the Pith Instruction Series (*Man ngag sde*) is the last phase of the Great Perfection tradition that was put into writing from the eleventh century onward. The descriptions of cosmogonic manifestation as well as visionary practices and death-related elements are characteristic to the Seminal Heart.⁹ In the cosmogonic narratives of rGod ldem's anthology, the first appearances arise from the universal ground (*kun gzhi*), which is the indeterminate ground of all possibilities devoid of wisdom or ignorance. The two trajectories of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra arise from the universal ground based on recognition or the lack of it. However, the two trajectories do not imply dualism, as the worlds of saṃsāra are ultimately unreal and illusory.

The typical cosmogonic narrative in the Seminal Heart is recounted in multiple texts in rGod ldem's anthology with some individual variation. *The Illuminating Lamp* describes how creative dynamism (*rtsal*) stirs a triad of subtle wind (*rlung*), space and awareness out of the ground, and these variously proliferate into manifestations of roaring sounds and brilliant lights. Samantabhadra does not react to these manifestations with desire or aversion, but recognizes them as his own projections thereby opening up the path to nirvāṇa. Saṃsāra, however, arises through a trajectory of dualism:

At that time, when the winds, awareness and space differentiated in the indeterminate ground, awareness was partial and unstable, so it generated a sense of pride. It feared the sounds, was afraid the lights and fainted due to the rays. Ignorance clouded it. Having generated pride, external objects and internal mind became dual. Just by wondering "I arose from that or that arose from me," the wind of karma stirred. The wind made the mind full-blown and the analytical mind

⁸ See for example, Klong chen pa's *Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*).

⁹ For an analysis of the development of the various traditions of the Great Perfection, see David Germano, "Funerary Transformation of the Great Perfection."

examined objects.¹⁰

Not recognizing the appearances as self-display and viewing them as external sparks the downward spiral of ignorance, dualism and karma that eventually solidifies as the six realms.

In addition to the standard Seminal Heart descriptions of the manifestation of the ground, rGod ldem's anthology contains distinctive cosmogonic narratives that relate to the vision of Samantabhadrā. One of these is *The Pith Instruction of the Glorious Samantabhadrā: The Way the Liberation Through Wearing Emerges*, which describes the manifestation of the *Liberation Through Wearing* tantras in the beginning of cosmogony. Upon his enlightenment, Samantabhadrā emanates the peaceful and wrathful deities, and from their divine bodies arise the syllables Om, Aḥ and Hūṃ. Other letters arise from the three syllables, and the 21 tantras of *Liberation Through Wearing* manifest from Vajradhara's enlightened mind. One hundred and one pith instructions emerge from them, and the 84,000 approaches to dharma are differentiated from these letters of self-arisen speech. Various Buddhas teach large numbers of beings and Vajradhara transmits the *Liberation Through Wearing* tantras to dGa' rab rdo rje.¹¹

This cosmogonic narrative places the *Liberation Through Wearing* tantras contained in rGod ldem's anthology in a unique position in Samantabhadrā's vision to benefit beings. The scriptures are manifested by Samantabhadrā's emanation as Vajradhara in the first stages of cosmogony, when letters are produced from the subtle essence of speech. Their origin is thus intimately connected to the primordial Buddha. Samantabhadrā's compassionate vision for the world is evident, because soon after the emergence of these dharma teachings, the *Liberation Through Wearing* tantras and the pith instructions of the Great Perfection, which are collectively referred to as "the self-arisen letters that arose from the expanse of Samantabhadrā's enlightened mind,"¹² are transmitted to dGa' rab rdo rje, who is destined to bring them to our world. Therefore, this cosmogonic narrative in particular begins Samantabhadrā's diachronic involvement with the world and grounds his vision to enlighten sentient beings in the initial cosmic formation due to the arising of these teachings at the early stages of

¹⁰ gZhi ci yang ma yin pa la rlung rig nam mkha' gsum phye ba'i tshe rig pa ldog pas brtan pa med pas snyem byed zhugs: sgra la dngangs: 'od la skrags: zer la brgyal: ma rig par thibs kyis song: de la snyem byed zhugs nas phyi'i yul dang: nang gi sems gnyis su song: pha gi las bdag byung ngam: bdag las pha gi byung snyam pa tsam gyis las kyi rlung g.yos: rlung gis yid brtas: dpyod pa'i yid kyis yul dpyad: (Rang byung rang shar gyi rgyud las byung ba'i man ngag gsal sgron) UR III:41.

¹¹ dPal kun tu bzang po'i man ngag/ btags grol byon tshul, UR III:205-208.

¹² Ibid. UR III:208.

cosmogonic manifestation. The tremendous blessing power attributed to the *Liberation Through Wearing* amulets (and the instantly enlightening capacity of the pith instructions of the Great Perfection) also arises from their cosmogonic origin in the subtle essence of speech, which is a form of language that precedes signification. Even though the tantras in the amulets contain words of mantras and teachings, the signification of the words is secondary compared to the direct blessings arising from their pre-signified source. This is also the reason why they are thought to liberate merely through wearing without intellectual engagement with the signified meaning of the words.

Another cosmogonic text, *The Precious Liberation upon Seeing: The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection*, which is somewhat atypical in the context of rGod ldem's anthology, emphasizes the role of sound in creation. It is written as Samantabhadra's first person account of his enlightenment, which gives it an interesting, personal character:

First, in the wide expanse of the mother universal ground, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa were equal. When the ground differentiated itself from this equality, sounds, light and rays resounded and emanated by themselves. Thus, I, the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra, recognized the intrinsic creativity (*rtsal*) of the ground as awareness's own display and reached my own place. Without being afraid of the sounds, terrified of the lights or fearful of the rays, my awareness abided in its own clarity. At that point, my internal consciousness was alert without proliferation, lucid without obstructions and open without dullness. External appearances made roaring and thundering sounds, and phenomenal appearances were shaking, dark, vibrating and trembling. I embraced the essence of sound, so the self-arisen pitch of the sound dominated my hearing. When 'a a sha sa ma ha resounded, they arose and abided as a reflection of the six syllables. I heard the sounds without obstructions and my mind did not waver from the pitch of the sound.¹³

¹³ *Dang po kun gzhi ma'i klong yangs su: 'khor 'das gnyis mnyam pa las: zhi de go phye ba'i tshé sgra dang 'od dang zer gsum rang byung du grags shing rang shar du 'phros pas: thog ma'i sangs rgyas kun tu bzang po ngas: gzhi'i rang rtsal rig pa rang snang du rang ngo shes nas rang sa zin/ sgra la mi dngangs: 'od la mi 'jigs: zer la mi skrag par rig pa rang gsal du gnas pa'o: de'i tshé rang gi nang gi shes pa ni mi 'phro bar lhang nge ba: ma 'gags par sal le ba: ma rmugs par ye re ba zhig 'dug: phyi'i snang ba ni sgra u ru ru thug chom chom: snang srid 'khrug ste rum rum mer mer shig shig 'dug go: sgra'i snying po dril bas rang byung gi sgra gdangs snyan la drag pa: 'a a sha sa ma ha: zhes grags pa'i 'dus na yi ge drug gi gzugs brnyan du shar 'dug go: nga'i sgra de ma 'gags par thos: sgra'i gdangs thos kyang sgra phyir yid ma 'gyus pas: (Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po mthong grol rin po che) UR III:275-276.*

The reader is reminded of the display of sounds, lights and rays in the bardo of *dharmatā* or reality-as-it-is – the parallelism being undoubtedly intentional. The bardo of *dharmatā* is the part of the intermediate process between death and rebirth in which the deceased perceives visions of five colored lights, rays and thundering sounds as well as visions of peaceful and wrathful deities. This subtle visionary state manifests for the deceased because coarser aspects of the mind have dissolved, which is why it parallels the subtle visionary manifestations in the beginning of cosmogony before appearances became the coarse manifestations of the six realms. Similarly, to Samantabhadra's primordial recognition, the key instruction in the bardo of *dharmatā* is to recognize the visual and auditory manifestations as self-display. The text continues with Samantabhadra instructing one to practice the six primordial sounds characteristic to *rdzogs chen* meditation, 'a a sha sa ma ha, that are said to have the power to clear the mind. One should also relate to them without fear or attachment in the same way as Samantabhadra heard the sounds in the first moments of manifestations arising from the ground.

This cosmogonic narrative of primordial sounds illustrates the vision of Samantabhadra by employing Samantabhadra's vivid first person narrative and by turning the first moments of manifestation and Samantabhadra's recognition into a practice to be emulated in this life, and by obvious extension, in the bardo. Thus, the distinctive contribution of the cosmogonic narratives in rGod I dem's anthology is not so much their individual content, but the way they relate to the anthology as a whole, as the vision of Samantabhadra: in other words, the way they utilize the first moments of cosmogony to illustrate Samantabhadra's compassionate intention to urge sentient beings to follow in his footsteps to realization either by directly emulating his recognition or by following the tantras and pith instructions that sprang from his fundamental involvement with the cosmogonic manifestation.

3.1.2. Narrativizing the Primordial Buddha

Samantabhadra's various appearances and engagement in the cosmogonic narratives in general, and in his first person narrative in particular, highlight arguably the most important aspect of these stories: the narrativization of the primordial Buddha. Samantabhadra is the *dharmakāya* ("reality body"), the enlightened awareness beyond form, time and space. Narrativizing him normalizes him into our temporal and spatial world, and introduces a continuity of a Buddha, a pervasive quality of enlightened activity that ranges through the

spectrum of existence and the realms of the three bodies. When the *dharmakāya* is made into a part of the narrative structure, the narratives are fully divinized, and the Buddha's enlightenment is incorporated into our world, in all aspects of life and religious history.

The narrativization of Samantabhadra in the cosmogonic texts constitutes the foundation for crafting the vision of Samantabhadra. Both these themes go together and are continued in the tantras and transmission narratives of the anthology where Samantabhadra appears as the speaker of the Great Perfection teachings and source of the transmission lineages. In *The Root Tantra of Unimpeded Realization*, which is the main text to outline the vision of Samantabhadra, the narrativization and vision of Samantabhadra are crystallized, as both the history of Buddhism and Great Perfection transmission are reconfigured as involving the compassionate agency of Samantabhadra through his emanations.

In the context of Buddhism, this type of narrativization of the *dharmakāya* is quite unusual and highlights the distinctive nature of the Seminal Heart cosmogony. The standard Buddhist answer to cosmogonic origins is that *saṃsāra* is beginningless and several stories in the Pāli canon depict the Buddha as regarding these type of questions as futile. In *The Shorter Instructions to Malunkya*, the Buddha is asked about the origin of the universe and he chooses to remain silent. In the same *sūtra*, the Buddha compares the search for cosmogonic answers to a wish to know who made the arrow that was shot through one's leg instead of just wanting it removed, as one should wish to remove the cause of suffering in general.¹⁴ In light of these stories, we can appreciate the unique character of the detailed cosmogonic narratives in *The Unimpeded Realization* that not only relate cosmogonic beginnings, but infuse the narrative with the agency of the primordial *dharmakāya* Buddha, who opens the path to *nirvāṇa* through his recognition and produces enlightening methods recorded in scriptures through his compassion.

The narrativization of Samantabhadra is essentially a paradox because these stories talk historically about something that is beyond time and space. The *dharmakāya* Buddha relates his personal history of attaining enlightenment in the first person narrative that has a story line in time, even though it is mythical, primordial time. After attaining enlightenment, Samantabhadra is simultaneously in timeless dimension and actively involved in historical time through his emanations.

This paradox seems to be an indication of a larger role of paradoxes as creative devices in the Great Perfection. The paradox of instant

¹⁴ *Culamalunkyovadasutta*, Majjhima Nikaya, Volume II, sutta 63.

recognition and gradual practice accommodates the entire Buddhist path as the gradual build-up to the instant recognition of the Great Perfection. The question of practice and non-practice is also a kin to a paradox. Early Great Perfection authors criticized complex tantric practices and even the idea of practice altogether as a contrivance upon awakened awareness. At the same time, this non-practice itself could be regarded as a practice and some of these authors may also have been engaged in some type of non-conceptual meditation or even Mahāyoga rituals.¹⁵ Non-practice could also be understood as referring, not to a method, but to the perfect (*rdzogs*) empty nature of reality.

Arguably, one function of this seeming paradox was to shake the stiffened conceptions of reality and spiritual cultivation and facilitate the recognition of the already present Buddha Nature. The seeming paradox of practice and non-practice also became a creative filter as tantric practices were eventually adopted into the tradition. Through this filter they were transformed with the *rdzogs chen* concepts of naturalness and spontaneity, resulting for example in the visionary practice of direct transcendence that contains natural unfoldment of visions instead of scripted visualization. The creative function of the paradox of timeless *dharmakāya* active in historical time is to saturate the narratives in rGod ldem's anthology with the presence and authority of the primordial Buddha and, as we shall see in the next chapter, to incorporate other Buddhist vehicles in the agenda of the Great Perfection.

3.1.3. *Samantabhadra's Diachronic Involvement*

Samantabhadra's diachronic involvement with the worlds of *samsāra* is realized through his emanations. It begins in the cosmogonic narrative *The Pith Instruction of the Glorious Samantabhadra: The Way the Liberation Through Wearing Emerges* when Samantabhadra as Vajradhara manifests the Liberation Through Wearing tantras from the subtle essence of speech. However, most of Samantabhadra's diachronic activity is described in *The Root Tantra of Unimpeded Realization*, which is the key text to articulate Samantabhadra's vision. The text explains how Samantabhadra emanates as Vajradhara, who goes to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods. Due to the great merit of the gods, he teaches them the effortless vehicle of the Great Perfection. The text also describes how Samantabhadra emanates as the Five Buddhas, and then myriads of emanation bodies come out of the Five Buddhas

¹⁵ Dalton, *The Gathering of Intentions*, 41-42.

in order to tame beings. One of these is Śākyamuni, who comes to our world, Jambudvīpa, to teach the law of cause and effect and how to be born in the higher realms. Another one of these emanations, Vajrapāṇi, goes to Lanka to the land of the ten-headed demon to teach the wrathful dharma, and a fierce young emanation goes to teach emptiness in the land of *yakṣas*. Later on, the secret mantra also spreads and flourishes in Jambudvīpa because of the merit of an unnamed king, apparently the king Dza a.k.a. Indrabhūti. dGa' rab rdo rje is presented as a second order emanation of Samantabhadra, because he emanates from the heart of Vajrasattva on the Amolika rock in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods and introduces the effortless vehicle to our world.¹⁶

Thus, we see how Samantabhadra's vision is presented as encompassing different stages of development of Buddhism, including the initial introduction of the Lesser Vehicle (Hīnayāna) by Śākyamuni, the rise of Vajrayāna and the spread of the final vehicle of the Great Perfection. In addition to Buddhist history, this narrative incorporates elements from known rNying ma mythology. The scene of Vajrapāṇi teaching the ten-headed demon Rāvana in Lanka is described in a ninth century tantra *The Gathering of Intentions* (dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo) and retold in multiple rNying ma sources. *The Gathering of Intentions* also describes how king Dza receives the transmission of the secret mantra, although this myth was already popular in the ninth century from earlier Yoga and Mahāyoga sources.¹⁷ However, in *The Root Tantra of Unimpeded Realization*, all these events get a distinctive reinterpretation as being part of Samantabhadra's vision, as the teachings are given by the emanations of the primordial Buddha.

It is also notable that unlike the Sūtrayāna teachings that stress the birth as a god as undesirable due to the lack of motivation for spiritual growth, *The Unimpeded Realization* describes dissemination of the highest Great Perfection vehicle not only to various gods, but also to *nāgas*, *yakṣas* and planetary beings. *The Gathering of Intention* again contains a precedent for this, because in addition to Rāvana, Vajrapāṇi teaches four other disciples in his sermon in Lanka: the king of serpent spirits (*nāgas*), Brahmā (gods), Ulkamukhā (*yakṣas*) and Vimalakīrti (humans). The same idea of spreading the teachings to various celestial realms is contained in *The Unimpeded Realization*, but

¹⁶ dGongs pa zang thal rtsa ba'i rgyud, UR III:465-467. A similar story pertaining to Śākyamuni is told in *The Precious Lamp of the Three Roots*, in which Samantabhadra emanates as the Buddha Śākyamuni, and sends him to teach the interpretative meaning (drang don) of the teachings to our world (Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i snyan rgyud sde gsum gyi rtsa ba rtsa gsum rin chen sgron me, UR IV:489).

¹⁷ Dalton, *The Gathering of Intentions*, 16-19.

the content of the teachings is now the *rdzogs chen* practices of Samantabhadra's vision. *The Tantra of the Enlightened Activity of the Precious Unborn, Unfabricated, Self-emergent and Self-arisen One* describes how the three bodhisattvas propagate Samantabhadra's vision in the realms of *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, gods and planetary beings causing hundreds of thousands of retinue members to attain enlightenment in each realm. Numerous narratives in *The Unimpeded Realization* also refer to the Amolika Rock in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods as the first place where the Great Perfection was taught outside Akaniṣṭha due to the great merit of gods.

Similarly to Samantabhadra's activity, *The Narrative Discourse of the Religious History for the Marvelous Secret* states that Prajñāpāramitā is the external emanation of Samantabhadrī,¹⁸ thus envisioning the normative canonical literature on emptiness as the work of Samantabhadrī, the female emptiness aspect of the primordial couple. The same text also credits the spread of the Yoginī Tantras to Samantabhadrī, when she emanated as the Great Mother Vajravārāhī and taught the mother tantras.¹⁹

Thus, we see how the primordial Buddha couple is envisioned as an active force in celestial and human history. Through the vision of Samantabhadra, the role of the primordial Buddha couple extends beyond the lofty heights of Akaniṣṭha. They are given an active role in the transmission through their emanations that spring from their compassion. This type of active role of Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī is part of the narrativization of the primordial Buddha and seems to be distinctive to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's anthology.

3.1.4. Synchronic Relationships: The Maṇḍala of Samantabhadra

In addition to the diachronic involvement of the primordial Buddha couple, Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī are synchronically related to most of the divine agents appearing in the anthology, because they belong to the maṇḍala of the primordial Buddha couple. The maṇḍala of Samantabhadra is mentioned explicitly in *The Root Tantra of the Unimpeded Realization* as including Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī, the five Buddhas, bodhisattvas and gate keepers, all with their female counterparts (*yum*) and surrounded by inconceivably many maṇḍalas of the deities of the five Buddha families.²⁰ Saman-

¹⁸ *gSang ba rmad byung gi chos 'byung gleng gzhi*, UR IV:569.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* IV:569.

²⁰ *dGongs pa zang thal rtsa ba'i rgyud*, UR III:456-458.

tabhadra *yab yum* is also at the center of the *maṇḍala* of the peaceful and wrathful deities described in the ritual of *The Spontaneously Present Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*²¹ and its associated literature, as well as in the texts that describe the location of these deities in the human body. For example *The Tantra of the Quintessential Realization of the Pith Instructions taught by Vajrasattva* describes Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī at the center of the peaceful *maṇḍala* located in the fabulous palace of exalted mind (*tsitta*) at the heart center (*cakra*, 'khor lo) of the subtle body.²²

Connecting the divine agents of the anthology as belonging to the *maṇḍala* of Samantabhadra creates a strong sense of unity across the anthology's different texts where these deities appear as speakers, teachers or focus of ritual practice. The diachronic identifications have a similar function. For example, due to the identification of Vajravārāhī as an emanation of Samantabhadrī in *The Narrative Discourse of the Religious History for the Marvelous Secret*, the cycle of *The Six Seals of Vajra-vārāhī* becomes closely aligned with the primordial Buddha couple and vision of Samantabhadra.

3.1.5. Didactic Vision and Its Prophetic Transmission

Besides Samantabhadra's diachronic and synchronic relationships to the divine agents, *The Root Tantra of the Unimpeded Realization* describes all the teachings of the anthology as the unimpeded vision of Samantabhadra taught to enlighten the karmically mature recipients.²³ The anthology as a didactic, enlightening plan of Samantabhadra is comprised of the different genres, topics and practices, and woven together by the narratives that describe Samantabhadra's realization as the origin of the teachings, his diachronic involvement in the spread of the teachings to the human and other realms, and the subsequent transmission of the teachings to India and Tibet.

The various narratives of the anthology also construct a powerful image of uniqueness and preciousness of the teachings. *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* discuss the position of the Great Perfection as the pinnacle of all the vehicles and stress the rarity of the teachings of the anthology, particularly the oral transmissions.²⁴ Numerous texts describe transmission scenes in the dynastic period, and relate how the teachings were concealed as treasures because suitable recip-

²¹ *rDzogs pa chen po chos nyid mngon sum zhi khro lhun grub kyi phrin las*, UR II:201-244.

²² *Man ngag snying gi dgongs pa'i rgyud rdo rje sems dpas gsungs pa*, UR IV:7-8.

²³ *dGongs pa zang thal rtsa ba'i rgyud*, UR III:467.

²⁴ *Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud dang po*, UR II:474-482.

ients could not be found at that time. The cycle of *The Six Seals of Vajravārāhī* depicts the time of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem as a degenerate era, the final 500-year period of the Buddhist teachings before the disappearance of the genuine dharma.²⁵ The prophecies of rGod ldem picture him as the predestined revealer, a zealous yogi who will accomplish the practices of *The Unimpeded Realization* and struggle to uphold the authentic lamp of dharma in the face of criticism and hostility prevalent in the dark time.

In this way, the vision of Samantabhadra is depicted as unfolding in time via the predestined transmission of the rare teachings contained in the anthology. The treasure revelation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is portrayed as a particularly auspicious karmic fortune because it unifies all the strands of the Great Perfection transmitted separately by Śrī Siṃha to the three masters of awareness: Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana. The esoteric nature of the anthology is highlighted in *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava*, as they are said to be so profound and secret that they should only be transmitted to a handful a people.²⁶ Thus, the prophetic *telos* of Samantabhadra's vision culminates in the revelation of rGod ldem, because it is the cathartic end of the prophetic journey that brings the teachings to light from centuries of oblivion, and it contains the complete visionary teachings of the anthology transmitted by the three masters of awareness, accessible to a wider audience for the first time. Emphasizing the rarity and secrecy of the teachings is part of the narrative theme of Samantabhadra's vision that enhances the appeal of the anthology as a superior teaching.

The vision of Samantabhadra also includes the reader or the practitioner of the tradition in the special position of having encountered these rare and secret teachings. As Anne Monius points out, literature and community exist in a mutually constitutive relationship. The Tamil Buddhist texts, *Vīracolīyam* and *Manimekalai*, which Monius examines, enable a reader to envision himself as part of a larger collective, a religious community that is bound together by shared commitments, goals and moral sensibilities.²⁷ *The Unimpeded Realization* and *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* have an even stronger sense of community, because the texts are meant only for those who have the empowerments transmitted by a master of the tradition, and this community of initiates is bound by numerous tan-

²⁵ *The Secret Pith Instructions on the Ritual Stages of the Dakinī (mKha' 'gro'i las rim gsang ba'i man ngag)*, UR I:500-502.

²⁶ *The Oral Transmission of Padmasambhava: The Ultimate Letterless within all Oral Transmissions (sNyan brgyud thams cad kyi nang na yi ge med pa mthar thug pal padma'i snyan brgyud)*, UR II:448.

²⁷ Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism*.

tric commitments (*samaya, dam tshig*).

Thus, the community of readers depicted in the anthology is that of aspiring yogis, and they are included in the vision of Samantabhadra through their karmically destined connection with the teachings. This is elucidated in *The Supporting Notes on the Liberation Through Wearing*, which states that one has to have accumulated merit for several eons to encounter the liberating teachings.²⁸ In *The Tantra of Becoming a Buddha by Merely Seeing, Hearing, Wearing, or Praying to this Great Tantra*, Samantabhadra relates that his unimpeded realization (*dgongs pa zang thal*) is the supreme teaching in the world, and by encountering it, one is bound to attain enlightenment either in this or subsequent lives depending on one's acumen and practice,²⁹ thus enveloping the reader in the prophetic framework of the anthology. The inclusion of the reader in the unfoldment of karmic and gnostic forces entailing predestined revelation and prophetic vision is a tremendous inspirational force for an aspiring yogi, and thus the vision of Samantabhadra becomes a method to shatter the binding image of ordinariness and to give a greater sense of purpose and a sense of belonging to a scheme of divine forces at work in history and time.

Connecting the anthology's divine figures and teachings synchronically and diachronically under Samantabhadra is related to the overall agenda of the anthology, which is to weave the various tantric and preliminary practices into the overarching metaperspective of the Great Perfection. Many Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna practices are presented through the lens of the Great Perfection and integrated into the *rdzogs chen* framework—an approach which is part of the vision of the anthology embodied in Samantabhadra. According to Anne Ferry, compilers of anthologies seek to fashion them into something of a different kind,³⁰ and clearly the vision of Samantabhadra turns the anthology into a distinctive creation that is more than just a compilation of the particular subject matters. It is the main tool of integration that unifies the disparate genres, cycles, agents, practices and topics into a characteristic Seminal Heart system with its own powerful message.

²⁸ *Yang gsang bla na med pa'i rdzogs pa chen po'i btags grol rgyab yig gsang ba'i gnad bkrol gnad kyi yi ge'i them yig rnam*s, UR III:256.

²⁹ *rGyud chen mithong ba dang thos pa dang btags pa dang smon lam btab pa tsam gyis sangs rgyas pa'i rgyud*, UR IV:88.

³⁰ Ferry, 2001: 2, 31.

3.2. Unifying the *rDzogs chen* Transmissions and Padmasambhava Triumphalism

One of the important agendas in rGod ldem's anthology is to unify the Great Perfection transmissions attributed to the three legendary *rdzogs chen* masters of the imperial period: Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana. This is evident in the inclusion of three major cycles called oral transmissions attributed to each of the three masters. *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava* focus on direct transcendence (*thod rgal*), the distinctive visionary practice of the Seminal Heart. *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* discuss mainly the practice of breakthrough (*khregs chod*) and *rdzogs chen* view, while *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* is a lengthy scholastic text on the eleven topics of the Great Perfection.³¹

These transmissions are mapped onto the Three Series of the Great Perfection: Vairocana to Mind Series (*Sems sde*), Vimalamitra to Space Series (*Klong sde*) and Padmasambhava to Pith Instruction Series (*Man ngag sde*).³² The three series represent successive layers of historical development in the Great Perfection and competing types of Great Perfection philosophy and practice. By synthesizing the Three Series and the three legendary *rdzogs chen* masters within a single anthology, *The Unimpeded Realization* presents a comprehensive vision of the Great Perfection. By doing this, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem also continues the synthesizing efforts of Klong chen pa. While *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts* (*sNying thig ya bzhi*), compiled and partly composed by Klong chen pa, incorporates transmissions attributed to Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava, *The Unimpeded Realization* also includes transmissions attributed to Vairocana. The crafted nature of rGod ldem's synthesis is evident in that historically it would make more sense to associate Vimalamitra with the Mind Series, because *The Eighteen Texts of the Mind Series* refer to him as one of the figures involved in the transmission, authorship and redaction of these texts.³³

Besides integrating Vairocana in the transmission scheme, *The Unimpeded Realization* furthers Klong chen pa's synthesis of the Seminal Heart tradition in its own distinctive way. The anthology incorporates Mahāyoga ritual and subtle body practices in the context of the

³¹ The eleven topics are (1) the universal ground, (2) arising of saṃsāra, (3) Buddha Nature, (4) location of wisdom in the human body, (5) subtle channels, (6) gateways of wisdom or lamps, (7) objective sphere of visions or expanse (*dbyings*), (8) *rdzogs chen* practice, (9) signs of successful practice, (10) bardo and (11) liberation.

³² *The First Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Oral Transmission of Vairocana* (*Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud dang po*), UR II:473.

³³ Germano, *The Funerary Transformation of the Great Perfection (Rdzogs chen)*, 11.

Great Perfection, even as part of direct transcendence practice, thus demonstrating an unusual appreciation of these ritual and contemplative techniques. This topic will be discussed in my forthcoming book. On the other hand, rGod ldem's indebtedness to the Seminal Heart tradition is evident in his textual borrowing. Ten ritual texts in rGod ldem's anthology are directly adopted from *The Seminal Heart of the Dakinīs* revealed by Tshul khrims rdo rje and compiled into *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts* by Klong chen pa.³⁴ *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra*³⁵ is almost identical with *The Eleven Topics of the Great Perfection* by mKhas pa nyi 'bum (1158-1213).³⁶ This text is also the template for Klong chen pa's *Treasury of Words and Meaning*, which is an expanded version of mKhas pa nyi 'bum's work.

In addition to the simple choice of including transmissions attributed to Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana, the anthology contains numerous narratives that weave the three strands of transmission together in the form of stories. For example, *The First Oral Transmission of Vairocana* and *A Pith Instruction of the Great Perfection: The Tantra which Teaches the Wisdom of the Buddha in its own Right* relate how Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana studied under Śrī Simha in India receiving different parts of the Great Perfection transmission as well as outline their meetings in bSam yas where

³⁴ The ten texts are *The Elaborate Vase Empowerment* (sPros bcas bum pa'i dbang) UR I:105-156, *The Non-Elaborate Secret Empowerment* (sPros med gsang ba'i dbang) UR I:157-167, *The Exceedingly Non-Elaborate Insight Wisdom Empowerment* (Shin tu spros med shes rab ye shes kyi dbang) UR I:169-173 and *The Utterly Non-Elaborate Suchness Empowerment* (Rab tu spros med de kho na nyid kyi dbang) UR I:175-181, *The External Sādhana of the Five Families* (Rigs Inga'i phyi sgrub) UR I:332-338, *The Internal Sādhana of the Five Families: The Ocean of Accomplishments* (Rigs Inga'i nang sgrub dngos grub rgya mtsho) UR 338-340, *The Secret Actualization of the Dakinī: The Treasure Vase of Attainments* (mKha' 'gro'i gsang sgrub dngos grub gter gyi bum pa' mkha' 'gro ma'i nor sgrub rin chen gter gyi bum pa) UR I:365-371, *Pinpointing the Key Points of the Time [Visualization and Mantra] of the Dakinīs, and the Topmost Key Point, the Soul Stone* (Dā ki'i dus gnad gnad 'bebs shis spyi gnad bla rdo) UR I:371-375, *The Feast Offering to the Five Families* (Rigs Inga'i tshogs mchod) UR I:407-411 and *The Garland of Offerings in the Sādhana of the Dakinī of the Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection* (Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i mkha' 'gro'i las byang mchod phreng) UR I:413-453. These texts are found in *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts*, X:106-182, X:317-328, X:221-261. The last text contains some differences.

³⁵ *The Great Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra Transmitted to the King: The Intrinsically Radiant Wisdom Commentary on the Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection* (also entitled *The Great Exegesis on the Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra*) (Bi ma mi tra'i snyan brgyud chen mo rgyal po la gdams pa yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i 'grel pa ye shes rang gsal/ Bi ma la'i snyan brgyud 'grel tig chen mo yang zer), UR IV:183-401.

³⁶ For mKhas pa nyi 'bum and *The Eleven Topics*, see the work of Yeshe and Dalton in this issue and the paper of Achard in the next.

they transmitted the teachings to the Tibetan recipients.³⁷

The anthology's synthesis of the transmissions of Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana contains an important agenda: to establish Padmasambhava's superiority over his peers. In general, Padmasambhava stands out in the transmission narratives that discuss receiving teachings in India from Śrī Siṃha and disseminating them in Tibet, because there are many more narratives on him and he is the recipient of the highest transmission, the Pith Instruction Series. He is also the sole recipient of *The Six Seals*, which is a cycle of texts on completion stage subtle body yogic techniques. Padmasambhava is depicted as receiving this transmission directly from Vajravārahī in the charnel ground of So sa gling³⁸ and, unlike his peers, he also receives instructions from dGa' rab rdo rje, the first mythical human recipient of the Great Perfection who brings the teachings to our world from celestial realms.³⁹ Padmasambhava appears also in the wrathful narratives that describe his activities of killing and taming demons in India.⁴⁰ Most importantly, the transformation narratives go into great detail concerning his training under Śrī Siṃha and the way he passes the teachings onto Ye shes mtsho rgyal, presenting long dialogues between a master and student (I shall return to these below). Vairocana also has a substantial role in some of the transmission narratives that describe how he receives teachings from Śrī Siṃha, while Vimalamitra is not much more than a name in the lineage.

Across the texts of *The Unimpeded Realization*, Padmasambhava is the person who authors, teaches and conceals most of the treasure texts of the anthology. He appears as an author in as many as 28 texts, speaker in 19 texts and concealer of 28 texts, while Vimalamitra and Vairocana authored eight and six texts respectively and appear as speakers and concealers only in a couple of texts and even then together with Padmasambhava. Thus, we see that Padmasambhava is present, not only through his extensive textual contribution, but also through his direct speech, while Vairocana and Vimalamitra are distanced to the background as authors, lacking almost entirely a direct teaching voice. However, *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* is a

³⁷ *Bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud dang po*, UR II:462-465, 473 and *rDzogs pa chen po'i man ngag: sangs rgyas kyi dgongs pa rang chas su bstan pa'i rgyud*, UR III:170-172.

³⁸ *The First of the Six Profound Seals: The Tantra of the Enlightened Activities of Vajravārahī's Joy (rDo rje phag mo'i dgyes pa phrin las kyi rgyud zab rgya drug gi dang po)*, UR I:550.

³⁹ *The First Command of Padmasambhava: The Tantra of the Quintessential Realization (Padma'i bka' yig dang po snying gi dgongs pa'i rgyud)*, UR III:294-295.

⁴⁰ *The Three Lamps: The Last Testament Composed by Oddiyana Padmasambhava (O rgyan padmas mdzad pa'i zhal chems sgron ma rnam gsum)*, UR V:204-208.

monumental treatise of 218 pages augmented by 50 pages of Vimalamitra's other compositions, rendering Vimalamitra's textual involvement quite extensive, even though he lacks substantial presence as a speaker or in the stories of transmission. The texts attributed to Padmasambhava are mainly short, 10-25 pages, but the total number of pages is nevertheless 406, reiterating his preeminent role in the Seminal Heart tradition in the 14th century. It should also be noted that even though *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* is attributed to Vimalamitra, it is a group of teachings that all three masters of awareness are said to have transmitted together to the king Khri srong lde btsan in the retreat cave of mChims phu in bSam yas.⁴¹

3.3. Three poles of gravity

The narrative structure of *The Unimpeded Realization* contains three poles of gravity: Samantabhadra, Padmasambhava and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. These poles of gravity, or points of narrative significance, function to integrate and organize the contents of the anthology. Even though Samantabhadra's vision is the overarching narrative of the anthology, his presence gravitates toward the beginning of the story line, dominating the cosmogonic narratives in particular. In most other narratives, Padmasambhava is in a key role: he is the central pole of gravity that transmits the vision of Samantabhadra from India to the familiar soil of Tibet. The third pole, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, constitutes the end of the prophetic journey. The prophecies of the anthology portray rGod ldem as the destined revealer of the treasure, a fierce yogi practicing with zeal in the face of criticism. The prophecies also depict rGod ldem's time as part of a dark, degenerate period of the final 500 years when true Buddhism is about to disappear, but rGod ldem's revelation illuminates the darkness.⁴² rGod ldem's anthology is also loaded with significance because he is the single point of convergence that unearths, deciphers and transmits all the teachings coming from Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana.

The metaphysical nature of Samantabhadra shrouded in luminous wisdom, cosmogonic origins and primordial realization is contrasted to the activities of Padmasambhava and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem situated

⁴¹ *Bi ma mi tra'i snyan brgyud chen mo rgyal po la gdams pa yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i 'grel pa ye shes rang gsal*, UR IV:183-401.

⁴² *The Key to the Precious Prophecy: The List Certificate of the Six Oral Transmissions (sNyan brgyud drug gi tho byang lung bstan rin po che'i lde'u mig)*, UR I:78-83, and *The Secret Pith Instructions on the Ritual Stages of the Dakini (mKha' 'gro'i las rim gsang ba'i man ngag)*, UR I:500-502.

historically in the world. These two narrative structures form opposite poles on many levels: light *versus* darkness, gnostic *versus* karmic, peaceful *versus* wrathful, vast dissemination *versus* concealment as treasures, flourishing, emanating and overflowing *versus* degeneration, generic *versus* specific, divine *versus* terrestrial, and metaphysical *versus* historical. Samantabhadra's vision is an entirely peaceful and positive vision, related to the prevalence of wisdom and its luminous manifestations and involving vast dissemination of *rdzogs chen* teachings in pure lands and the realms of gods, planetary beings, *yakṣas* and *nāgas*. Padmasambhava and rGod ldem instead are involved in wrathful rites of subjugation, limited secret transmission during the dark degenerate time and concealment of treasures on the terrestrial plane dominated by karma.

While Samantabhadra is connected to many of the divine and human agents through his emanations, Padmasambhava is also at the center of a web of relationships comprised of his teachers Śrī Siṃha, dGa' rab rdo rje and Vajravārāhī, his consort Ye shes mtsho rgyal, peers Vimalamitra and Vairocana, students sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms and so forth, and his king Khri srong lde btsan. In addition, Padmasambhava is very engaged with the world of spirits and demons that have a prevalent impact on Tibetan life. As a *dharmakāya* Buddha, Samantabhadra remains in the luminous realm of wisdom, so a wrathful master is needed to bring order to chaotic, hostile forces and spirits that solicit the land of Tibet. This function is fulfilled by Padmasambhava, an icon of fierce tantric power.

These three poles of gravity, Samantabhadra, Padmasambhava and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, form a continuum of identification. Padmasambhava is presented as a second order emanation of Samantabhadra, as he arises from three seed syllables produced by Vairocana, Amitābha and Vajrasattva, who were in turn emanated by Samantabhadra.⁴³ Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is an incarnation of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms, one of Padmasambhava's heart sons or direct disciples, and the anthology also contains a text, *The Three Lamps: The Last Testament Composed by Oddiyana Padmasambhava*, which conceptually identifies Rig 'dzin rGod ldem with Padmasambhava through their fierce activities and establishes rGod ldem as a wrathful heir and spiritual son of Padmasambhava.⁴⁴

Through the continuum of these figures, the transcendence of the *dharmakāya* is brought closer to Tibetans by masters that can more easily be related to in the messiness and violence of the terrestrial

⁴³ *The Tantra of the Enlightened Activity of the Precious Unborn, Unfabricated, Self-emergent and Self-arisen One* (sKye med ma bcos rang byung rang shar ba rin po che phrin las kyi rgyud), UR III:27-28.

⁴⁴ *O rgyan padmas mdzad pa'i zhal chems sgron ma rnam gsum*, UR V:201-244.

plane. Another social implication of the dialectic between Samantabhadra and Padmasambhava is a legitimation of the wrathful practices and lifestyle of a tantric yogi. Since Padmasambhava embodies Samantabhadra, his wrathful actions and practices are sanctified by this connection to the primordial Buddha.

Through these three poles of gravity the agency of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is positioned in the psychological continuum from Samantabhadra to Padmasambhava and himself, temporal continuum from timelessness to the mythical life span of Padmasambhava and the present time of rGod ldem, and the spatial continuum from Akaniṣṭha to India and Tibet. One of the important outcomes of this narrative scheme is the legitimation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his revelation. Via this continuum, the power of Samantabhadra is invested in rGod ldem, the historical person closest to the audience carrying on the gnostic and wrathful legacies.

4. Narratives of Transformation Through *rDzogs chen* Practice

In the narrative dynamics of rGod ldem's *rdzogs chen* revelation, two texts stand out as particularly interesting as they present unusual narratives of visionary practice. *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* relates how Padmasambhava trained in Great Perfection meditation under Śrī Siṃha and *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* depicts Ye shes mtsho rgyal's meditative training under Padmasambhava. These texts are located toward the end of *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity*, which in the Northern Treasures tradition is variously considered as the fifth volume of *The Unimpeded Realization* or a separate anthology (see footnote four). In any case, *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* is clearly a Great Perfection collection and together with *The Unimpeded Realization* forms a distinctive *rdzogs chen* part of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's massive treasure revelation.

The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction and *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* portray the disciples' transformative experiences resulting from *rdzogs chen* practice, which is why these texts bring to life and culminate the message and teachings of rGod ldem's Great Perfection revelation. Following numerous doctrinal explanations of *rdzogs chen* contemplation, these two texts offer a model of how they are applied in practice. Instead of focusing on Samantabhadra and transmission in the celestial realms, these narratives describe teaching scenarios in the human realm. The reader gets a sense of direction from macro to micro environment, from deities to humans and from celestial realms to India and Tibet. The texts dis-

cuss the same kind of *rdzogs chen* training given in India by Śrī Siṃha and in Tibet by Padmasambhava, thus pointing to authentic lineage that was brought from India to Tibet by the Lotus-Born Guru.

The narrative format of *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* is distinctive in the context of rGod ldem's anthology. The texts are presented as dialogues (*zhus len*) between a master and disciple, but unlike many dialogue texts in Buddhist literature, these two texts describe journeys of inner transformation in the manner of biographical literature, but embedded in lively dialogical encounters, even debates, between a guru and disciple. This being said, they differ from Tibetan biographical literature in their exclusive focus on meditation experiences. They are also not like the transmission narratives in rGod ldem's anthology that present merely bits and pieces of biographical information, because these narratives contain actual life stories of how to travel on the *rdzogs chen* path. Therefore, in the context of rGod ldem's Great Perfection revelation these two transformation narratives constitute a distinctive type of narrative literature that bridge and intermingle various domains: *rdzogs chen* meditation instructions and biographical narrative, presentation of doctrine and descriptions of experience, philosophy and contemplation, and dialogical and narrative presentation.

These narratives are significant also because they make several important philosophical, doctrinal and social points through the format of narrative. (1) Implicitly, the texts make a strong argument for the gradual path and progressively increasing wisdom awareness, as opposed to instant enlightenment. (2) Another prominent theme is the subtlety of enlightenment: there is considerably more to realize than even an advanced yogi can conceive. Without these two texts, rGod ldem's presentation of the final stages of *rdzogs chen* practice would be scanty, as they are the only texts in *The Unimpeded Realization* and *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* that elaborate on the last stages of the path before attaining enlightenment. (3) Perhaps the most interesting question is whether the visionary experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal in these narratives are the visions of direct transcendence, because they are considerably different from the standard descriptions. If they are, they make a point for the fluid nature of these visionary experiences. If they are not, it is curious that the visionary *rdzogs chen* training of these iconic figures does not entail direct transcendence. (4) Additionally, the two narratives present a model of ideal guru-disciple relationship and how to follow a master. These four topics will be analyzed after introducing the two narratives. In conjunction with describing the two narratives, this paper will also discuss other notable themes, such as

the nature of mind and the need to transcend visionary experiences for the final realization of non-dual wisdom, for these topics feature prominently in the texts' conception of the *rdzogs chen* path.

4.1. Padmasambhava's *rdzogs chen* Training

The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction, A Dialogue with Padmasambhava is presented in the form of first person narrative by Padmasambhava who relates his meditation experiences and discussions with Śrī Siṃha in the final stages of his journey to enlightenment. The text opens with brief instructions on breakthrough meditation, a simple method to "let your body, speech and mind be naturally without fabricating in a solitary place," upon which the four visions (*nyams kyi snang ba bzhi*) arise. However, upon seeing the visionary manifestations, Padmasambhava has to transcend them in order to realize the non-duality of enlightenment, which is one of the central themes in the transformation narratives. The text makes this point already on the second page with Śrī Siṃha's startling question:

At that point, the guru Śrī Siṃha said to me: "Being satisfied with the four visions is a childish view. You have to be unattached to these visions and emptiness. Do you have that? By equalizing the Buddhas and sentient beings as inseparable, you must respect all sentient beings just like you respect the Buddhas. Can you do that? ---"

Then, I, Padmasambhava, settled in the three methods of letting be, and generated the eight experiences. There was an experience of clarity devoid of outside and inside. Whether I had my eyes open or closed, it arose as clarity and emptiness. The experience of emptiness was pervasive everywhere without attachment. In the experience of bliss, the body and mind were the same, like melting butter, vivid and vibrating. The consciousness was in self-display, clear and free from attachment toward multiplicity, like the rising sun. The body was like mist, so it was free from dualistic activity and there was recognition devoid of the self and other. I thought: "It makes sense that all sentient beings can understand the meaning of the nature of mind like I have understood it."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *De'i skabs su gu ru shrī singhas bdag la gsungs pa: nyams kyi snang ba bzhi chog shes su bzung ba ni byis pa'i lta ba yin no: snang ba dang stong pa 'di la ma chags pa zhig dgos te: khyod la 'dug gam: --- de nas padma 'byung gnas bdag gis bzhag thabs gsum la bzhag pa'i dus su nyams brgyad skyes te: gsal nyams phyi dang nang med par song ste: mig phyed btsun khyad med par gsal stong du shar: stong nyams gang la yang zhen pa med par stong pa cham cham du song: bde nyams su lus sems gnyis mnyam par mar zhu ba ltar lhan lhan phril phril ba dang: sna tshogs su gsal la zhen pa med par shes pa rang snang la nyi ma shar ba lta bu: lus na bun lta bus spyod rgyu gnyis su med pas: bdag gzhan gnyis ngo mi shes pa dang: sems nyid kyi don 'di bdag gi go bzhin du sems can*

The realization of non-duality, which Padmasambhava is gradually approaching, entails a complete renunciation and freedom from attachments, hopes, fears and the eight worldly concerns. It is the realization of oneness of all phenomena: even Buddhas and sentient beings are equal. It is also a realization that entails one's mind transcending all limitations and becoming pervasive like the sky. Thus, in the next stage Padmasambhava is instructed to expand his mind. The text highlights the processual nature of *rdzogs chen* training, because even Padmasambhava is presented as needing to progress through several stages of training.

[Śrī Siṃha]: Your awareness is narrow, so without having attachment to the visions, expand your mind."

I asked: "How should I expand the mind?"

Śrī Siṃha said: "There is no difference between Buddhas and sentient beings, excepting the extent of their awareness. The mind of a sentient being is small and scattered, while the enlightened mind of a Buddha is completely pervasive. Therefore, expand your mind to be like the sky. Whichever direction you look at the sky – east, south, west or north - there is no limit."

Then, I went to a solitary place. I expanded [my mind], and thus generated many experiences. I let my mind be without proliferating and dissolving thoughts, so it became empty, clear and immaculate. I thought that this is one-pointedness, and I was not attached to any objects. My mind did not abide in anything and it became like waves. I thought that this indeed is the activity free from elaborations. Wherever I looked, it appeared as one, so there was nothing to abandon or accomplish. This indeed is what is called one taste. --- I thought there could not be anything higher than this. --- Without fabricating, the creative displays arose variously. It was unchanging like the essence of space. I thought that this indeed is when the cognition of dual appearing is not generated. It was a lucid great experience that was limpid, open, shining, vibrating and shimmering. It was a clear experience like the sun rising, empty experience like the expanse of the sky, a blissful experience like the depth of the ocean.⁴⁶

thams cad kyis kyang 'di ltar go bar rigs so snyam pa byung ste (Ngo sprod rang rig rang gsal padma'i zhus lan) UR V:153-154.

⁴⁶ *Rig pa col chung ba yin pas: nyams snang la ma zhen par sems rgya bskyed cig gsungs pas: bdag gis sems ji ltar rgya bskyed zhus pas: shri singha'i zhal nas: sangs rgyas dang sems can gnyis kyis khyad par rig pa'i rgya che chung gnyis las med: sems can gyi sems dum bur gnas: sangs rgyas kyi thugs khyab bdal du gnas pas: de'i phyir rang sems nam mkha' lta bur rgya skyed cig: nam mkha' la shar lho nub byang sogs phyog gang du bltas kyang mtha' med do: zhes gsungs so: de nas bdag gi dben par song ste: rgya bskyed pas nyams mang po skyed do: sems la spro bsdu med par bzhas pas gsal stong du yer yer byung: rtse gcig bya ba 'di yin snyam pa dang: dngos po gang la yang ma zhen: blo gang la yang mi gnas par chal chal ba byung: spros bral bya ba 'di rang yin snyam pa dang:*

In this passage, Padmasambhava thinks that he has attained enlightenment and “there could not be anything higher than this”, but Śrī Siṃha points out to him that all visionary content of experience still has to be transcended:

I asked about [my experience], so Śrī Siṃha said: “The actual abiding reality is devoid of visions. Padmasambhava, whatever you experience, whoever experiences and whatever you delight in, it is the mind. When there is no content of experience at all, not even a little bit, will you find something that surpasses that? The experiences that you experienced cannot be found even by the Buddhas of the three times, so if you grasp at these experiences as experiences, you will surely be deceived by demons. If you have grasping and attachment, and you do, your experiences will manifest with fabrications. You still have obscurations of conditions. You do not have forbearance. Your realization is good, but it is like a net and you have not unraveled the knot of conceptuality, so it is like having a sickness within. At this point, bliss is of no benefit. You still have not reached the exalted position, so the smothered flame of confusion breaks out again.”⁴⁷

Upon further instructions not to grasp at the visions, not to desire, not to practice nor do anything at all, but just let be, Padmasambhava makes progress:

Then, I practiced in a solitary place just as [he had instructed], so all the earlier experiences were purified as husks of the intellect. Suffering exhausted and the basic wakefulness (*tha mal gyi shes pa*) was not obscured by any fault or virtue at all. It was free from both the result and something to meditate on. Even if one meditated, there was nothing whatsoever to generate, and even if one did not meditate, there was nothing to be confused about. The basic wakefulness was naked, bare and serene without accepting or rejecting. I realized all the contrived and nakedly free phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa as subsumed in

gang la btas kyang gcig tu 'dus pas spangs bya dang bsgub bya mi 'dug pas ro gcig bya ba 'di rang yin par 'dug: --- de bas lhag pa yod mi srid snyam pa dang: --- ma byas par rtsal sna tshogs su shar ba: nam mkha'i ngo bo ltar mi 'gyur ba dang: gnyis snang gi shes pa mi skye ba dang: 'di rang yin snyam pa'i nyams chen po sal sal pa dang: seng seng ba dang: phyal phyal pa: lhag lhag pa: phril phril pa: mer mer pa: gsal nyams nyi ma shar ba lta bu: Ibid. V:155-156.

⁴⁷ *Zhus pas: shri singha'i zhal nas: dngos po'i gnas lugs nyams snang dang bral ba yin: padma 'byung gnas gar myong gang gis myong gang la dga' bde sems yin: myong ba cung cad kyang med na: de bas lhag pa zhig rnyed dam: khyod kyi myong ba de ni dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas kyis kyang mi rnyed pas: 'di nyams su myong ba la myong bar 'dzin na: bdud kyis bslus par nges so: 'dzin zhen yod na de kun byas pa las byung ba bcos pa'i nyams so: da dung rkyen sgrub yod: rkyen mi thub: bzang rtogs kyi drwa ba yin: rnam rtoḡ gi mdud pa mi khrul bas khong na nad yod pa dang 'dra: da res tsam bde bas mi phan: da dung btsan sa mi zin pas 'khrul ba'i rme ro ldang yong: Ibid.V:156-157.*

one essence.⁴⁸

However, Padmasambhava is not enlightened yet, but still has attachment such as the desire to be with his teacher. This desire has to be transcended through the final stage of practice: non-dual yogic discipline.

Then, I went to the presence of the guru Śrī Siṃha, and asked about [my experience], so he said: "That which is called the uncompounded dharmakāya, the primordially abiding reality, is indeed the naked clear basic wakefulness devoid of something to meditate on and something to be confused about. Now, do not be obscured by desire! Through eradicating desire, you will traverse to the place of no desire. Do not meditate nor be separate from [negativities]. By maintaining just that non-meditation and non-separation, you will obtain the supreme and ordinary *siddhis* (miraculous abilities). At this point, you and I will not meet."

"Can I still meet you and ask for teachings?" I asked.

He said: "If we meet, will you be happy, and if we do not meet, will you be unhappy?"

I said: "If we meet, I will be very happy."

Śrī Siṃha said: "If you are unhappy, you have hopes. If you are happy, fears will come. If you have hopes and fears, you have dualistic grasping. For the stainless non-dual wisdom of great bliss, you have to cut across in between [happiness and unhappiness]. Seeing many faults in this [way of happiness and unhappiness], engage in the non-dual yogic discipline! Now, without even looking at me, go!"⁴⁹

The way the text presents the final process of transcending desire is almost heartbreaking in its powerful simplicity. The master sends

⁴⁸ *De nas dben par de kho na bzhin nyams su blangs pas: nyams snga ma thams cad blo'i shun par dag ste: sdug zad nas tha mal gyi shes pa skyon dang yon tan gang gis kyang mi sgrib pa: de la bsgom rgyu dang 'bras bu gnyis ka bral te: sgom kyang ci yang skye rgyu med pa la: ma sgom kyang 'khrul rgyu med pa tha mal gyi shes pa gcer bu blang dor med pa: a 'thas se: rjen lhan ne: 'khor 'das kyi chos thams cad ngo bo gcig tu 'dus par rtogs so: Ibid.V:158-159.*

⁴⁹ *De nas guru shri singha'i spyang sngar phyin te zhus pas: guru shri singha'i zhal nas: ye gnas kyi gnas lugs 'dus ma byas kyi chos sku bya ba: sgom rgyu 'khrul rgyu gnyis ka med pa'i tha mal gyi shes pa gcer bu lhang pa de rang yin no: da 'dod pas ma sgrib cig: 'dod 'dod pa zhig gis mi 'dod pa'i sar skyel yong: sgom ma myong dang 'bral ma myong: mi sgom don dang mi 'bral ba: de nyid rang skyong bas mchog dang thun mong gi dngos grub thob zin gyis: da khyod dang nga mi 'phrad do: gsung ngo: da dung zhal mjal lam chos zhu zhes zhus pas: da dung mjal na dga' 'am: ma mjal na mi dga' 'am gsung ngo: bdag ni da dung mjal ba la shin tu dga' lags zhus pas: shri singha'i zhal nas: mi dga' ba yod na re ba yod pa yin: dga' ba yod na dogs pa yod pa yin: re dogs dang bcas na gnyis 'dzin yod pa yin: bde ba chen po gnyis su med pa'i ye shes dri ma dang bral ba la bar du gcod do: de la skyon du ma blta bar gnyis med kyi brtul zhugs gyis shig: da bdag la yang ma blta bar song zhig gsung ngo: Ibid.V:159-160.*

Padmasambhava off to practice non-dual conduct with the notion that they will not meet again and he must not be unhappy about it in the face of non-dual nature of reality. However, the master and disciple meet one more time when Śrī Siṃha comes to check Padmasambhava's realization:

[Padmasambhava] practiced in a big city in the land of Orgyen. He did not generate virtue or non-virtue, good or bad. Whatever appearances arose and however they manifested, he did not reckon that "this is" and "this is not", but abided like a corpse discarded on a charnel ground. Then, Śrī Siṃha came to him for the benefit of beings.

"A son of the noble family, show your realization!" he said.

I said: "Oh, precious guru! I do not have any realization to show not even as much as a tip of a hair. I am like a trail of a bird flying in the sky."

Śrī Siṃha said: "Do not lose that realization! Without being separate from the realization, go wherever you please. Practice conduct like in the [Three] Baskets. Practice meditation like in the Secret Mantra. Make you view like in the Great Perfection. Benefit sentient beings like a jewel. Take care of many fortunate disciples. Always make offerings to the lamas and ḍākinīs. You will have the power to make the eight classes of gods and demons as your servants." Having said this, he went.

Then, [Padmasambhava] realized in his continuum that phenomena are like dreams and illusions and the nature of the mind is devoid of birth and death. The great accomplished one (*mahāsiddha*) saw the Eight Heruka deities. He made the eight classes of gods and demons as his servants.⁵⁰

As we see here, Śrī Siṃha finally approves Padmasambhava's realization, which amounts to realizing that there is nothing to realize. Everything is of the single nature of emptiness and primordially pure awareness. Samsāra is nirvāṇa. One's spontaneous conduct is free from the shackles of desire and leaves no karmic traces like a bird

⁵⁰ *De nas o rgyan gyi yul grong khyer chen por spyod pa byas pas: dge ba dang mi dge ba: legs pa dang mi legs pa ma skyes te: ji ltar snang ba gang ltar shar yang: 'di yin dang 'din min gyi rtsis gdab med par mi ro dur khrod du bor ba lta bu'i ngang du gnas skabs 'gro don du shrī singha byon nas: rigs kyi bu rtogs pa phul cig gsungs so: bdag gis 'di skad zhus so: kye bla ma rin po che: rtogs pa phul rgyu skra rtse tsam gcig kyang med par nam mkha' la bya 'phur ba'i rjes bzhin tu gda' lags so: zhes zhus pas: shrī singha'i zhal nas: rtogs pa de ma stor bar gyis: rtogs pa dang ma bral bar gang dgar song zhig: spyod pa de snod ltar gyis: sgom pa sang sngags ltar gyis: lta ba rdzogs chen ltar gyis: sems can gyi don nor bu ltar gyis: skal ldan gyi slob ma mang du skyongs: bla ma dang mkha' 'gro rtag tu mchod dang: lha srin sde brgyad bran tu khol nus pa cig 'ong gsung nas gshags so: de nas chos rmi lam sgyu ma lta bu sems nyid la skye shi med par rgyud la khol nas: sgrub pa chen po bka' brgyad kyi lha tshogs rnams kyi zhal mthong: lha srin sde brgyad bran bzhin bkol: Ibid.V:160-161.*

leaves no trails in the sky.

This passage also illustrates another important feature that appears multiple times in *The Unimpeded Realization*: the importance of ethics and ritual. Upon the peak of non-dual conduct when Padmasambhava has abandoned all practice and is just letting spontaneous action unfold, he is now instructed to embody the best of both the sūtric and tantric vehicles and exhibit the exemplary ethics of the Vinaya and ritual practices of Vajrayāna. rGod ldem's anthology makes a point to emphasize the importance of conscientious moral conduct on numerous occasions. It seems that the motivation is to counteract possible misunderstanding of the radical *rdzogs chen* statements that exhort one to discard all meditation practice and do as one pleases. In the context of rGod ldem's anthology, including the narrative discussed above, this type of non-meditation and non-dual conduct are presented as one of the final stages of training on the *rdzogs chen* path. However, when a yogi has realized non-duality and is free from grasping, he has completed the practice of non-dual conduct and should again embody the conduct of an exemplary practitioner of sūtra and tantra.

4.2. Ye shes mtsho rgyal investigates the mind

The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points (from here onward *The Ten Steps*) follows the same format as *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* but is much longer and more detailed. In *The Ten Steps*, Padmasambhava teaches Ye shes mtsho rgyal and the text begins from an earlier point in Great Perfection training: investigating the origin, dwelling and destination of the mind (*byung gnas 'gro*), which is part of the breakthrough practice (*khregs chod*):

[Padmasambhava] said: "mTsho rgyal, by taking up many difficult topics, you will not obtain the result, so remove the tie to the body, speech and mind. That is called viewing the meaning of the abiding reality (*gnas lugs*). Think: 'From where has the substance of my nature of mind appeared initially?' Investigate as to where it abides in the middle. Look as to where it goes in the end. Do not come here until you find it."

[After seven days] the lady said: "I thought about the initial place of arising for seven days, but I do not know it. I looked for where it abides in the middle, but I did not find it. I did not see where it goes in the end, and I am suffering."

The great guru said: "mTsho rgyal, did you see the meaning of abiding reality?"

She said: "I did not see anything at all and I am suffering."

He said: "mTsho rgyal, the very not seeing anything at all is the inexpressible meaning of abiding reality. It is like the sky. Similarly, the sky does not first arise from somewhere. In between, it does not abide even for a moment. In the end, it does not get emptied out from somewhere. As for that suffering that arose from the absence of suffering without abiding in the universal ground, you are obscured by co-emergent ignorance and have slipped onto the path of confusion. [The appearing of ignorance and suffering from the ground] is like stars [appearing] in the sky at dusk even though there is no radiance of light [in the sky itself]. Their own form is precisely clear, and there are many of them and they change. First, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa separated in this kind of dividing point [of recognition and lack of it].⁵¹

This excerpt from the dialogue between Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal is not only a narrative of mTsho rgyal's struggles in meditation but is also a pith instruction and philosophical explanation of the Seminal Heart view on the nature of the mind. In the Seminal Heart philosophy, the word mind (*sems*) is used to refer to conceptual, superficial mental aspects that are to be differentiated from the deep, underlying recesses of pristine awareness (*rig pa*), which is also, somewhat confusingly, referred to as the nature of mind (*sems nyid*). When the yogi becomes familiar with investigating the origin, dwelling and disappearance of the mind, it transforms into the practice of differentiating mind from awareness, which is very similar to the practice of differentiating the universal ground (*kun gzhi*) of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa from the enlightened wisdom of *dharmakāya* (reality body, *chos sku*). Both these practices entail differentiating unawakened aspects (mind and universal ground) from awakened ones (awareness and *dharmakāya*), but while the universal ground is the indeterminate ground devoid of wisdom and ignorance, mind is the

⁵¹ *Bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal: rgyu dka' ba dang du ma blangs par 'bras bu mi thob pas lus ngag yid gsum 'brel ba spangs la: gnas lugs kyi don lta ba zhes bya ba ste: rang gi sems nyid kyi rgyu de dang po gang nas byung bsam mno thong: bar du gang na gnas tshol: tha ma gang gu 'gro ltos de ma rnyed bar du 'dir ma byon gsung ngo: jo mo nyid kyis zhag bdun du dang po byung sa bsam pas ma shes: bar du gang na gnas btsal bas ma rnyed: tha ma gang du 'gro ma mthong ste: sdug bsngal zhing 'dug pa la: ma hā gu rus bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal gnas lugs kyi don mthong ngam gsungs: bdag ni ci yang ma mthong bar sdug bsngal lags so ces zhus so: bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal ci yang ma mthon ba de nyid rang smra brjod bral ba: gnas lugs kyi don lags: dper na nam mkha' lta bu ste: nam mkha' yang dang po 'di nas byung med: bar du 'di tsam sdod med: tha ma 'di nas stong med do: gzhi gnas las de'i ngang las mi gnas par: sdug bsngal med pa'i ngang las sdug bsngal byung ba de ni: lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pas bsgrub nas 'khrul pa'i lam la shor ba'o: dper na sa sros kha'i nam mkha' la dwangs ba ci yang mi gnas pa de nas skar ma lta bu: rang gzugs gsal ba tsam de yang grangs mang ba la 'pho 'gyur che ba'i: dang po 'khor 'das gnyis kyi mtshams de lta bu la gyes pa yin no gsungs so: (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu) UR V:324-325.*

apparatus of saṃsāric existence ingrained in ignorance and enmeshed in conceptuality.⁵²

In *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana*, it is explained that the mind arises from the universal ground, abides in the six realms and dissipates into the ground upon attaining enlightenment:

As for the dharma teaching of the common vehicles, they look for the origin of mind. They do not find it, so it is introduced as unborn. They look for the dwelling place and do not find it, so it is introduced as non-dual union. In the end, they look for the place it disappears to and do not find it, so it is introduced as non-ceasing. The followers of *The Unimpeded Realization* of the Great Perfection are completely certain that all the activities of the mind are mistaken. They assert that initially its origin arose from the indeterminate universal ground, so identify the ground. In between, its dwelling place is in the six realms. It is confused, but as soon as the excellent spiritual teacher teaches the pith instructions in this life, you should abandon the activities of the mind as you abandon poison or like a visitor turns back from a mistaken path. Identify the awareness devoid of the mind. In the end, the place of disappearance, called the body of essence, is the ground of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, so when the realization becomes actual, you will become enlightened.⁵³

In addition to describing the mind, this passage illustrates the agenda of *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, which is to establish the superiority of the Great Perfection over other vehicles. However, we are compelled to ask: isn't the above mentioned view of the common vehicles that defines mind as lacking the place of origin and disappearance similar to Padmasambhava's explanation in *The Ten Steps*

⁵² It seems that the fourteenth century is the time when the philosophical topics of differentiating the mind from awareness and the universal ground from *dharmakāya* were first applied as contemplative practices as part of breakthrough and *The Unimpeded Realization* may be the first source where this shift is taking place. Later on these type of analytical meditations became codified as practices of distinguishing (*shan 'byed*) found for example in Jigs med gling pa's *Seminal Heart of Klong chen pa* (*Klong chen snying thig*). For more on the philosophy of mind and wisdom/awareness, see David Higgins' dissertation, *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical rDzogs chen in Tibet*.

⁵³ *Theg pa spyi'i chos ni: sems kyi byung sa btsal bas ma rnyed pa de skyed med du ngo sprod pa yod: gnas sa btsal bas ma rnyed pa de gnyis med zung 'jug tu ngo sprod pa yod: tha ma 'gro sa btsal bas ma rnyed pa de 'gag med du ngo sprod pa yod do: rdzogs pa chen po dzongs pa zang thal bas: sems kyi byas pa thams cad 'khrul par thag rbad kyi bcaid do: dang po byung sa yang kun gzhi bar ma do nas byung bas gzhi ngos zin: bar du gnas sa rigs drug tu gnas nas 'khrul kyang: da lta bla ma dam pas man ngag gsungs ma thag tu: mgron po lam nor log pa bzhin tu sems kyi bya ba dug bzhin tu dor nas: sems med kyi rig pa ngos 'dzin: tha ma 'gro sa ngo nyid kyi sku bya ba 'khor 'das gnyis ka'i gzhi de rtogs pa mngon du gyur na sangs rgya par 'dod do: (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud bar ma) UR II:500.*

that compares abiding reality to the sky devoid of arising, abiding and disappearing? The question is pressing and not sufficiently resolved in the anthology. It seems that in the passage above from *The Ten Steps* there is no contradiction, because Padmasambhava is describing the abiding reality (*gnas lugs*) or the way things really are, which in the Great Perfection refers to the union of emptiness and awareness (not mere emptiness), personified as the primordial Buddha couple Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī in union. However, later in *The Ten Steps* Padmasambhava describes the mind as not arising or disappearing anywhere along the lines of the common vehicles criticized in *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana*:

The great guru said: "mTsho rgyal, abandon ties to the three doors, and whatever coarse conceptuality you have in the mind, think as to from where it initially arose. Investigate where it abides in the middle. Look where it goes in the end. Make effort until you find it."

[After seven days] the lady said: "For seven days, I had intense conceptuality of wanting to be free from saṃsāra. I examined where it arose from, and I thought it arose from this form aggregate. I examined where the form arose from, and I thought it was generated by my parents. I examined how they were generated, but I did not know it, so I did not find the place of arising. I examined again where the body goes in the end, so I saw that it dies. Well then, I examined where the conceptuality goes to, but I did not find a destination."

The great guru said: "mTsho rgyal, did you cut off the root of confusion?"

She answered as before, so he said: "mTsho rgyal, the confused mind is clouded by the co-emergent ignorance. Initially, there is no origin. In the end, there is no place it goes to. In between it binds itself and does and experiences all kinds of things. For example, even though clouds, thunder and lightning appear in the empty sky like great magical apparitions, in the end, the place where they go is the sky itself, so there is no [other place for them to go] on the side. The general confused conceptuality of the six classes of beings also arises initially in this way.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ mTsho rgyal sgo gsum brel ba spong la: yid la gang hrag pa'i rtog pa de: dang po gang nas byung bsam mmo thong: bar du gang na gnas tshol: tha ma gang du 'gro ltos: de ma rnyed bar du rtsol ba bskyed gsung ngo: jo mo nyid kyis zag bdun du 'khor ba nas thar bar 'dod pa'i rtog pa hrag par 'dug nas: de ci las byung bltas pas gzugs kyi phung po 'di las byung 'dug: gzugs gang nas byung bltas pas pha ma gnyis kyis bskyed par 'dug: de ji ltar bskyed bltas pas ma shes te byung sa ma rnyed: yang gzugs tha ma gar 'gro bltas pas 'chi: o na rnam rtog gar 'gro bltas pas 'gro sa ma rnyed pa las: ma hā gu rus bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal 'khrul pa'i rtsa ba chod dam gsungs: gong ltar zhus pas: bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal 'khrul pa'i sems 'di lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pas bsgrub nas: dang po byung sa med pa tha ma 'gro sa med pa la bar skabs 'dir kho rang gis kho rang bcings nas: ci yang byed la gang yang myong ba gcig yin: dper na nam mkha' stong pa la 'brin dang 'brug dang glog 'gyu ba cho 'phrul che ba ltar snang yang: tha ma 'gro sa nam mkha'

While *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* specifies the universal ground as the origin of the mind, the six realms as the dwelling and the body of essence as the destination, in the passage above Padmasambhava states that the confused mind lacks a place of origin and destination. A skillful commentator might attempt to explain this contradiction away by saying that the six realms are an illusion and the universal ground is indeterminate and cannot be pinpointed to be anything particular, which is why they do not constitute real places of arising or dwelling. We may also choose to view this as another example of how paradoxes are utilized in the Great Perfection. However, the two explanations are different, and this suggests heterogeneous sources and multiple editors at work in the compilation of *The Unimpeded Realization*. Moreover, in the light of these passages from *The Ten Steps*, the criticism leveled to the common vehicles in *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* becomes rather mute and mainly illustrates the polemical agenda to establish the Great Perfection as a superior Buddhist path.

4.3. mTsho rgyal's visionary journey

After struggling with the question of identifying the origin, dwelling and destination of the mind for a long time, Ye shes mtsho rgyal practices a simple breakthrough meditation of just letting the mind be naturally without fabrications for seven months in the cave of mChims phu in bSam yas. As a result, she experiences the first one of the four visions (*nyams kyi snang ba bzhi*) in the form of a long visionary journey. As she realizes the emptiness of phenomenal objects, she is able to pass through them as if they were holograms. She comes through the wall of her cave unimpededly and flies to India. After settling a group of 500 elephants in meditative equipoise and sitting on a bridge as a royal procession of tigers, leopards and elephants passes through her, she arrives at Bodh Gaya, penetrates the Bodhi tree and meditates inside it for seven days. She tries to pass through the vajra seat, but to her surprise, is unable to penetrate it. In dismay, she decides to take it with her, ties her belt around it and flies up in the air. The entire Bodh Gaya lifts up with the vajra seat, but she lets go of it shortly after being urged by five hundred young boys that appear from the sky wearing white robes. Then, the five hundred boys take her to Joyous Heaven (dGa' ldan) and she passes through

rang yin pas zur na med: dang po 'gro drug spyi'i 'khrul rtog yang de lta bu la byung ba yin no gsungs so: (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu) UR V:328-329.

all the palaces there. Upon a short visit to Mt. Meru, Ye shes mtsho rgyal flies for ten days and arrives at Akaniṣṭha, the supreme pure land or Buddha paradise of Samantabhadra. She discovers that it is another place she cannot pass through.

I came to a dwelling in space, the ground of which looked like it was filled with five kinds of jewels. There was nowhere to go. I thought to pass through it, but I went on the side like sweeping a hand along a silk curtain. I looked, and upon five lights, there were figures in equipoise approaching enlightenment. They were uninterruptedly confident among melodious sounds. Their eyes were like the rays of the sun and were unbearable to look at. A white Buddha above me without ornaments said: "Yoginī, yet again your yogic discipline is great. This is the expanse of reality (*dharmadhātu*) of Akaniṣṭha. You do not conceptualize empty appearances, but you should still generate diligence in concentration. After three instances of the dharmakāya, 25 years of the nirmāṇakāya and 1800 human years from now, you will come to this place with a noble retinue of 600 000 beings."⁵⁵

Ye shes mtsho rgyal's journey continues with a visit to the pure land of the Buddha Akṣobhya. With her mind, she constitutes a long stairway in the sky, but every time she arrives at the top there are more steps to climb. Eventually she arrives, meets Akṣobhya surrounded by limitless bodhisattvas and asks for teachings. She perceives herself as being simultaneously in Akṣobhya's pure land and on top of Mt. Meru, which engenders a resolution that appearances indeed are empty.

After this lengthy visionary experience and ensuing realizations, Ye shes mtsho rgyal goes to Padmasambhava to tell him about her experience. Padmasambhava explains the symbolic meaning of the various parts of her experience, ranks it and asks her to demonstrate her realization:

[Padmasambhava] said: "mTsho rgyal, listen! The confused appearances of sentient beings, the appearances of suffering and dualistic grasping, are called linked chains (*lu gu rgyud*). When a yogi releases

⁵⁵ *Rin po che lnga sbrag gi sa gzhi lta bu bar snang khang song nas 'gro sa mi 'dug; de gsheg snyom pas yol ba lag pas phul ba ltar 'gro yin 'dug; mig gis bltas pas 'od lnga phrag de'i snang na mnyam bzhas mdzad pa'i sangs rgyas su khad de 'dug; sgra snyan la gdeng che ba rgyun mi chad par 'dug; nyi ma'i 'od zer lta bu mig gis mi bzod par 'dug; bdag gi steng na sangs rgyas gyi sku; sku mdog dkar po rgyan cha khrol le 'dug pa na re rnal 'byor ma da rung brtul zhugs ches: 'di ni 'og min chos kyi dbyings yin: khyod kyi snang ba stong pa las rtog pa la med pas: da rung bsam gtan la nan tan bskyed: da lta chos sku skad cig ma gsum: sprul sku'i lo gnyis bcu rtsa lnga: sems can mi'i lo stong brgyad brgya nas rigs ldan 'khor drug 'bum dang bcas te: guas 'dir 'byon par 'gyur gyi gsungs: Ibid. V:347-348.*

his mind and lets it be without grasping, he cuts off the root of confusion completely, so the manifestations of awareness and emptiness are unobstructedly clear. Compassion to the karmic retribution in the six destinies is generated upon that. Upon that generation, she can issue forth emanations of compassion. Suffering in the six destinies is continuous, so the realization of compassion is continuous. mTsho rgyal, your experience is called the first experience of *samādhi*⁵⁶ and the former sign of *dharmatā* (reality-as-it-is). If it arises in a dream, it is the experience of inferior yogis. If the vision arises without fixation, it is the experience of middling yogis. If one can establish this kind of cognition the moment one recollects it, it is the experience of superior yogis. The 500 elephants that arose in your first experience in eastern India mean that as soon as the abiding reality is introduced to you, your awareness will transfer to a thoroughly pure land. The aggregate of your body will be still like an abandoned stone. The king with a large retinue means that you will go to Akaniṣṭha after seven births. --- Concerning the way it arose, your experience is that of superior yogis. Concerning the time of arising, it is the experience of middling yogis. You are a *ḍākinī* of the vajra family, so connect appearance and emptiness now in this moment!"

The lady of mKhar chen pulled a boulder at bSam yas with her right hand. She pulled the empty sky with her left hand and made three intricate knots, so the guru said:

"mTsho rgyal, you encountered emptiness and appearance inseparably for the benefit of sentient beings: that is the generation of the first experience of *dharmatā*. Do not be separate from that experience!"⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Samādhi* refers to various types of profound meditative states resulting from one-pointed concentration.

⁵⁷ mTsho rgyal nyon cig: *sems can pa'i 'khrul snang gnyis 'dzin sdug bsngal kyi snang ba lu gu rgyud bya ba yin: rnal 'byor pa sems 'dzin med du klod bzhas pa'i dus na: phu 'khrul pa'i rtsa ba chod pas stong la rig pa'i 'char sgo ma 'gags par gsal ba: de la 'gro drug gi las la snying rje skyes: skyes pa la thug rje'i sprul pa 'gyed nus: thugs rje rgyun chad med pa de rigs drug gi sdug bsngal rgyun chad med pas dgongs pa yin: mtsho rgyal khyod kyi nyams de ting nge 'dzin gyi nyams dang po bya ba yin: chos nyid kyi rtags sngon ma bya ba yin: de rmi lam du byung na rnal 'byor pa tha ma'i nyams yin: nyams snang gtad med la byung na rnal 'byor pa 'bring gi nyams yin: da ltar gyi shes pa skad cig dran ma thag gtad la phebs na: rnal 'byor pa rab kyi nyams yin: khyod kyi nyams snang dang po la shar ba'i rgya gar shar phyogs na glang po che lnga brgya 'dug pa de khyod kyi gnas lugs ngo sprod ma thag: rig pa rnam par dag pa'i zhing du 'phos: gzugs kyi phung po rdo bor ba bzhin rong nge 'dug: rgyal po 'khor mang po dang bcas pa de skye ba bdun gyi khongs su 'og min gyi gnas su phyin par 'gyur: --- khyod kyi 'char lugs de rnal 'byor pa rab kyi nyams yin: 'char dus de rnal 'byor pa 'bring gi nyams yin: khyod rdo rje rigs kyi mkha' 'gro ma yin pas da lta skad cig ma la snang stong gnyis la mtshams sbyor gyis gsungs so: mkhar chen bzas phyag g.yas kyi bsam yas kyi brag 'then: g.yon gyis nam mkha' stong pa 'then te rgya mdud gsum rgyab pas: gu ru'i zhal nas: mtsho rgyal khyod kyi sems can gyi don snang stong zung du 'phrod chos nyid kyi nyams dang po skyes 'dus pas: de nyams de dang ma bral gyis shig gsungs: (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu) UR V:352-355.*

4.4. The Eight Experiences

As the text points out, mTsho rgyal's profound experience is only the first stage of a long process of solitary practice of refining and expanding her realization. Even though she realizes that form is emptiness and could demonstrate it by tying a boulder into a knot with the sky, there is much more to attain. Similar to Padmasambhava's training under Śrī Siṃha, mTsho rgyal has to transcend attachment to the visions, expand awareness and attain complete renunciation and non-duality, but in *The Ten Steps* the explanations and dialogues are much more substantial than in *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction*. mTsho rgyal's realization is presented as growing through eight stages or eight experiences of *dharmatā*, and in each stage she receives instructions on how to enhance (*bogs 'don*) or transcend her realization. The first experience is her visionary journey related above. In the second experience, she perceives the appearances of the world clearly through her cave wall and they are infused with luminosity, emptiness, clarity and bliss. The text describes her vision, which is called the second experiential vision of *dharmatā* (*chos nyid nyams kyi snang gnyis pa*):

The cave became unimpededly transparent without inside and outside. The world and its people were lucidly clear without obstructions, lucidly clear whether she had her eyes open or closed. She thought: "This is the experience of clarity. Without attachment to any experience of emptiness whatsoever, emptiness and appearance have become one. In the experience of bliss, the body and mind are inseparable and the naked awareness is clear, vivid and vibrating. The appearances in their multitude are luminous in the absence of attachment. The self-arisen self-display of cognition is like the rising sun."⁵⁸

In the third vision or experience, Padmasambhava instructs mTsho rgyal to expand her awareness and she practices accordingly:

mTsho rgyal, the lady of mKhar chen, expanded her awareness in the cave in mChims phu for three months, so she generated many experiences. Wherever she rested her mind, there arose a lucid openness as one-pointed emptiness and clarity. She thought: "This is what is called the yoga of one-pointedness." She was not attached to any appearances whatsoever as having substance. Her mind did not abide in

⁵⁸ *Brag phug phyi nang med par zang thal le: snod bcud sgrib pa med par sal le: mig phye btsun med par sal le: de gsal ba'i nyams yin stong pa'i nyam gang la yan shen pa med par snang stong phyal phyal 'gro ba: bde ba'i nyam lus sems dbyar med par: rig pa rjen pa lhan lhan phril phril 'gro ba: snang ba sna tshogs su gsal ba shen pa med pa: shes pa rang snang rang shar nyi ma shar ba lta bu: Ibid. V:358.*

any particular point, and her awareness became pervasive. She thought: "This indeed is what is called the yoga devoid of elaborations." However she looked, it was as one, so there was nothing whatsoever to abandon or accomplish. She thought: "This is the yoga of one taste. Now, even if I meditate, there is nothing [higher] than this. There is indeed primordially nothing to practice, nothing to meditate on, so this very state is what is called non-meditation." --- The visions were not of one kind, but arose variously like waves on water or like magical apparitions in the sky.⁵⁹

The fourth stage entails a complete transcendence of visions and a return to pure awareness:

Then, mTsho rgyal, the lady of mKhar chen asked the great master Padmasambhava: "Great master, how should I enhance the *samādhi* now?"

He said: "You do not need to enhance the *samādhi*. Make your initial cognition uncontrived."

She asked: "Well then, what is the meaning of all the meditations?"

He said: "mTsho rgyal, listen! If you do not enhance the meditation experiences with *samādhi*, you will not recognize the uncontrived cognition and the visions of realization that are just dust particles flying on sun beams will become obstacles. When the three levels of visions have arisen, making effort in meditation and all kind of exertion is pointless. These are called visions. mTsho rgyal, do not regard the situational visions as supreme. Do not look at external appearances of objects. Do not look at the internal mind. Do not do any activities at all. Do not engage in any hatred or desire whatsoever. Do not have any doubts or fears, but release your cognition as you please. Let the essence of your mind, your awareness, be like the sky."

The lady of mKhar chen took those very instructions into her experience in the cave of mChims phu for one month, so all the visions generated earlier became like husks of the intellect. Suffering was exhausted, so the basic temporal wakefulness was not obscured by any faults or virtues whatsoever. She realized awareness as single, devoid of the result and something to meditate on. She realized that even if one meditates, there was nothing to generate, and even if one does not meditate, there was nothing to be confused about. Realizing the nakedly relaxed basic wakefulness as one, she realized that all the contrived

⁵⁹ mKhar chen bza' mtsho rgyal mchims phu dge'u ru zla ba gsum du rig pa rgya bskyed pas nyams mang po skyes so: sems gang bzhas par gsal stong rtse gcig tu ye re ba byung: rtse gcig gi rnal 'byor bya ba 'di yin snyams pa skyes: dngos po'i snang ba gang la yang mi shen: blo gang la yang mi gnas la rig pa phyal phyal ba byung: spros bral gyi rnal 'byor bya ba 'di rang yin bsam pa byung: gang ltar bltas kyang gcig tu 'dug pas spang bya sgrub rgyu rtsa ba nas mi 'dug: 'di ro gcig gi rnal 'byor yin bsam pa byung: da sgom kyang 'di las mi 'dug: nyams su blangs rgyu bsgom rgyu rang ye mi 'dug pas: sgom med bya ba 'di rang yin bsam pa byung: --- nyams snang rigs mi gcig pa chu'i gnyer ma lta bu nam mkha'i cho 'phrul lta bu sna tshogs byung ngo: Ibid. V:360-362.

and nakedly free phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa were of one essence.⁶⁰

In the fifth stage, Ye shes mtsho rgyal practices non-dual yogic discipline letting her cognition manifest naturally and wandering around like a bird in the sky. Then, she returns to Padmasambhava and in the sixth stage she receives instructions on how to cut off the eight elaborations or “ropes of fondness” pertaining to saṃsāra and nirvāṇa (*dmar thag brgyad gcad*), which are further investigations on the nature of awareness. The first four elaborations conducive to saṃsāra are the elaborations of causes, conditions, substance and the three times. mTsho rgyal has to examine whether awareness relates to any of these concepts: whether it arises from causes, is destroyed by conditions, has a substance, or arises, abides and disappears in the three times. The four elaborations conducive to nirvāṇa entail cutting through the conceptual constructs of (1) eternalism and nihilism, (2) hopes and fears, (3) listening, reflecting and meditating, and (4) a meditator and object of meditation.

In the seventh stage, mTsho rgyal has to cut off various superimpositions elaborated upon empty *dharmatā* awareness, such as the superimpositions of the world and its beings, their birth, flourishing and decline, and even the concept of the three times as such. All these are like dreams or magical projections of the mind that need to be cleared away by looking at non-dual pure awareness lucid in the gaps in between superimpositions.

It is interesting that in these higher stages of Ye shes mtsho rgyal's Great Perfection training when she has already transcended the perception of visions and has practiced non-dual conduct, the topics to contemplate are similar to the *sūtra* vehicles but they are related to

⁶⁰ *De nas mkhar chen bza' mtsho rgyal gyis: slob dpon chen po padma 'byung gnas la zhus pa: slob dpon chen po: da bdag gis ting nge 'dzin la bogs ji ltar 'don zhus pas: bka' stsal pa: da ting nge 'dzin gyi bogs 'don mi dgos kyis: khyod rang gi dang po'i shes pa de bcos med du khyer la gsungs so: o na sgom pa thams cad kyi don gang lags zhus pas: bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal nyon cig: sgom pa'i nyams ting nge 'dzin gyi bogs ma thon no: shes pa ma bcos pa ngo mi shes te: rtogs pa'i snang ba nyi zer gyi rdul tsam gyis bar du gcod yod: nyams kyi snang ba rim pa gsum shar nas: sgom pa'i rtsol ba byas nas: thams cad 'bad pa don med: nyams kyi snang ba bya ba yin: mtsho rgyal gnas skabs kyi nyams snang la mchog tu ma 'dzin: phyi's yul snang la ma blta: nang gi sems la ma blta: bya ba ci yang ma byed: zhe 'dod gang la yang ma byed: dogs pa ma bca' nyam nga ma byed shes pa ci dgar thong: sems kyi ngo bo rig pa nam mkha' ltar zhog gsungs so: mkhar chen bza'i mchims phu dge'u ru de kho na bzhin nyams su blangs pas: gong du skyes pa'i nyams snang thams cad blo yi spun par song ste: sdug zad pas tha mal dus kyi shes pa: skyon dang yon tan gang gis ma sgrib pa: rig pa gcig pu ru rtogs: de la sgom rgyu dang 'bras bu gnyis gnyis mi 'dug ste: sgom kyan ci yang skye rgyu med ma sgom kyang 'khrul rgyu med par rtogs so: tha mal gyi shes pa gcer bur lhang pa gcig tu rtogs te: a byas se: rjen khres se: 'khor 'das gyi chos thams cad ngo bo gcig tu rtogs so: Ibid. V:364-366.*

the distinctive *rdzogs chen* concept of pristine wisdom awareness (*rig pa*). Like a student of Madhyamaka philosophy, she has to contemplate the illusory nature of causes and conditions, and cut through eternalism and nihilism, agent and object and hopes and fears. The important difference, however, is that the nature of reality is described as a union of emptiness and awareness instead of mere emptiness.

In the eighth and final stage of training, Padmasambhava instructs Ye shes mtsho rgyal to just let be or let the mind abide. This is done with four skilled methods described in terse, somewhat cryptic verses that point to the single empty nature of all phenomena and amount to resting in equipoise in the ultimate reality free from the false identification with the self. Various analogies are also employed to illustrate the point.

The master Padma said: "Lady of mKhar chen, you have to abide in the peaceful innate nature. To expand on that, you have to let be through four skilled methods. Let the knowable, knower and method be peaceful and empty by themselves. It is like extracting the heart of a wise person. Let everything be in the state of great stainless clear light. Like the clear sky that is naturally luminous, let whatever arises be as the great self-arisen self-display. Another analogy is the sun rising in the sky. Without conceptuality, let the six consciousnesses be at ease. It is like a skillful person training an ox. Then, you have to abide through the four skilled abidings:

- (1) Empty, absent and unmanifest. When you have defeated yourself naturally, abide.
- (2) Forgotten, is not mindful and unmindful. When you have cut off your own life force naturally, abide.
- (3) Was not born, is not born and unborn. When you have delighted in one taste, abide.
- (4) Undone, is not done and cannot be done. When you have destroyed yourself, abide.⁶¹

The eighth stage also entails training on conduct. mTsho rgyal has to take to the path all her fears, adverse conditions and problems by

⁶¹ *sLob dpon padma'i zhal nas: mkhar chen bza' gnyug ma'i rang bzhin zhi bar gnas dgos te: de yang bzhag thabs la mkhas pa bzhis bzhag dgos te: shes bya shes byed thabs gsum rang zhi rang stong du zhog: dper na skyes bu rig pa can gyi snying bton pa lta bu'o: gang yang dri med 'od gsal chen po'i ngang la zhog: dper na nam mkha' dag pa rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal ba lta bu cir snang rang byung rang snang chen por zhog: dper na bar snang la nyi ma shar ba lta bu'o: rtog med tshogs drug rgya yan du zhog: dper na mkhas pas ba lang skyong ba bzhin no: de nas gnas pa la mkhas pa bzhi yis gnas dgos te: stong dang med dang ma grub gsum: rang phung rang gis sgrub nas gnas: rjed dang ma dran dran med gsum: rang srog rang gis bcad nas gnas: ma skyes mi skye skye med gsum: gcig ro gcig la 'kal nas gnas: ma byas mi byed mi gtub gsum: gcig shig gcig gis bdur nas gnas: Ibid. V:391-392.*

seizing them with mindfulness and welcoming them as friends “like a peacock delights in deadly poison.”⁶² The text describes the final stages of a yogi perfecting their conduct:

One lives alone like a lion, has no weaknesses like an ox, is free from attachment like a small child, has no concern of pure and impure like a dog or pig, is not fixated on concepts like a mad person and destroys that which is unsuitable like a sword.⁶³

After the fabulous narrative of mTsho rgyal’s experiences, the text concludes with a terse notion that she became inseparable from Samantabhadri. The future generations are urged to practice these instructions and Padmasambhava is said to have hidden the text as a treasure in Copper Colored Divine Rock with a prophecy that a dark-skinned, vulture-feathered revealer will unearth it in a degenerate, strife-filled future time.

4.5. Gradual path

Let us now turn our attention to some important topics that are highlighted by the dynamics of these narratives. Firstly, how does the text construct a vision of the gradual path to enlightenment? This paper already pointed out the polemical agenda to establish the Great Perfection as the highest vehicle. The polemics of rGod ldem’s anthology do not denigrate other vehicles, but view them as important steps that prepare one for the superior Great Perfection view and practice. This view on other vehicles is part of the text’s conception of gradual path, and the gradual nature of refining one’s realization continues in the Great Perfection. In the narratives above, it is clear that Padmasambhava progresses gradually on the *rdzogs chen* path and his realization increases in stages. Ye shes mtsho rgyal goes through eight experiences or eight stages of Great Perfection training, each having their specific goals and pith instructions. She realizes emptiness already in her first experience of *dharmatā*, the elaborate visionary journey, but her realization still has to grow and she has to expand her awareness, transcend the realm of alluring visions, refine her view and eradicate all traces of attachment.

The Great Perfection is sometimes understood as a kin to the ways of instantaneous enlightenment common in Chan and Zen Bud-

⁶² Ibid. V:393.

⁶³ *Seng nge bzhin du gcig pur tshugs: glang chen bzhin du nyams nga med: bu chung bzhin du 'dzin chags bral: khyi phag bzhin du gtsang rtsog med: smyon pa bzhin du gza' gtad med: mtshon cha bzhin du ma rung 'joms: Ibid. V:395.*

dhism, and rGod ldem's anthology also contains statements that support this aspect of the Great Perfection. For example, *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* reiterates the famous *rdzogs chen* idea that if a yogi realizes the nature of reality in the morning, he will get enlightened in that very morning.⁶⁴ Moreover, Samantabhadra attained enlightenment merely upon recognizing phenomena as self-display, and the possibility of following in his footsteps is mentioned numerous times in the anthology.

How are we to understand these conflicting models of liberation? Looking at the narratives of the anthology, we see that instant enlightenment only takes place in celestial realms, where gods and other divine beings are described as attaining liberation merely upon hearing a *rdzogs chen* teaching. On the terrestrial plane, instant enlightenment seems possible only in theory, and in practice, rGod ldem's anthology makes a strong case for a gradual path. Even Padmasambhava is presented as going through several stages of training, in which he experiences the luminous manifestations of the four visions, has to transcend them, expands his awareness and practices non-dual yogic discipline. These two narratives are particularly suited to articulate the vision of the gradual path, because they portray the liberating journey of two iconic figures in the tradition. If even Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal have to progress through gradual stages, how could a practitioner of lesser stature realize complete enlightenment in one instant?

4.6. Subtlety of enlightenment

The training of Padmasambhava and especially Ye shes mtsho rgyal through various stages of realizations also emphasizes subtlety and profundity of complete enlightenment. After realizing emptiness, perceiving visions of *dharmatā* reality and gaining different miraculous abilities, there is still more to attain. The sovereignty of these lofty *rdzogs chen* realizations is portrayed as deceptive in the sense that one may think that one has attained complete enlightenment due to the power and extent of one's awareness. The possibility of this type of misjudgment is depicted as rather pressing in *The Ten Steps*, for the text presents Ye shes mtsho rgyal as thinking that she is a Buddha three times: in the beginning of the sixth, seventh and eighth stage of her training. Excerpts are cited below from her dialogue with Padmasambhava taking place before he imparts her the corrective pith instructions on the eighth stage.

⁶⁴ *Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud bar ma*, UR II:502.

At that time, the master Padmasambhava said: "Lady of mKhar chen, would you estimate your continuum as high or low? Are you a sentient being or a Buddha?"

The lady of mKhar chen said: "I am an authentically perfected Buddha. I have realized the four innate (*sahaja*) experiences without experiencing them as primordially separate." ---

The master Padmasambhava said: "mTsho rgyal, lady of mKhar chen, your realization is like that, but you do not abide at the peak of realization, so the latent tendencies of earlier attachments have carried you into confusion. ---"

Until you have cut off the latent tendencies of earlier attachments from the root, you do not have the power and you are like a crazy person. The extent of your wisdom of knowing is still small."

The lady of mKhar chen said: "Nirmānakāya guru! I have thirty-two special insights, so do not disparage the extent my wisdom of knowing as small. The two obscurations have been exhausted, so do not claim that I have latent tendencies."

The master Padma said again: "Lady of mKhar chen, you still have not perfected the wisdom of knowing, so do not claim that you have the wisdom of omniscience. When you still have latent tendencies of earlier attachments, do not disparage yourself by saying that you do not have them. ---"

The lady of mKhar chen asked: "Since I realized the abiding reality of objects of knowledge, how come I cannot have transcended saṃsāra yet?"

He said: "There is a dagger of self-grasping in the great primordially empty ground that has not been taken out. --- There is an intricate knot of subject and object in the naturally character-free mindfulness that has not been untied.---"

The lady of mKhar chen knew she had these faults and she said: "Nirmānakāya guru, I ask for an authentic pith instruction."⁶⁵

⁶⁵ *De'i dus su slob dpon padma 'byung gnas kyi zhal nas: mkhar chen bza' khyod kyi rgyud tshod mtho dman gang tsam du phyin: khyod sems can yin nam sangs rgyas yin ces gsungs pas mkhar chen bza' yis zhus pa: bdag yang dang par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas yin te: lhan cig skyes pa'i nyams bzhi dang ye nas 'bral ma myong bar rtogs: --- slob dpon padma 'byung gnas kyi zhal nas: mkhar chen bza' mtsho rgyal khyod kyi rtogs pa de ltar yin te: khyod rtogs pa'i thog tu mi gnas pas: sngar shen gyi bag chags 'khrul par khyer nas --- da rung sngar shen gyi bag chags rtsad nas ma chod gyi bar du khyod rang la dbang med do: smyon pa dang dra'o: da rung mkhyen pa'i ye shes rgya chung ngo: zhes gsungs pas: mkhar chen bzas zhus pa: gu ru sprul pa'i sku bdag la lhag mthong gsun bcu gnyis yod pas: mkhyen pa'i ye shes rgya chung zhes skur pa ma 'debs: sgrib pa gnyis zad pas bag chags yod ces sgro ma 'dogs: ces zhus pas: yang slob dpon padma'i zhal nas: mkhar chen bza' khyod da rung mkhyen pa'i ye shes ma rdzogs pas thams cas mkhyen pa'i ye shes rang la yod ces sgro ma 'dog: da rung sngar zhen gyi bad chags yod pa la: med ces rang la skur pa ma 'debs: --- mkhar chen bzas zhus pas: bdag shes bya'i dngos po la gnas lugs rtogs pas: 'khor ba la 'da' mi nus pa ji ltar lags zhus pas: bka' stsal pa: gzhi ye stong chen po la bdag 'dzin kyi phur ba ma thon par 'dug: --- dran pa tshan ma rang grol la gzung 'dzin gyi rgya mdud ma 'grol par 'dug: --- mkhar chen bza'i rang la de ltar*

It is interesting that in this passage Ye shes mtsho rgyal insists that she is a Buddha and even debates her guru about it. In Tibetan literature, this type of defiance of one's guru is rather unusual in an exemplary guru-disciple relationship, like that of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal. Reading this dialogue certainly had and still has a startling effect on the *rdzogs chen* audience. Why is Ye shes mtsho rgyal presented as challenging Padmasambhava? One reason for this is the emphasis on the subtlety of enlightenment. The heights of all-pervading awareness are unfathomable even to an advanced practitioner. It is a reminder of humility for everyone who might want to claim enlightenment or high realization, and it sets an example to transcend one's present experiences instead of settling with or clinging to them.

4.7. Are the experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal the visions of direct transcendence?

The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction and *The Ten Steps of Profound Key Points* describe the *rdzogs chen* training of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal. Upon practicing breakthrough meditation, they have three stages of visionary experiences. In the fourth stage, they go beyond seeing visions and attain non-dual realization of empty wisdom awareness. Upon continued practice through various stages, they both attain enlightenment. The readers are bound to ask, are the experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal the four visions of direct transcendence? The visions in these narratives are considerably different compared to the standard doctrinal presentations of direct transcendence in *The Unimpeded Realization* and Seminal Heart literature in general, yet they are called the four experiential visions (*nyams kyi snang ba bzhi*) and are part of *rdzogs chen* training occurring in between breakthrough and eventual transcendence of visionary manifestations and enlightenment, just like the visions of direct transcendence in the prescriptive texts. Could this be an alternative account of direct transcendence? Can direct transcendence be this type of natural, technique-free visionary unfolding, or does it have to be a formal practice that employs the postures and gazes of direct transcendence? Do these narratives argue for the primacy of vision over cultivated visionary experiences?

First, we have to compare the *rdzogs chen* path in *The Intrinsically*

yod pa'i mtshang shes nas zhus pa: gu ru sprul pa'i sku: bdag la yang dag pa'i man ngag cig zhu 'tshal ces zhus pas: (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu) UR V:383-391.

Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction and *The Ten Steps* to ascertain whether the two narratives are sufficiently similar to conclude that they describe the same kind of training, experiences and realizations. On this basis, we can discuss the four visions of direct transcendence in the prescriptive texts and compare them with the experiences outlined in the two narratives.

4.7.1. Comparing Padmasambhava's and Ye shes mtsho rgyal's visionary training

Both *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps* refer to the visionary experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal as the four experiential visions (*nyams kyi snang ba bzhi*). The texts also employ an alternative framework to categorize the path: the eight experiences. While *The Ten Steps* outline the eight experiences clearly in separate chapters, *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* does not identify the eight stages, but merely states that Padmasambhava attained the eight experiences. However, several stages or experiences can be discerned from the narrative, especially with the outline provided by *The Ten Steps*. The eight experiences in both *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps* are presented in Table One.

Table 1.

Eight Experiences	<i>The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction</i>	<i>The Ten Steps of Profound Key Points</i>
First	Not described: only referred to as union of emptiness and appearance	Visionary journey to Bodh Gaya and pure lands
Second	Luminous visions of emptiness, clarity and bliss like the rising sun, clear whether the eyes were open or closed	Luminous visions of emptiness, clarity and bliss like the rising sun, clear whether the eyes were open or closed
Third	Expanded awareness and multiplicity of luminous visions that are one	Expanded awareness and multiplicity of luminous visions that are one
Fourth	Visions dissolve	Visions dissolve
Fifth	Non-dual yogic discipline (includes transcending desire, hopes and fears as Padmasambhava has to accept that he will not meet Śrī Simha)	Non-dual yogic discipline
Sixth	Natural enlightened activity	Cutting off the eight ropes of fondness to saṃsāra and nirvāna
Seventh		Eradicating superimpositions elaborated upon empty awareness
Eighth		Letting be

The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction does not describe

Padmasambhava's first experience of the four visions, but merely states that the four visions arise upon letting the mind abide naturally at ease, i.e. breakthrough contemplation, and the initial experience entails the union of emptiness and appearance. Ye shes mtsho rgyal's first visionary experience in *The Ten Steps* is her long visionary journey. Her experience is also described as arising from her realization of emptiness of all appearances, although the text refers to her vision as containing an element of confusion and conceptuality.⁶⁶

The descriptions of the second and third visions in these two narratives are very similar accounts of seeing luminous visions of bliss, clarity and emptiness. In the second stage, both Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal see the visions whether their eyes are open or closed. The topic of expanding the mind is central in the third vision in both narratives and the visions manifest as multiple, but are realized as being one. The fourth vision in both narratives entails transcending all visionary manifestations, and in the fifth stage both Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal train in non-dual yogic discipline. However, while *The Ten Steps* clearly outlines the sixth, seventh and eighth stages, *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* only discusses one more stage of training after non-dual yogic discipline. This is labeled "natural enlightened activity" because it entails maintaining the realization of non-dual yogic discipline with the Great Perfection view, meditation as in the Secret Mantra and conduct like in the Vinaya. This difference in the final stages of the two narratives highlights Padmasambhava superiority: he is presented as needing less training and progressing more swiftly to enlightenment through the final three stages as they are collapsed into one.

The path structures in *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps* are very similar. Frequently, the texts even employ the same phrases to express the disciples' realizations, such as in the fourth experience the visionary manifestations are purified as if they were "husks of intellect" and Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal realize that "all the contrived and nakedly free phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa were of one essence."⁶⁷ Thus, the texts clearly discuss the same Great Perfection training and realizations, even though there is definite individual variation, the most notable differences being Ye shes mtsho rgyal's visionary journey and the additional reflections she needs to apply in the last three stages.

⁶⁶ *Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu*, UR V:344-345.

⁶⁷ *Ngo sprod rang rig rang gsal padma'i zhus lan*, UR V:158, *Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu*, UR V:365.

4.7.2. *The visionary training of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal vis-à-vis direct transcendence*

So, how do the descriptions of the four experiential visions and eight experiences in these narratives compare to the doctrinal presentations of direct transcendence? The four visions (*snang ba bzhi*) of direct transcendence are outlined in several texts in rGod ldem's anthology, such as the cycle of *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava*,⁶⁸ *The Secret Lamp*⁶⁹ and *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra*. The description below is from *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* in the fourth volume of *The Unimpeded Realization*. The account is virtually identical to the descriptions of the four visions in the Seminal Heart literature in general. The basis of the practice is undistracted focus and unmoving eyes attained as a result of the breakthrough (*khregs chod*) contemplation. The yogi also applies particular bodily postures and gazes, in particular the postures of the lion, elephant and rishi and the upward, sideways and downward gazes. Upon gazing at natural light sources such as the sun, moon or a flame, the yogi perceives the first vision, the Direct Perception of *Dharmatā* (*chos nyid mngon sum*). Circular manifestations of light or *bindus* (*thig le*) begin to connect and form chain-like patterns together with the five colors of the five kinds of wisdom.

In the second vision of Experience's Increase (*nyams gong 'phel*), the light patterns take various, progressively complex shapes, such as vertical patterns of five-colored light, wheel spokes, square patterns, *stūpas*, thousand-petalled lotuses, luminous nets and increasingly huge manifestations of light. In the third vision of Optimizing Awareness (*rig pa tshad phebs*), images of peaceful and wrathful deities dawn in each *bindu*. Lastly, the fourth vision of Cessation of *Dharmatā* (*chos nyid zad pa*) entails all visionary manifestations subsiding within emptiness.⁷⁰

As we can see, this brief description of the four visions is different from the experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal. The first vision of the Direct Perception of *Dharmatā* does not bear much resemblance to Ye shes mtsho rgyal's first vision in *The Ten Steps*. mTsho rgyal does not see *bindus* linked into chains or turning into various luminous shapes, but her experience is a visionary journey with a storyline that lasts several weeks and includes visiting

⁶⁸ The cycle of *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava* UR II:393-459.

⁶⁹ *The Secret Lamp: A Text on the Key points of the Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection* (Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i gnad yig gsang ba'i sgron ma) UR III:141-162.

⁷⁰ *Bi ma mi tra'i snyan brgyud chen mo rgyal po la gdams pa yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i 'grel pa ye shes rang gsal*, UR IV:346-348.

places on earth and meeting animals and people. Similarly, there are notable differences in the other stages of visions.

So, do these two narratives themselves regard the visionary experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal as direct transcendence? First, this paper will examine the terminology employed in the texts and then analyze the content. Both *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps* refer to the first four experiences as the four experiential visions (*nyams kyi snang ba bzhi*),⁷¹ a phrase similar to the four visions (*snang ba bzhi*).

Can we equate the four experiential visions with the four visions or could these refer to something else? First of all, two relevant concepts have to be introduced: visionary experiences (*snang ba'i nyams*) and mental experiences (*shes pa'i nyams*). These are two kinds of visions or experiences that a yogi can have as part of the second vision, Experience's Increase. Visionary experiences (*snang ba'i nyams*) are the visions of the five colors of wisdom and various shapes, in other words, genuine direct transcendence visions, while the mental experiences (*shes pa'i nyams*) are other, lesser, but still valued type of visions, such as smoke, mirage and butter lamp. They also include experiences of meditative absorption (*samādhi*), such as emptiness and compassion.⁷² The terminology used in the two narratives aligns the visions of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal with the more profound type, the visionary experiences (*snang ba'i nyams*).

What about the phrase "experiential vision" (*nyams kyi snang ba*)? Does it appear elsewhere in Seminal Heart literature? "Experiential vision" does not appear in other texts of *The Unimpeded Realization* that discuss direct transcendence visions. However, in Klong chen pa's *The Treasury of Words and Meanings*, we have three occurrences of "experiential vision." All of them appear in citations from The Seventeen Tantras (*Unimpeded Sound* and *Garland of Pearls*), not in Klong chen pa's writing. Two of them likely refer to the second vision of direct transcendence, the Vision of Experience's Increase (*nyams gong 'phel kyi snang ba*),⁷³ but the third citation is clearly referring to direct transcendence visions in general, because the "experiential visions" are said to be emptied out in the fourth vision, Cessation of Dharmatā:

In the Vision of Cessation of Dharmatā,
Experiential visions are emptied out,
The body ceases and sensory objects cease too.
Having become liberated from the host of conceptuality,

⁷¹ *Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu*, UR V:152, 352, 356.

⁷² *The Secret Lamp*, UR III:156.

⁷³ *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* 264, 390.

You are free from words as a basis of expression.⁷⁴

In addition, *The Illuminating Lamp* (*sGron ma snang byed*), which is Vimalamitra's commentary on *The Tantra of Unimpeded Sound*, contains numerous references to "experiential visions" in the context of direct transcendence visions. The text states:

Now, the second topic, the teaching on the experiential visions of the training that involves an object of focus. To expand on that, the external appearances become primordial wisdom. The various internal flickering conceptual thoughts and the intellect that thinks "this is" or "this is not" cease, and the visions of the colors, shapes and measures of the five kinds of wisdom arise.⁷⁵

This passage describes the experiential visions that arise when one trains with an object of focus, probably referring to a light source such as the sun or a flame. The visions that arise are clearly visions of direct transcendence, as they are said to be visions of the five kinds of wisdom. *The Illuminating Lamp* also refers to the experiential visions as subsiding before the vision of the Cessation of Dharmatā:

When the experiential visions have ceased naturally, there is the Cessation of Dharmatā.⁷⁶

It seems clear that even though the four visions in *The Ten Steps* have the qualifying word "experiential" (*nyams*), from the point of view of this terminological label, the text could be referring to the four direct transcendence visions. However, the individual visions in the two narratives are not called with the names used in the prescriptive texts. The terms Direct Perception of *Dharmatā*, Experience's Increase and Awareness's Optimization are conspicuously absent in the two narratives. Instead, Ye shes mtsho rgyal's visions are called the first experience of *dharmatā* (*chos nyid kyi nyams dang po*), the second experiential vision of *dharmatā* (*chos nyid nyams kyi snang ba gnyis pa*) and the third experiential vision (*nyams snang gsum pa*). Padmasambha-

⁷⁴ *Chod nyid zad pa'i snang ba ni// nyams kyi snang ba stongs nas ni// lus zad dbang po'i yul zad nas// rtog tshogs 'khrul pa las khrol nas// brjod gzhi'i tshig dang bral ba'o//* Citation from *The Tantra of Unimpeded Sound* in *The Treasury of Words and Meanings*, 399.

⁷⁵ *Da ni gnyis pa dmigs rten la bslabs pa'i nyams kyi snang ba bstan pa ni/ de yang phyi snang ba ye shes su 'gyur/ nang 'gyu ba shes pa'i rtog pa sna tshogs pa'i nyams yin snyam pa dang/ min snyam snyom byed kyi blo zad pa'i snang ba/ ye shes lnga'i kha dog dang/ dbyibs dang tshad kyi snang ba shar te/* (*The Illuminating Lamp*, II:411). For more references to *nyams kyi snang ba*, see *Ibid.* I:32, I:73, II:471, II:506 and II:576.

⁷⁶ *Nyams kyi snang ba rang zad nas/ chos nyid zad par 'gyur ba ni/* (*The Illuminating Lamp*, I:32).

va's individual visions are not given any names, but they are just collectively referred to as the four experiential visions and the eight experiences.

What about the context and content of the visions? Do they suggest that these are the four visions of direct transcendence or something else? These are more difficult questions to answer conclusively at this point, but this paper shall compare and analyze the model of visionary *rdzogs chen* training in the two narratives vis-à-vis a standard description in the prescriptive texts and present a tentative view. The stages of training and experiences are summarized in Table Two.

Table 2.

Stage of visionary/ contemplative experience	Prescriptive texts such as <i>The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra</i>	<i>Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction</i>	<i>The Ten Steps of Profound Key Points</i>
First	Direct Perception of <i>Dharmatā</i> : <i>bindus</i> link together forming vajra chains and colors of five wisdoms manifest	Not described: referred to as the union of appearance and emptiness	Visionary journey to Bodh Gaya and pure lands
Second	Experience's Increase: visions take specific shapes	Luminous visions of bliss, clarity and emptiness	
Third	Awareness's Optimization: visions of deities	Expanded awareness and multiplicity of luminous visions	
Fourth	Cessation of <i>Dharmatā</i> : visions dissolve	Visions dissolve	
Fifth		Non-dual yogic discipline	
Sixth		Natural enlightened activity	Cutting off the eight ropes of fondness to <i>samsāra</i> and <i>nirvāṇa</i>
Seventh			Eradicating superimpositions elaborated upon empty awareness
Eighth			Letting be

Comparing the first visionary experience in the prescriptive texts and the two narratives, we see that the content is rather different. mTsho rgyal's first vision is a visionary journey, as opposed to seeing *bindus* connecting into chains, and the visual content of Padmasambhava's first experience is not described. However, there is one important indication that there may be a connection between the linked chains (*lu gu rgyud*) of *bindus* and mTsho rgyal's visionary journey, because, as we have seen above, after mTsho rgyal relates her visionary journey to Padmasambhava, he begins his analysis of her experience by equating appearances with the linked chains (see the section 4.3 mTsho rgyal's visionary journey). It seems that Padmasambhava is

referring to mTsho rgyal's experience as a purified experience of the linked chains, which themselves are said to be visual manifestations of dualistic perception. This reference connects mTsho rgyal's first vision to the framework of direct transcendence, because *bindus* connecting into linked chains dominates the first vision of direct transcendence.

The second vision in the two narratives is quite similar to the vision of Experience's Increase in the prescriptive texts, because it entails seeing luminous manifestations, although Padmasambhava and mTsho rgyal are not said to see specific shapes such as wheel spokes or lotuses. The third vision in the narratives and prescriptive texts is generally different, as Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal do not see the visions of deities that characterize Awareness's Optimization. Instead, mTsho rgyal sees visions of deities (Buddha Samantabhadra and Akṣobhya) during her first vision, i.e. her visionary journey, and Padmasambhava is briefly mentioned to have visions of the Eight Herukas in the very end of his training. However, the third vision in the two narratives and prescriptive texts contains an interesting parallel. Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal aim at expanding awareness on the third stage and their increasingly refined visionary experiences arise from the successful expansion of awareness. A notion similar to expansion is also there in the Optimization of Awareness, because the visionary manifestations reach the fullest expression in the maṇḍalas of the deities. It is also notable that in the prescriptive texts the goal of the practice is to realize that awareness (*rig pa*) is inseparable from space or expanse (*dbyings*) – a concept that is a kin to expansive awareness. Klong chen pa states in *The Treasury of Words and Meanings*:

Looking at one's own condition in direct immediacy, the target aimed at in the Great Perfection tradition is held to be that which is termed "the realization of the non-duality of the expanse and awareness."⁷⁷

The fourth experience in the two narratives seems identical to the vision of Cessation of Dharmatā in the prescriptive texts, because in all these accounts the fourth stage entails the dissolution of all visionary manifestations within the empty nature of reality. However, the classificatory scheme of eight experiences in the two narratives still contains further stages of training before attaining enlightenment, such as the non-dual yogic discipline and meditations to refine the

⁷⁷ *rDzogs pa chen po 'di'i lugs kyi gtad so'i 'bem mngon sum rang ngo la blta ba dbying rig gnyis su med pa'i dgongs pa zhes bya bar 'dod de/ (The Treasury of Words and Meanings, 282).*

view and eradicate last traces of attachment.

The fifth experience, the non-dual yogic discipline, introduces an element of conduct as a higher training after the visionary practices. This emphasizes the importance of action and lifestyle, or the way one's realization manifests in the daily life and the way one's conduct engenders realization. The notion of conduct is present also in Padmasambhava's sixth and last training that includes the ethical conduct of the Vinaya and the meditation of the Secret Mantra. Notably, Ye shes mtsho rgyal's sixth and seventh stages of practice include an element of analytical reflection and refinement of the view, as she is instructed to examine various topics, such as the nature of awareness, hopes, fears, agent and object. Only mTsho rgyal's eighth and last stage of training does not contain any analytical elements, but evokes the pristine realization of the vision of Cessation of Dharmatā in its various instructions to simply let be or abide in the ultimate realization.

How should we understand the last stages of training in the two narratives after the visions dissolve? Could these be seen as elaborations on the vision of Cessation of Dharmatā? Is this a different view on Great Perfection training that considers further practice as necessary after the visions dissolve? Or does this demonstrate that the visions in the two narratives are not the visions of direct transcendence? The answer depends on whether we choose to view the visionary experiences and their dissolution in the two narratives as direct transcendence. There are certainly sufficient differences to discredit such identification. Perhaps the texts could be discussing a less known rubric, the four visions of breakthrough, described for example by Klong chen pa in *The Naturally Liberated Nature of the Mind (Sems nyid rang grol)*.⁷⁸ This would fit with the general outlook of *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity*, which is closely aligned with breakthrough and its key concept of primordial purity (*ka dag*). However, the description of the four visions of breakthrough by Klong chen pa does not contain discernible visionary content, not to mention a visionary journey, nor the idea of expanding awareness. Moreover, the concept of the four visions of breakthrough does not appear in *The Unimpeded Realization* or *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity*.

In the context of the 14th century Great Perfection tradition in general and *The Unimpeded Realization* in particular, Padmasambhava is the figure that is associated with the transmission of the Seminal Heart (*sNying thig*) of the Pith Instruction Series (*Man ngag sde*) and its distinctive practice: direct transcendence. The transmission narra-

⁷⁸ Thondup, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 376-377.

tives describe briefly how he receives these teachings from Śrī Siṃha in India and transmits them to Tibet, especially to Ye shes mtsho rgyal and Khri srong lde btsan. *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* is the only text in *The Unimpeded Realization* and *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* that describes Padmasambhava's Great Perfection training and his visionary experiences in detail. In the context of rGod ldem's *rdzogs chen* revelation, it would be appropriate if this detailed narrative of Padmasambhava's training under Śrī Siṃha was that of direct transcendence.

Despite the contextual appeal to regard these visions as direct transcendence, their content remains rather different. Even though we might expect some fluidity from a fourteenth century description of the practice, the depictions of the four visions were already relatively standard in the early Seminal Heart prescriptive literature. Thus, it seems that the visionary experiences of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal are closer to tantric pure visions (*dag snang*) even though they contain notable parallels to direct transcendence.

The visions of direct transcendence are cultivated experiences that rely on specific key points and techniques, while the visions in the two narratives are presented as a natural unfoldment of experiences that contain notable individual variation and a somewhat different template of training compared to direct transcendence. While Klong chen pa notes that individual variation does occur in the four visions, the degree of variation presented in the two narratives seems too great to conclude that the texts discuss direct transcendence. However, more research on visionary *rdzogs chen* experiences in pre-fourteenth century sources, especially in narrative literature, is necessary to ascertain whether this type of fluidity could have been associated with direct transcendence experiences early on when the creativity of the Tibetan Renaissance was still affecting literary production.

4.8. Guru-disciple relationships

The narratives of both Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal's training under their masters portray a model of guru-disciple relationships. They outline a vision of ideal social exchanges in Great Perfection training: how to follow a master and how to teach a disciple. They also highlight a central concept in Tibetan Buddhism: the importance of having a master and receiving personal guidance. This type of one-on-one dialogical guidance is still the way the Great Perfection transmission is passed on in the Northern Treasures and many other Tibetan traditions. These narratives also create a sense of lineage, because Padmasambhava passes Śrī Siṃha's teachings on to

Ye shes mtsho rgyal, using the same format and sequence of training and occasionally even the same phrases and instructions as Śrī Siṃha employed.

The Ten Steps contains abundant additional richness in its vision of guru-disciple relationships compared to the narrative of Padmasambhava's training under Śrī Siṃha. Padmasambhava is such a perfect disciple that it is hard to identify with him, but Ye shes mtsho rgyal is presented as struggling, making effort and failing to understand for a long time despite repeated attempts. The humanness of mTsho rgyal enables a yogi to identify with her, bringing the inspiration that the struggles will in the end lead to attainments.

Ye shes mtsho rgyal is also presented in *The Ten Steps* as a generally humble disciple, but with a definite bit of resistance and critical questioning of her guru's views. This aspect of her portrayal challenges the prevalent view in Tantric Buddhism that a disciple should follow a master obediently and uncritically. mTsho rgyal obeys the master only after she has come to the same understanding. She needs to resolve her doubts about the guru's judgment when he says that she is not enlightened but she thinks she is (see the citation above in the section on Eight Experiences). She is presented as true to herself and authentic in the sense that she cannot simply accept the guru's word, but has to realize its meaning first, even if it means that she has to debate and defy the master. Unlike the model of Tantric Buddhist submission, the text's vision is that one should be committed to realization, not to blind obedience. The guru's role is to help, but the disciples have to travel the journey, resolve their doubts and come to realizations by themselves.

5. Conclusion

Tibetan treasure anthologies have a uniquely heterogeneous character that accommodates many types of innovative literature. Undoubtedly this is one reason why we find such creative narratives in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *rdzogs chen* revelation as the stories of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal's Great Perfection training. By synthesizing doctrine and narrative, pith instructions and hagiography, philosophy and contemplation, *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps* fit well in the integrative agenda of rGod ldem's anthology. In the context of *The Unimpeded Realization* and *The Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity*, these transformation narratives bring to life the instructions on *rdzogs chen* meditation by portraying how the teachings are received and practiced by the iconic figures of the tradition.

These two narratives on Great Perfection training also present an interesting account of visionary experiences that seem to be pure visions (*dag snang*), though they contain notable similarities to visions of direct transcendence. The visions of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal have a four-fold structure including their eventual dissolution in the fourth stage and Ye shes mtsho rgyal's first vision contains a reference to the linked chains (*lu gu rgyud*). The contemplative context of the visions is also similar to direct transcendence as they result in enlightenment and are preceded by breakthrough meditations of letting the mind be at ease and investigating the origin, dwelling and destination of the mind. The narrative context of rGod ldem's Great Perfection revelation also begs the question whether these visions are direct transcendence, because Padmasambhava is the figure that presides over the transmission of the Seminal Heart and direct transcendence taught in the cycle of *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava* and these two narratives are the only detailed depictions of his visionary *rdzogs chen* training under Śrī Śiṃha and his passing on the transmission to Ye shes mtsho rgyal.

Even though the context of rGod ldem's *rdzogs chen* revelation suggests that the visions of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal might be direct transcendence, the differences are too pronounced to make such an identification. The names of the visions are not those of direct transcendence, and even though they contain a four-fold structure with increasing visionary profundity and eventual dissolution, they do not feature the particular luminous shapes or mandalas of deities described in Seminal Heart literature on direct transcendence. The two narratives also present the visionary training of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal with the rubric of eight experiences, adding further stages of training after the visions dissolve such as non-dual conduct and analytical reflections on the nature of reality. Thus, it seems that *The Intrinsically Radiant Self-Awareness Introduction* and *The Ten Steps* describe visionary experiences that are closer to pure visions than direct transcendence. If this is the case, it points to a narrative discrepancy in rGod ldem's Great Perfection revelation, because while direct transcendence is the trademark of Padmasambhava in rGod ldem's revelation, he is portrayed as attaining enlightenment via an alternative visionary *rdzogs chen* training that is not explained in the anthology. The puzzling character of visionary training in these two narratives presents another indication of the heterogeneous nature of rGod ldem's anthology despite his notable editorial hand and unifying themes.

The narratives on the transformative training of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal are part of the conceptual framework of the vision of Samantabhadra, the main narrative theme that integrates

the texts and topics of the anthology into a literary whole. The two transformation narratives bring the vision of Samantabhadra to Tibet, the familiar place of traditional audiences, better than any other narrative in rGod ldem's anthology due to their detailed, rich examples of how to practice the Great Perfection teachings, the didactic vision of the primordial Buddha.

Padmasambhava is in a key role in the anthology in general and in the transformation narratives in particular, and he is intimately connected to Samantabhadra's vision. As Samantabhadra's second order emanation, Padmasambhava is a prime example of Samantabhadra's diachronic involvement with the world. By presenting Padmasambhava as Śrī Siṃha's disciple in India receiving *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* and then teaching it to Ye shes mtsho rgyal in Tibet, the transformation narratives depict Samantabhadra's presence in the formative moments of transmitting the lineage of these *rdzogs chen* teachings to Tibet. It is also notable that *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* conclude by stating that Ye shes mtsho rgyal became inseparable from Samantabhadrī, which evokes the idea that Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal became the human representatives of the primordial Buddha couple on earth. The continuum of authority extends also to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, who is a heart son and speech emanation of Padmasambhava.

As part of Samantabhadra's didactic vision, the transformation narratives map the *rdzogs chen* path to the audience in practical terms. Samantabhadra's vision encompasses the audience in its prophetic conception that all readers and recipients of the anthology are karmically destined to encounter *The Unimpeded Realization*. In accordance with this, *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* presents the entire text as a set of instructions given for the sake of future generations, especially people of low intelligence, which emphasizes the idea that these teachings are not just for the outstanding genii, but for a wide range of practitioners. The narrative discourse of *The Ten Steps* states:

When the great master Padmasambhava was residing again in the solitary place of mChims phu in bSam yas, mTsho rgyal, the lady of mKhar chen, asked him: "O great master! You are an emanation body, a blissful Buddha. You see the three times clearly without obstructions. Sentient beings like me who have low intelligence know the five poisons of afflictions very well. Whatever we do, we slip into the path of confusion. It is very difficult to progress on the path to enlightenment. For the sake of myself and those who will come later, I ask for a pith instruction that teaches the path free from confusion, a teaching that accords with our low intelligence, a key point that tames the afflictions difficult to tame."

He said: "mTsho rgyal, listen! It is very good that you asked for a

profound teaching for the sake of future people of low intelligence."⁷⁹

An important point highlighted by the transformation narratives is the need to transcend the visions to a complete realization of empty, non-dual wisdom devoid of visionary content. The intricate descriptions of how this is actually accomplished in the context of practice augment the Great Perfection instructions outlined in rGod ldem's anthology. Whether we regard the visionary experiences portrayed in the narratives as direct transcendence, these depictions bring richness to our understanding of visionary training contained in *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava*, *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* and other texts on direct transcendence in *The Unimpeded Realization*. While these doctrinal texts give robust descriptions on the formation of the direct transcendence visions in the first three phases, they do not offer much concerning the last vision apart from stating that in the end all the visions are dissolved within emptiness and the yogi attains enlightenment. The transformation narratives instead elaborate on how to transcend the visions, practice non-dual conduct and eradicate final traces of attachment. Thus, the alternative framework of visionary training in the transformation narratives expands the anthology's overall presentation of the final stages of *rdzogs chen* training.

The vision of the Buddhist path in the transformation narratives is clearly that of gradual cultivation, which is in contrast with many other statements and approaches favoring instant enlightenment both in rGod ldem's anthology and Great Perfection literature in general. Samantabhadra's awakening is instant upon his recognition of the first manifestations as self-display, but Padmasambhava and Yeshe mtsho rgyal attain awakening in stages. Their realization grows gradually and becomes so glorious and powerful during the higher stages that they even think of having attained enlightenment prematurely.

In the larger context of *The Unimpeded Realization*, the instant approach is integrated in the artful synthesis of the anthology – a synthesis that encompasses many vital aspects in the Great Perfection tradition: the Three Series, transmissions from the three prominent

⁷⁹ *sLob dpon chen po padma 'byung gnas mchims phu'i yang dben na bzhugs pa'i dus su: mkhar chen bza' mtsho rgyal gyis zhus pa: kye slob dpon chen po lags: nyid ni bde gshegs sprul pa'i sku: dus gsum ma 'gag sa ler gzigs: bdag 'dra blo dman sems can rnam: nyon mongs dug lnga shes ches pas: ci byas 'khrul pa'i lam du shor: thar lam bkrod pa shin tu dka': bdag dang phyis 'byung don ched du: gang zag blo dang mthun pa'i chos: nyon mongs 'dul dka' 'dul ba'i gnad: mi 'khrul lam ston man ngag zhu: ces zhus so: bka' stsal pa: mtsho rgyal nyon cig: ma 'ongs pa'i gang zag blo dman rnam kyi don du zab mo'i chos zhus pa shin tu legs so: (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu) UR V:322-323.*

masters, Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Vairocana, as well as the spontaneous, natural approach of instant recognition and the gradual path appreciative of ethics and meditation practices. The instant path is possible for Samantabhadra and celestial beings, but everyone on earth, even Padmasambhava, is presented as having to go through gradual training. The transformation narratives discuss only Great Perfection training, but in general rGod ldem's anthology values the practices of both sūtric and tantric vehicles. They are all assimilated in the metaperspective of the Great Perfection with the *rdzogs chen* view and practices ranked as superior. The appreciation of sūtric and tantric vehicles in rGod ldem's anthology is supported by the vision of Samantabhadra, because the primordial Buddha couple is credited for the spread of these earlier vehicles through their emanations as Śākyamuni, Vajrapāṇi and Vajravārāhī.

The extensive involvement of Samantabhadra in the history of the world is one aspect of narrativizing the primordial Buddha – the paradox of the timeless *dharmakāya* Buddha narrated into the finite structures of history and time. Samantabhadra's enlightenment unfolds in the mythical time of the early stages of cosmogony and his vision spans all across history. Through the paradox of narrativizing the primordial Buddha and ascribing him a unique agency and vision, the narratives of rGod ldem's anthology are truly divinized. The precursor of this idea is the Mahāyāna notion that the three bodies of a Buddha are one in essence. In rGod ldem's anthology, this Mahāyāna notion is developed into the distinctive narrative theme, the vision of Samantabhadra, that forms a unique, gnostic space, in which all the practices and doctrines are situated and gain a deeper, interrelated meaning. Samantabhadra's compassionate presence extends from cosmic origins through mythical transmission to predestined revelation and beyond, pointing to the ultimate non-duality of history and timeless wisdom, form and empty awareness, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

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Histoire des manuels de pratique du *dGongs pa zang thal**

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u fil du très long travail qui a abouti à la parution (2016) de ma traduction française du manuel de pratique du *dGongs pa zang thal* de *sPrul sku* Tshul khrim bzang po ou *sPrul sku* Tshul lo (1884–1957)¹, j’ai eu tout loisir de me poser bien des questions sur la composition de ce vaste texte, qui est communément regardé comme le plus substantiel des *khrid yig* de ce cycle.

Dans les notes de bas de page du *Manuel de la transparution immédiate*, on trouve non seulement l’identification de pratiquement tous les textes cités (notamment ceux du *dGongs pa zang thal*, des dix-sept *tantra* ou du *Klong gsal*)², mais encore l’explication de ce que l’on pourrait appeler la structure cachée du texte — la manière dont l’auteur se sert du grand manuel de pratique du *mKha’ ’gro yang tig* de Klong chen pa (1308–1364), le *Zab don rgya mtsho’i sprin* — jamais cité — comme cadre et comme liant de tous les éléments du *dGongs pa zang thal* qu’il combine, quand les *khrid yig* inclus dans le *gter chos* n’y suffisent pas.

Cependant, dans le *Manuel de la transparution immédiate*, j’ai complètement laissé de côté l’un des champs d’interprétation possibles : celui des rapports de *sPrul sku* Tshul lo à la littérature des manuels composés entre l’époque de *Rig ’dzin rGod ldem* et la sienne.

J’avoue n’avoir trouvé dans cette littérature que bien peu des réponses aux perplexités que la lecture du *Khrid yig skal bzang re skong* et celle du *dGongs pa zang thal* lui-même m’avaient inspirées au fil des ans. Mais, comme souvent, le chercheur, qui ne trouve pas ce qu’il

* Je suis très reconnaissant à Mme Anne-Marie Blondeau pour sa relecture très méticuleuse de cet article et pour ses précieuses suggestions.

¹ Arguillère 2016 : Tülku Tsullo, *Manuel de la transparution immédiate*, Cerf, Paris, nov. 2016.

² Le travail avait déjà été largement mené à bien par Tulku Thondup, dans une traduction anglaise à diffusion restreinte : *Boundless Vision by Tulku Tsultrim Zangpo (Tulku Tsulo) — A Byangter Manual on Dzogchen Training. An Outline Commentary on the Boundless Vision of Universal Goodness*, Wandel Verkag, Berlin, 2012. En revanche, Tulku Thondup n’avait pas noté l’omniprésence souterraine du *Zab don rgya mtsho’i sprin* de Klong chen pa.

cherche, trouve en revanche bien des choses auxquelles il ne s'attendait pas.

C'est en tout état de cause une première esquisse d'histoire littéraire du *dGongs pa zang thal* que je veux proposer dans le présent article — histoire littéraire, au sens où je ne me suis intéressé ici à la transmission du *dGongs pa zang thal* que dans l'étroite mesure où elle permettait de situer ses *khrid yig*, leurs auteurs et les rapports qui les lient les uns aux autres. Autrement dit : je n'ai exploité que bien superficiellement les sources biographiques et, vu l'abondance des matériaux (dont j'ai tâché de recenser les plus importants), il faut dire que je ne pose ici que les premiers jalons d'une histoire du *dGongs pa zang thal* entre son *invention* et l'époque actuelle.

Les manuels de pratique du dGongs pa zang thal

K. Turpeinen (2015 : p. 161 *sq.*) a repéré cinq manuels de pratique du *dGongs pa zang thal* ; je les extrais de son répertoire de « commentaires », qui inclut notamment une liste — légèrement incomplète elle aussi — de textes exégétiques sur la fameuse « prière de Samantabhadra » du *dGongs pa zang thal*. Les voici, dans l'ordre chronologique reconstitué ici :

1. Śākya rgyal mtshan, *rDzogs pa chen po dgongs pa zang thal gyi man ngag zab don mngon sum gsal byed* ;
2. bKra shis rgya mtsho, *Zab mo snying thig gi gnad thams cad bsdu pa'i don khrid lag len gsal ba* ;
3. Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol, *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal gyi nyams khrid thar gling chos sku'i zhing khams su bgrod pa'i nye lam chen po* ;
4. Kaḥ thog Tshe dbang nor bu, *rDzogs chen kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal gyi khrid kyi 'chad thabs 'od kyi 'khor lo* ;
5. sPrul sku Tshul khriims bzang po, *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal gyi dgongs don phyogs gcig tu bkod pa khrid yig skal bzang re skongs rig 'dzin dgongs rgyan*.

À cette liste, il faut ajouter, pour m'en tenir à ce que j'ai trouvé à cette étape :

6. (a) Le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar gyi khrid yig chos dbyings lam bzang* de Kha'u dGa' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol, avec sa source directe,

- (b) le *Yang tig gces sgron zin bris* de Padma phrin las³, qui procède
- (c) d'un texte de Zur *chen* Chos dbyings rang grol : le *Yang tig gces pa'i sgron me'i khrid kyi rtsa tshig gsung rgyun rab gsal*, qui dépend apparemment à son tour du
- (d) *Yang tig gces sgron gyi khrid yig* de 'Gyur med rdo rje (gTer bdag gling pa), lequel commente
- (e) un texte du *gter chos* de Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, le *Thugs sgrub snying po blang ba'i phyir yang tig gces pa'i sgron me smar khrid mngon sum gtan la dbab pa'i rgyud*.
7. Il y a en outre un commentaire très détaillé de *sPrul sku* Tshul lo sur les *gZer lnga*, le *Byang gter sngon 'gro rin po che gnad kyi gzer lnga zhes bya ba tshig don legs par ston pa'i rin po che'i them skas kun bzang myur lam* (dans la nouvelle édition de ses œuvres complètes : vol. XI, p. 219-365) ;
8. Et surtout un commentaire du même auteur sur le *Lung phag mo zab rgya*, le *Rig 'dzin gter ston rnam gnyis kyi gter byon phag mo zab rgya'i dmigs khrid nyung ngur bkod pa gsang khrid gsal ba'i lde mig* (dans la même édition : vol. I, p. 219-282).

Il y a également des instructions de pratique dans son commentaire de la prière de Samantabhadra, le *Byang gter dgongs pa zang thal gyi rgyud chen las byung ba'i kun bzang smon lam gyi rnam bshad kun bzang nye lam 'od snang gsal ba'i sgron me* (dans la même édition : vol. I, p. 283-328). Mais ce serait l'objet d'un autre article que d'étudier l'histoire des commentaires du *Kun bzang smon lam*. A tort ou à raison, j'ai laissé de côté tout ce corpus — considérablement plus abondant en réalité qu'il ne paraît dans la recension qu'en donne K. Turpeinen. Il y aurait là une ample matière à exploiter, en complément des acquis du présent article, en vue d'une histoire littéraire du *dGongs pa zang thal*.

Remarques méthodologiques

D'une manière générale, ce serait une excellente méthode, pour parvenir à une véritable intelligence de l'histoire de la pensée tibétaine, que de suivre, au fil des siècles, les commentaires d'un même texte. C'est un projet que j'avais déjà en tête vers 1995, plutôt à propos de philosophie scolastique tibétaine ; les circonstances m'ont empêché de mettre ce programme en application depuis — mais c'est à des entreprises de ce genre que je me propose de consacrer principalement le temps dont je puis encore disposer.

³ C'est là en fait le plus complet des manuels de pratique du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, même s'il se donne pour tout autre chose (comme on va le voir).

Rien n'est plus révélateur en effet de l'évolution d'une pensée — surtout quand cette pensée a une forte inclination vers l'exégèse — que le déplacement progressif de l'attention de tel à tel point d'un même texte, ou que la manière de le contextualiser (de le mettre en rapport avec d'autres corpus), *etc.*⁴

La présente recherche s'inscrit à la fois dans fil de mes travaux antérieurs sur l'histoire de la pensée (philosophique) tibétaine et dans le champ ouvert par les travaux de Jean-Luc Achard sur les instructions de pratique du rDzogs chen, considérées d'un point de vue historique et philologique⁵. On pourrait objecter que les *khrid yig* du *dGongs pa zang thal* ne seraient pas un bon révélateur de l'histoire de la pensée tibétaine, étant donné le caractère technique et spécialisé du genre « manuel de pratique du rDzogs chen ». Mais cette objection relève à la fois d'une ignorance de la matière et d'une conception fautive de l'histoire culturelle.

Ignorance de la matière, parce que les manuels de pratique du rDzogs chen ne sont pas un genre pauvre ou plus stéréotypé qu'un autre : certes, il y a beaucoup de répétitions d'un texte à l'autre ; mais après tout il en va de même dans n'importe quel autre genre de la prose didactique tibétaine (comme de notre littérature religieuse ou philosophique médiévale, d'ailleurs). Les évolutions sont toujours discrètes, jamais revendiquées ouvertement ; mais un léger changement d'interprétation sur ce qui apparaît au lecteur profane comme un point de détail peut engager une réorientation assez profonde de tout un système⁶.

Une conception fautive de l'histoire culturelle, disais-je : celle qui voudrait que tout le champ de la production intellectuelle d'un peuple soit gouverné par de grands mouvements homogènes et unilatéraux, de grands *tournants de civilisation*, comme si l'on devait pouvoir repérer les mêmes tendances à l'œuvre dans toute l'étendue de ce champ, des commentaires sur le Madhyamaka aux traités de médecine ou d'astrologie, en passant par l'exégèse tantrique et les manuels de pratique méditative.

Pour ma part, je ne tends vers aucune grande synthèse exagérément unifiante — même s'il ne faut pas exclure non plus, par principe, au

⁴ Gene Smith, en son temps, avait tout à fait cela en vue et c'est dans cet esprit qu'à la fin des années 1990 il m'a envoyé un DVD compilé par BDRC de commentaires tibétains sur l'*Uttara-tantra-sāstra*.

⁵ Achard 1992, 1995, 1999, pour ne faire référence qu'à ce qui a exercé une influence directe sur les premières étapes de mon long travail sur le manuel de *sPrul sku Tshul lo*.

⁶ Sur cette idée et pour un ensemble de considérations méthodologiques sur la manière d'étudier l'histoire de la pensée au Tibet, voir notamment la postface de Arguillère 2004.

nom d'un nominalisme méthodologique intempérant, toute possibilité de ce genre. Et cela d'autant moins que le Tibet a été riche en polygraphes étendant leur activité à une bonne part des registres divers de la culture tibétaine au sens le plus large. *sPrul sku Tshul lo*, par exemple, reste le même homme quand il écrit sur le Madhyamaka ou sur le *dGongs pa zang thal* : au reste, les deux sphères se rencontrent parfois chez lui, notamment dans un écrit très remarquable, le *Kun bzang dgongs rgyan*, dont j'ai dit quelques mots ailleurs⁷ : *sPrul sku Tshul lo* l'a certainement conçu comme une sorte d'appendice à ses écrits sur le *dGongs pa zang thal* (son titre l'indique), même si, dans la forme, il s'agit plutôt d'une sorte de texte théorique de portée générale, visant à éclaircir philosophiquement ce qui se produit lors de la « confrontation » (*ngo sprod*) et par la suite lorsque l'on « préserve l'intelligence » (*rig pa skyong ba*), en termes de devenir de l'esprit ordinaire (*sems*) et de son éventuelle sublimation dans l'Intelligence (*rig pa*). Ce texte ne cite pas la littérature du *dGongs pa zang thal* ni d'aucun autre cycle de pratique déterminé.

En tout état de cause, il ne sera pas question de ce petit traité dans le présent article. De même n'étudierai-je pas séparément les commentaires de *sPrul sku Tshul lo* sur les *gZer lnga* et sur le *Lung phag mo zab rgya* — le premier parce qu'il n'apporte pas grand-chose pour ce qui nous intéresse (l'évolution de la manière de commenter le *dGongs pa zang thal*), étant simplement un commentaire littéral très fouillé des « préliminaires extraordinaires » (*thun mong ma yin pa'i sngon 'gro*) ; le second, parce qu'à cette étape, je n'ai pas résolu un problème épineux — à savoir : pourquoi, dans les *khrid yig*, les pratiques correspondant aux trois premières des cinq consécration (*dbang*) du *dGongs pa zang thal* ne sont-elles jamais incluses comme des étapes qui devraient s'insérer, disons, entre les « préliminaires extraordinaires » et les préliminaires spécifiques du *rDzogs chen* ?

*L'architecture des manuels du rDzogs chen
et l'absence des instructions tantriques*

Cette question n'est pas gratuite. A l'automne 1992, me trouvant au Népal, j'ai fait la connaissance du Lama de Maratika, Ngag dbang chos 'phel rgya mtsho (1922–1996)⁸. J'avais à la main, lors de notre première rencontre, le *Khrid yig skal bzang re skong* de *sPrul sku Tshul lo*, soigneusement empaqueté dans son *dpe ras*, car j'étais plongé dans la lecture de ce manuel que Chhimed Rigdzin Rinpoché ('Khor gdong gter sprul,

⁷ Arguillère 2016 : p. 479-482 ; voir aussi index, p. 468, pour les autres occurrences.

⁸ On trouve sa biographie dans le livre de Katia Buffetrille, *Pélerins, Lamas et visionnaires* (2000 : p. 297-325).

1922-2002) m'avait fait connaître quelques mois auparavant. Le Lama de Maratika, dont sans doute la curiosité avait été piquée par ce spectacle d'un jeune Occidental portant respectueusement un texte tibétain, me demanda ce que c'était ; quand je lui eus répondu que c'était apparemment le plus ample et le plus détaillé de tous les manuels de pratique du *dGongs pa zang thal*, il me dit immédiatement que le *dGongs pa zang thal* avait été sa pratique principale durant ses longues années de retraite dans divers ermitages ; il me prit en sympathie et c'est ainsi qu'il me raconta en détail la manière dont il avait pratiqué toutes les étapes de ce cycle d'enseignements.

Je n'ai hélas pas pris de notes à l'époque, mais je me souviens distinctement du récit qu'il m'a fait de la manière dont il a pratiqué trois systèmes qui appartiennent effectivement au corpus du *dGongs pa zang thal*. Il m'a expliqué les avoir médités entre les « préliminaires extraordinaires » (les *gZer lnga*, en l'occurrence) et les pratiques préliminaires spécifiques du *rDzogs chen*.

Ces trois systèmes⁹, pour les nommer dans l'ordre de leur apparition dans le corpus, sont :

- Le *Lung phag mo zab rgya* (dont les textes se trouvent aux p. 413-654 du vol. I du *dGongs pa zang thal* dans l'édition d'A 'dzom 'brug pa) ;
- Le *bcud len* détaillé notamment aux p. 423-484 du vol. IV ;
- Le *gSang ba rmad du byung ba*, système de *gCod* dont les textes se trouvent aux p. 515-625 du vol. IV.

Je me rappelle clairement la manière dont le Lama de Maratika m'a raconté que, dans le *gCod* du *gSang ba rmad byung* tel que son maître¹⁰ lui a fait pratiquer, il fallait, entre les sessions, s'exposer presque nu aux piqûres des moustiques qui infestaient le lieu ; il m'a décrit comment il s'allongeait sur le sol et, quand son corps était entièrement couvert de piqûres sur un côté, il devait se retourner pour présenter l'autre. Il m'a dit avoir attrapé le paludisme à cette occasion — mais que la pratique de *bcud len*, cette sorte de « jeûne alchimique »¹¹, l'en avait guéri.

⁹ On pourrait ajouter tout le système de pratique des divinités paisibles et terribles dit *Rigs lnga'i phyi sgrub*, correspondant à la première des quatre consécérations, dont tous les éléments se trouvent dans le vol. I du *dGongs pa zang thal*, p. 331-411, juste avant le *Lung phag mo zab rgya* qui correspond aux deuxième et troisième consécérations.

¹⁰ *rDza sprul rin po che*, Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu (1867-1940) ; BDRC : P29036.

¹¹ En l'espèce : Maratika Lama m'a dit n'avoir pris que de l'eau pendant deux semaines, si je me souviens bien.

Puisqu'un tel usage existait chez les pratiquants du *Byang gter*, comment se fait-il que les *khrid yig* n'en portent pas la trace ? De ces trois étapes de la pratique, en effet, il n'est même pas fait mention dans le manuel, pourtant si détaillé, de *sPrul sku Tshul lo*. Et dans son *khrid yig* du *Lung phag mo zab rgya*, réciproquement, il n'est pas question non plus du mode d'insertion de ces pratiques de *yoga* interne dans la voie graduée du *dGongs pa zang thal*. Était-ce l'usage général des maîtres du *dGongs pa zang thal*, ou est-ce là l'expression d'un choix personnel de la part de *sPrul sku Tshul lo* ? Autant le dire d'emblée : je n'ai trouvé la solution de cette énigme nulle part dans l'ensemble des manuels de pratique conservés, si ce n'est pour la constance de l'usage de *ne pas parler* de ces pratiques dans le cadre d'un *khrid yig* du *rDzogs chen*¹².

En revanche, comme on va le voir, beaucoup d'éléments sont ressortis de cette enquête quant à la manière dont les maîtres de la postérité de *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* ont envisagé l'articulation de deux corpus que l'on confond souvent en un seul bloc : le *dGongs pa zang thal* proprement dit, d'une part — et le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, d'autre part. Ce dernier a certes été publié par *A 'dzom 'brug pa* (1842–1924) comme le cinquième et dernier volume de la collection, ainsi que par *Chos rje Śā kya yar 'phel* (19e siècle : TBRC P130055). Mais on va voir qu'un seul de tous les manuels consultés articule réellement les deux corpus : celui de *Zur Chos dbyings rang grol* au 17e siècle. Les éditions disponibles du *dGongs pa zang thal*, qui ne sont pas antérieures au 19e siècle, ne sont pas nécessairement les témoins certains d'une tradition plus ancienne — mais peut-être plutôt du rayonnement de ce qui a pu être un coup de force de *Zur Chos dbyings rang grol*. C'est une question très importante, dont on peut regretter que *K. Turpeinen* la considère partout comme allant de soi dans son grand travail sur le *dGongs pa zang thal* (2015).

Le corpus sur lequel repose la présente étude sera donc réduit, du

¹² Ce n'est pourtant pas une règle absolue ; ainsi, exemple entre bien d'autres, le *rDzogs chen snying thig mkha' khyab rang grol gyi lam rim gsang bdag dpa' bo rdo rje rig 'dzin chos kyi dbang po'i zhal lung, khrid yid* composé par un certain *Rig pa'i rdo rje* pour le *mKha' khyab rang grol, gter chos* de *Nyag bla Padma bdud 'dul* (1816-1872), développe toutes sortes de pratiques de *yoga* interne avant de présenter les instructions du *rDzogs chen* au sens plus étroit. Mais, pour remonter à l'autre extrémité de l'histoire du *rDzogs chen* « visionnaire », on trouvait déjà dans le *Phyag khrid*, manuel de pratique du *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* composé par le maître *bon po 'Bru rGyal ba g.yung drung* (1242-1290) cette complète exclusion des instructions de style tantrique, et cela alors même que ce cycle ancien était malgré tout lié à une divinité (*Zhang zhung me ri*) faisant par ailleurs l'objet de toutes sortes de *sadhāna* d'aspect purement tantrique. On a là affaire à ce rapport complexe, presque contradictoire (ou, au minimum, dialectique) entre *rDzogs chen* et *rdzogs rim*, amplement développé et théorisé par *Germano* (1994).

moins pour ce qui concerne les études détaillées, aux six textes suivants (replacés par ordre historique présumé de composition) :

1. Śākya rgyal mtshan, *rDzogs pa chen po dgongs pa zang thal gyi man ngag zab don mngon sum gsal byed* ;
2. bKra shis rgya mtsho, *Zab mo snying thig gi gnad thams cad bsdus pa'i don khrid lag len gsal ba* ;
3. Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol, *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal gyi nyams khrid thar gling chos sku'i zhing khams su bgrod pa'i nye lam chen po*.
4. Kha'u dGa' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol, *Ka dag rang byung rang shar gyi khrid yig chos dbyings lam bzang* avec ses sources mentionnées plus haut ;
5. Kaḥ thog Tshe dbang nor bu, *rDzogs chen kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal gyi khrid kyi 'chad thabs 'od kyi 'khor lo*.
6. sPrul sku Tshul khriṃs bzang po, *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal gyi dgongs don phyogs gcig tu bkod pa khrid yig skal bzang re skongs rig 'dzin dgongs rgyan*.

Parmi ces six manuels, il est aisé, à la lecture, de discerner deux familles plus ou moins unifiées, qui forment comme des blocs à la fois historiques, géographiques et thématiques (par leur manière de traiter le corpus) : d'une part, les deux manuels du 16e siècle, de la tradition de Kaḥ thog — Śākya rgyal mtshan et bKra shis rgya mtsho ; d'autre part, les manuels du 17e-18e siècles, de la tradition de rDo rje brag (au sens large) : Zur Chos dbyings rang grol, auquel j'ajoute 'Gyur med rdo rje et Padma phrin las pour le *Yang tig gces sgron*, puis Kha'u dGa' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol et Tshe dbang nor bu. A vrai dire, les deux derniers ne sont pas sans liens avec Kaḥ thog ; mais on va voir en quel sens et pourquoi ils relèvent de la tradition du Tibet central.

Le *khrid yig* de sPrul sku Tshul khriṃs bzang po est tout à fait à part, même si je vais montrer que son auteur était au fait de l'une et l'autre traditions. Le résultat de la présente recherche est, il faut le dire, assez décevant quant aux fruits de l'étude de tous ces manuels pour ce qui est d'expliquer les particularités de celui de sPrul sku Tshul lo ; cet axe de recherche s'est avéré bien moins fécond, à cette étape, que celui, plus structurel, qui est favorisé dans les notes du *Manuel de la transpiration immédiate* (Arguillère 2016), où j'ai montré à quel montage complexe l'auteur se livrait, entre les *khrid yig* inclus dans le *gter ma* de Rig 'dzin rGod ldem et quelques textes de Klong chen rab 'byams (notamment le *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin*).

En effet, il faut rappeler que le *dGongs pa zang thal* lui-même comporte plusieurs *khrid yig*, qui sont ou devraient être la source principale de tous les manuels composés par la suite. Voici ce qu'en dit sPrul sku

Tshul lo dans les premières pages de son manuel¹³ :

En me fondant sur le *Manuel fondamental, transmission orale du grand [maître] d'Odḍiyāna à propos de la perception directe de la Réalité*¹⁴ et sur la *Transmission orale du sens exact*¹⁵, et complétant ces deux [textes avec des éléments] tirés par exemple de la *Grande transmission orale de Vimalamitra*¹⁶, des *Trois clous*¹⁷ et de la *Transmission orale de Vairocana*¹⁸, j'en ai fait la synthèse et je vais donner une explication du *Manuel fondamental*¹⁹, qui condense les éléments [des autres]²⁰.

Ajoutons, puisque le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* n'est pas hors du champ de la présente étude, que ce cycle est largement une collection de recueils d'instructions de pratique graduée, notamment :

1. Le *Ma rig mun sel sgron me snying po bcud bsdu lam gyi gnad khrid kyi rim pa* (p. 189-200), notamment les p. 195-199 ;
2. Le *O rgyan Padmas mdzad pa'i zhal chems sgron ma rnam gsum*

¹³ Traduction reprise de Arguillère (2016), p. 47 et notes.

¹⁴ *rDzogs pa chen po yang gsang bla na med pa chos nyid mngon sum gyi khrid yig, dGongs pa zang thal*, vol. II, p. 353-392.

¹⁵ *Yang dag don gyi snyan rgyud rin po che rtsa ba'i man ngag gnyis pa*, op. cit. vol. II, p. 393-422. Ce texte est mobilisé par *sPrul sku Tshul lo* notamment pour la confrontation (*ngo sprod*) et les intructions du premier système de *Khregs chod* (Arguillère 2016 : p. 255-263), où il sera pratiquement recopié avec de très légers ajouts explicatifs. Une partie des développements sur l'état intermédiaire *post mortem* (Arguillère 2016 : p. 361-419) en est également tiré.

¹⁶ *Bi ma mi tra'i snyan rgyud chen mo rgyal po la gdams pa yang gsang bla na med pa'i rdzogs pa chen po'i 'grel pa ye shes rang gsal* ou *Bi ma la'i snyan rgyud 'grel tig chen mo*, op. cit. vol. IV, p. 183-401. Il s'agit du texte traduit par Malcom Smith sous le titre : *Buddhahood in This Life — The Great Commentary by Vimalamitra* (Wisdom Publications, 2016).

¹⁷ *Khrid yig gnad kyi gzer bu gsum pa Bi ma la mi tras mdzad pa*, op. cit. vol. II, p. 335-352.

¹⁸ Cycle comportant quatre textes : *Yang gsang bla na med pa Bai ro tsa na'i snyan rgyud dang po*, op. cit. vol. II, p. 461-484 ; *Yang gsang ... snyan rgyud bar ma*, op. cit. vol. II, p. 485-536 ; *Yang gsang... phyi ma*, op. cit. vol. II, p. 537-577 et *Yang gsang bla na med pa Bai ro tsa na'i thugs bryud zab mo*, op. cit. vol. II, p. 579-602. C'est le troisième de ces textes qui est le plus souvent cité ou paraphrasé.

¹⁹ Le premier des textes qui viennent d'être cités. Le mode de composition de *sPrul sku Tshul lo* est expliqué dans l'introduction de Arguillère 2016 ; surtout, les notes de bas de page du livre permettent de repérer les éléments que l'auteur a combinés, quand il ne les signale pas lui-même (ce qu'il ne fait jamais quand il s'agit de sources extérieures au *dGongs pa zang thal*).

²⁰ En fait, l'auteur utilise abondamment, par ailleurs, d'autres textes du *dGongs pa zang thal* qu'il combine avec ceux dont il vient de faire la liste. Sans compter les *Cinq coins des précieux points-clefs* (ou *gZer lnga*), dont toute la section sur les « préliminaires extraordinaires » est une paraphrase explicative, il faut citer notamment le *Texte explicatif des points-clefs, lampe secrète* (*gNad yig gsang sgron, dGongs pa zang thal*, vol. III, p. 141-162), central pour les préliminaires spécifiques du *rDzogs chen* (Arguillère 2016 : p. 185-226).

- (p. 201-244), même si les nombreuses instructions qu'il contient ne sont pas méthodiquement arrangées en une voie graduée ;
3. Le *Gegs sel nor bu rin po che'i mdzod* (p. 261-320) est un véritable manuel de *khregs chod* ;
 4. Le *Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu* (p. 321-401) présente également ce caractère.

L'existence de ces textes est sans doute ce qui explique que nous n'ayons aucun manuel de pratique conservé pour la période qui s'étend de l'invention du *gter chos* (hiver 1366-1367) jusqu'aux maîtres de *Kaḥ thog* au 16^e siècle, et elle est sans doute aussi une des raisons du caractère passablement nébuleux et syncrétique des *khrid yig* composés par ces derniers.

Le dGongs pa zang thal à Kaḥ thog

Dans les *Kaḥ thog khrid chen bcu gsum*, tout le cinquième volume est occupé par trois textes relatifs au *dGongs pa zang thal*. On sait par le *Chos 'byung* de Guru bkra shis (p. 751) que c'est un certain A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan qui a diffusé le *dGongs pa zang thal* à *Kaḥ thog*. Or, on possède une histoire de la transmission de ce corpus, le *Kun tu bzang po dgongs pa zang thal gyi lo rgyus rin chen phreng pa*, conservée dans le recueil des *Kaḥ thog khrid chen bcu gsum* (vol. V, p. 1-89)²¹, qui est, selon toute vraisemblance, l'œuvre de cet auteur.

Ce texte présente, comme il convient, une narration relative aux premières étapes, semi-mythiques, de la transmission du *dGongs pa zang thal* — *rgyal ba dgongs pas brgyud tshul* (p. 5-17) et *rig 'dzin brda' brgyud tshul* (p. 17-53) — qui n'ont pas d'intérêt pour la recherche historique. Dans la troisième partie (p. 53-89), je laisse de côté tout ce qui concerne les maillons traditionnels antérieurs à *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* (p. 53-64, incluant le récit de la manière dont le *gter chos* a été caché, etc.), ainsi que la vie de *rGod ldem* lui-même jusqu'à la transmission du *dGongs pa zang thal* à son disciple *Kun spangs Don yod rgyal mtshan* (p. 75). À partir de ce personnage, la lignée se poursuit ainsi²² : *dBon po*

²¹ Il en existe une autre édition dans les *Byang gter phyogs sgrigs*. Voir bibliographie. Ce texte n'est pas d'un très grand intérêt historique pour ce qui nous concerne ici, parce qu'il ne consacre que très peu de développements à ce qui est postérieur à *Thang stong rgyal po*.

²² Un autre disciple de *Kun spangs Don yod rgyal mtshan* dans *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung* p. 488 : *gSang bdag bDe chen lhun grub*. « Teacher in an alternate transmission for the *Byang gter* precepts stemming from *Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can* and passing through *Thang stong sgyal po* » (BDRC P 10106). Il obtient le corps d'arc-en-ciel complet (*Guru bkra shis*, p. 488) Il a lui-même un disciple dit *Grags pa'i mtshan*

bSod nams mchog bzang (p. 79), puis brTson 'grus bzang po (p. 81), qui n'est autre que Thang stong rgyal po (1361 ou 1385–1485, ou 1509, ou 1464 ?), dont il est dit (p. 82) qu'il a également reçu les initiations du *dGongs pa zang thal* directement de *Kun sprangs* Don yod rgyal mtshan. Il les passe à *Byang sems* Kun dga' nyi ma de Kyi mo dans le dBus (15e s. ; TBRC : P10111)²³. Dans le texte de A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan, on ne discerne pas parfaitement clairement qui est le disciple de *Byang sems* Kun dga' nyi ma pour le *dGongs pa zang thal*.

Nous sommes alors aidés par les présentations de la lignée chez les deux auteurs postérieurs de Kaḥ thog. En effet, elle est donnée dans son intégralité aux p. 95-96 du manuel de Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan : *Kun sprangs pa* Don yod rgyal mtshan, bSod nams mchog bzang, Thang stong rgyal po, *Byang sems* Kun dga' nyi ma, dKon mchog rgyal mtshan, Rong po dKon mchog rdo rje puis Śā kya rgyal mtshan lui-même. Cela confirme parfaitement ce que l'on trouve chez A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan et on lit la même chose sous la plume de Bu 'bor ba bKra shis rgya mtsho (f° 2b-3a dans le deuxième *khrid yig* de Kaḥ thog étudié ci-dessous). Il y a aussi une lignée courte par Thang stong rgyal po, identique par ailleurs²⁴.

Curieusement, Śā kya rgyal mtshan comme bKra shis rgya mtsho ajoutent une lignée des *man ngag gzhan* : Mar pa *etc.*, par Phag mo gru pa, passant par Rin chen gling pa, *etc.*, mais parvenant à eux par le même dKon mchog rdo rje. On est bien dans une lignée synchrétique, ou du moins tendant à une synthèse. On comprendra bientôt la fonction de cet ajout d'une lignée relevant clairement de la Mahāmudrā des bKa' brgyud pa dans ce texte. Il y a aussi une lignée très courte qui ne compte que le *rtsa ba'i bla ma* (p. 96).

can (BDRC : P10107), aussi disciple de bDe chen lhun grub (lui-même disciple de rNam rgyal mgon po) et maître de Thang stong rgyal po.

²³ Ce personnage paraît avoir reçu tous les enseignements tantriques possibles et imaginables (p. 84 *sq.*), y compris, du *rTogs ldan* Ri phug pa (inconnu de BDRC), sur le *Kun byed rgyal po* et le *Ye shes gsang rdzogs* ; puis de Nyang ston Rig pa'i 'byung gnas sur le *Bi ma snying thig* et le *mKha' 'gro snying thig*. Il est également inconnu. Son disciple Sangs rgyas brtson 'grus est daté du même siècle par BDRC. Son disciple, Padma sangs rgyas, que BDRC ne sait pas situer entre le 15e et le 16e siècles, aura lui-même un disciple appelé Nyi zla sangs rgyas qui n'est pas mieux daté. Tous sont mentionnés dans le *gsan yig* du V^{ème} Dalai-Lama.

²⁴ Il est à craindre que le lecteur se perde dans les ramifications et les méandres des lignées du *dGongs pa zang thal*. On trouvera donc à la fin de cet article (cf. l'appendice *in fine*), pour plus de facilité, un arbre de ces généalogies — réduit aux branches qui aboutissent peu ou prou à des manuels de pratique connus.

A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan

De ces divers personnages, on a de courtes biographies dans le *rGyal ba Kaḥ thog pa'i lo rgyus mdor 'dus* de 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (p. 76 sq.). On y apprend en effet qu'A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan, disciple de *Byang sems chos rje*, s'est rendu dans le Shangs zam bu lung où il a reçu le *dGongs pa zang thal* de *Byang sems Kun dga' nyi ma*, disciple de Thang stong rgyal po, ce qui concorde parfaitement avec les indications tirées de *Guru bKra shis*. *Byang sems Kun dga' nyi ma* est connu de BDRC (P10111), mais, outre la confirmation du fait qu'il était disciple de Thang stong rgyal po, on n'y trouve que l'indication de sa naissance au 15^e siècle.

On lit encore dans le *rGyal ba Kaḥ thog pa'i lo rgyus mdor 'dus* (p. 76) qu'A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan eut une vision de Padma-sambhava, puis retourna à rMugs sangs dgon où il demeura en retraite. Puis, qu'au temps où Drung lHa dbang rdo rje remplissait les fonctions de *gdan sa* de Kaḥ thog, il fut nommé à celles de *'chad nyan mkhan po*. Après quoi, « à la grotte de Byang seng de Kaḥ thog, il donna tous les livres du *dGongs pa zang thal* à *Bya bral ba* Byang chub seng ge²⁵. » On sait encore (p. 77) qu'il se rendit très souvent dans le Tibet central où il diffusa les *mDo sgyu sems gsum*. Il reçut également tout le cycle du *Kar gling zhi khro* qu'il transmit à He pa Chos 'byung (BDRC : P2MS9533), d'où procède la « tradition de He des Paisibles et Terribles ». Il médita en divers lieu et son disciple principal fut Rong po dKon mchog rdo rje, qui reçut de lui la Mahāmudrā et le rDzogs chen en général, et plus particulièrement le *dGongs pa zang thal*. On ne sait pas grand-chose de plus de Rong po dKon mchog rdo rje, sinon qu'il séjourna longtemps à Kaḥ thog et fit de longues retraites de pratique.

La vie de mGon po dbang rgyal (1845–1915) par *sPrul sku Tshul lo* son disciple (p. 21) nous apprend que, dans sa treizième année (donc en 1857), mGon po dbang rgyal reçut d'un de ses maîtres « un manuel d'instructions sur le *dGongs pa zang thal*, composé par A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan » (*dGongs zang gi gnad khrid A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan gyis mdzad pa*). Ce texte, s'il a existé, semble être perdu ; à l'attention des chercheurs, signalons seulement que dans le colophon du *Kun tu bzang po dgongs pa zang thal gyi lo rgyus rin chen phreng ba*, apparaîtrait un curieux nom de plume, « *Rang bzhin rdzogs pa chen po'i rnal 'byor pa Tra ye ka dus* ». Soyons donc à l'affût d'un manuel de rDzogs chen qui pourrait bien surgir sous ce nom : il serait sans doute l'œuvre d'A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan.

²⁵ Byang chub seng ge est donné, dans les présentations linéaires des lignées de maîtres à disciples, comme le disciple de Sā kya rgyal mtshan, disciple d'A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan.

Même si cela est douteux de la part d'un auteur aussi bien informé et aussi rigoureux que *sPrul sku* Tshul lo, il est bien possible qu'il ait confondu A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan soit avec Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan, soit avec le disciple du disciple de ce dernier, Bu 'bor ba bKra shis rgya mtsho, auteur d'un autre *khrid yig* dont il va être question un peu plus loin.

Rig 'dzin dKon mchog rdo rje (rDo pa bla ma)

A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan et ses disciples sont mentionnés dans le *sMar pa bka' brgyud kyi rnam thar phyogs sgrigs*²⁶, qui donne quelques détails qu'on ne trouve pas chez *Guru bKra shis*. On y lit (p. 234) que le disciple d'A rdo dKon mchog rgyal msthan, *Rig 'dzin dKon mchog rdo rje* (aussi appelé ici *rDo pa bla ma*), reçut de lui « le *dGongs pa zang thal* de Kun dga' rgyal msthan », curieuse formule qui pourrait désigner soit une lignée (mais nous n'avons pas trouvé de Kun dga' rgyal msthan jusqu'ici), soit un manuel de pratique aujourd'hui perdu : là encore, ayons l'attention en éveil, au cas où un tel texte referait surface. Il y est question de *phyag rdzogs zung 'jug*.

Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan

Ce personnage nous intéresse tout particulièrement, parce qu'il est l'auteur du plus ancien texte conservé se présentant comme un manuel de pratique du *dGongs pa zang thal*.

Le *rGyal ba Kah thog pa'i lo rgyus mdor 'dus* en dit à peine davantage sur notre Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan (p. 77-78) que sur ses prédécesseurs : il n'était pas satisfait des instructions reçues jusqu'à ce qu'il obtienne de Rong po dKon mchog rdo rje le *dGongs pa zang thal* ; il partagea sa vie, nous dit-on, entre contemplation et enseignement et, ajoute 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan, il diffusa largement le *sGyu 'phrul*. Les disciples directs et indirects n'étant pas plus facile à dater, il reste que nous sommes quelque part entre le 15^e siècle de Kun dga' nyi ma et le 17^e siècle de Klong gsal snying po.

Dans le *sMar pa bka' brgyud kyi rnam thar phyogs sgrigs*, Śā kya rgyal mtshan est appelé Hor so (plutôt que Hor po) Śā kya rgyal mtshan. L'auteur de la biographie insiste, pour ce personnage comme pour ses prédécesseurs, sur sa pratique combinée de la Mahāmudrā et du *rDzogs chen*²⁷. On trouve ici, dans les mêmes termes que chez *Guru*

²⁶ BDRC : W00EGS1017393.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 235 : *Phyag rdzogs dbyer med nyams bzhes kyi rtogs pa mthar phyin mkhas shing grub pa brnyes* l. L'une des sources de ces biographies et de celles que *Guru bKra shis* a compilées est apparemment le *Phyag rgya chen po snying po don gyi brgyud pa'i lo rgyus nyung ngur bsdus pa* contenu dans le vol. III des *Kah thog khrid*

bkra shis, l'idée que *Rig 'dzin 'Jigs med gling pa* a fait l'éloge de son exposition du *Sems sde*²⁸. Mais le seul élément informatif supplémentaire que cette biographie nous apporte, c'est que *Śā kya rgyal mtshan* se rappelait avoir été, dans sa précédente incarnation, *dGe mang mkhan po Kun dga' rgyal mtshan*, associé plus haut dans le même texte au *dGongs pa zang thal*. Je n'ai pas réussi à identifier ce personnage — dont la date de la mort donnerait un *terminus a quo* pour la naissance de *Śā kya rgyal mtshan* — ni à démêler cet écheveau d'énigmes.

Le texte de *Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan*, quoique sursaturé de références textuelles et de propos attribués à toutes sortes de maîtres tibétains, ne contient par ailleurs (me semble-t-il) aucune indication, ni aucun indice, qui permettrait d'une manière ou d'une autre de le dater plus précisément que dans un vague 16e siècle. En tout état de cause, c'est bien le plus ancien des manuels de pratique du *dGongs pa zang thal* actuellement accessibles.

Bu 'bor ba bKra shis rgya mtsho

Le *rGyal ba Kaḥ thog pa'i lo rgyus mdor 'dus* contient (p. 79) une petite vie de *bKra shis rgya mtsho*, où l'on apprend qu'il a reçu le *dGongs pa zang thal* de *Śā kya rgyal mtshan* lui-même ; *Byang chub seng ge*, qui est placé entre les deux dans les présentations ordinaires de cette lignée, doit avoir été son contemporain à peine plus âgé et ils paraissent avoir été actifs en même temps. Un élément cependant (p. 80) nous aide à dater ces deux personnages : la visite de *Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal* (BDRC : 1550?–1603) à *Kaḥ thog* du vivant de *bKra shis rgya mtsho*. On peut donc dater approximativement le *Don khrid lag len gsal ba* de la seconde moitié du 16e siècle et, sous toutes réserves, placer l'œuvre de *Śā kya rgyal mtshan* dans la première moitié du même siècle.

La même chronique de *Kaḥ thog* confirme bien que *bKra shis rgya mtsho* est l'auteur d'un manuel de pratique du *dGongs pa zang thal*²⁹ ; elle ajoute qu'il se trouverait dans le *Rin chen gter mdzod*, où cependant je ne l'ai pas trouvé.

chen bcu gsum, p. 75-130 ; le texte est anonyme, mais les derniers maîtres mentionnés y sont *Śā kya rgyal mtshan* et *Byang chub seng ge*, ce qui pourrait orienter vers *Bu 'bor ba bKra shis rgya mtsho* comme auteur — mais le style de cet écrit ne rappelle guère celui de son *khrid yig* étudié ci-dessous.

²⁸ Je n'ai trouvé, à cette étape, ni le passage correspondant chez *'Jigs med gling pa*, ni le texte en question de *Śā kya rgyal mtshan*, qui, du moins, ne se trouve pas là où on serait porté à le chercher, dans les *Kaḥ thog khrid chen bcu gsum*.

²⁹ *rGyal ba Kaḥ thog pa'i lo rgyus mdor 'dus*, p. 80 : *Drung rDo rje 'od zer dus bKra shis rgya mtshos 'chad nyan mkhor mdzad* | *Slob ma rnam la Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan gyi khrid yig la gzhi byas te Zangs thal gyi khrid rgyun dar spel gnang* | *Khong gis kyang Zangs thal gyi khrid yig gсар du mdzad pa da lta Rin gter du bzhugs pa de'o* |.

Postérité

On peut en outre, grâce à *Guru bKra shis*, reconstituer la filiation du *dGongs pa zang thal* à *Kaḥ thog* après ces deux auteurs³⁰, mais cela est d'un moindre intérêt pour nous, si ce n'est pour comprendre un jour comment la tradition de *Kaḥ thog* a pu parvenir à *Tshe dbang nor bu* puis à *sPrul sku Tshul lo. mGon po dbang rgyal*, le maître de ce dernier, avait en effet reçu cette tradition de *rJe dbon Byang chub rdo rje, sprul sku de gTer chen bDud 'dul rdo rje*³¹.

La littérature du dGongs pa zang thal à Kaḥ thog (16e siècle)

Outre le texte historiographique d'*A rdo dkon mchog rgyal mtshan*, ce qui est conservé de cette littérature semble se réduire à deux manuels : celui de *Śā kya rgyal mtshan* et celui de *bKra shis rgya mtsho*.

Le rDzogs pa chen po dgongs pa zang thal gyi man ngag zab don mngon sum gsal byed de Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan

Il s'agit d'un texte de 297 pages, numérotées de 91 à 387 dans l'édition consultée des *Kaḥ thog khrid chen bcu gsum*. Dans cette édition, seule accessible, le texte³² a été passablement corrompu par des copistes peu soigneux et ignorants (l'orthographe est très défectueuse et l'on y trouve partout des bourdes énormes, comme « *Lhun grub* » au lieu de

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 751-752 : *A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan* [BDRC : P2359] (au temps de *mGon po rdo rje [gdan sa]* et *Nam mkha' dpal ba ['chad nyan]*) ; *Rong po dKon mchog rdo rje* (P2734 ? « Au temps de *Drung lHa dbang rdo rje [gdan sa]* », P1370 ?) ; *Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan* ; *mTshungs med Byang chub seng ge* et *Bu 'bor ba bKra shis rgya mtsho* * [au temps de *gdan sa Drung rNam par dge ba'i mtshan*] ; Disciples de *bKra shis rgya mtsho* : *rMog tsha ba He pa chos 'byung*, *rGyal thang ba bsTan pa seng ge*, *dPal mo Shes rab bzang po* et *rGyal rong ba [gDan sa ba : Drung rTa mgrin, époque de Bla ma Tshe mdo et Grub thob Ma la bla ma]* ; puis vinrent *sDo (sNgo ?) khang Sangs rgyas rin chen* et *dPal 'bar ba Nam mkha' rgya mtsho* ; ce dernier eut pour disciple *Ba so dBang grags rgya mtsho*, maître de *rGa rjes Chos skyong rgya mtsho* [référéncé dans BDRC sans aucun élément d'information, sauf comme maître de *Klong gsal snying po*], dont le disciple fut *Byang chub rgya mtsho* qui n'est autre que le *gter ston Klong gsal snying po* (1625–1692 ; il est à *Kaḥ thog* en 1646 selon BDRC).

³¹ S'il s'agit du personnage le plus connu de ce nom, ses dates sont 1615–1672 (cf. Ronis 2006). Parmi ses disciples, *Klong gsal snying po* (1625–1692) a un disciple du nom de *Byang chub rdo rje* qui, s'il est bien le *sprul sku* du *gter chen*, devrait être né dans les années qui ont suivi 1672 — ce qui est évidemment beaucoup trop tôt pour avoir été le maître de *mGon po dbang rgyal*, né en 1845...

³² Voir *infra* dans l'appendice l'arbre récapitulatif des lignées aboutissant aux auteurs des manuels conservés du *dGongs pa zang thal*.

Klu grub pour Nāgārjuna, pour ne donner qu'un exemple caractéristique).

L'attribution à Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan est certaine (1) par le colophon de ce texte ; (2) par un passage du *rGyal ba Kaḥ thog pa'i lo rgyus mdor 'dus* de 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan auquel on a déjà fait allusion (p. 164) ; (3) parce que le fait est encore confirmé dans le *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung* (p. 750-751).

Quant au contenu de ce texte, force est de constater qu'il est particulièrement déconcertant. Si l'auteur se réclame clairement de la tradition de *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* pour ce qui est du rDzogs chen, en fait, les liens avec le *dGongs pa zang thal* sont excessivement lâches. Il n'est que de jeter un œil sur l'index des citations et dans celui des noms de personnes, compilés ci-dessous (p. 17 sq.), pour se rendre compte à quel point Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan brasse les références. Il est particulièrement soucieux de défendre la thèse de l'unité de fond de la Mahāmudrā des bKa' brgyud pa et du rDzogs chen. Ce penchant syncretique le pousse non seulement à y assimiler aussi le Madhyamaka dans sa lecture *spros bral* (c'est-à-dire, plutôt celle de Go rams pa que celle de Tsong kha pa), mais encore à poser un fond commun de toutes les traditions de pratique spirituelle du Tibet : on est déjà, en plein 14e siècle, dans une atmosphère que l'on aurait pu croire propre aux maîtres *ris med* du 19e siècle.

S'il est permis de risquer une appréciation qualitative dans un travail de recherche, on ne saurait qualifier le *Man ngag zab don mngon sum gsal byed* autrement que de passablement bavard, diffus et décousu, quoique profondément érudit. Quelques passages sont très beaux ; l'ensemble, cependant, a plutôt le caractère d'une immense conférence à bâtons rompus sur toutes sortes de thèmes auxquels le *dGongs pa zang thal* ne donne pas même un cadre de référence commun. En un mot : ce n'est pas du tout un manuel de pratique de ce cycle du rDzogs chen, et même : ce n'est pas du tout un *khrid yig*, car les instructions n'y figurent qu'à la faveur d'allusions souvent vagues³³.

Très intéressante originalité : alors que Klong chen rab 'byams n'associe aux *visions* lumineuses du *thod rgal* que des *auditions* (du type du *chos nyid rang sgra* dont il est question dans les textes relatifs au *bar do*), et ceci pour des raisons précises de « physiologie subtile », Śā kya rgyal

³³ Parfois, à l'inverse et paradoxalement, l'auteur entre dans un très grand détail, quand il s'agit d'un point qui, apparemment, le passionne, telles les postures corporelles, d'ailleurs décrites en bien plus grand nombre que ce qui se trouve, en tout cas, dans le *dGongs pa zang thal*. Bref, il compose sans nulle règle, sinon sa fantaisie. Il est aussi très profus quand il décrit les visions, les auditions, etc., auxquelles le pratiquant peut être confronté — avec une sorte de goût curieux (s'il est permis de le conjecturer par l'insistance) pour les visions horribles.

mtshan, lui, a d'abondants développements sur des expériences des trois autres sens qui seraient du même ordre.

A propos de Klong chen rab 'byams, un autre point intéressant est (on le verra en consultant les index ci-dessous) l'assez forte présence de cet auteur dans le *Zab don mngon sum gsal byed* — au moins aussi forte que celle du *dGongs pa zang thal*. En plein 16e siècle, cela contredit assez frontalement la thèse de Katarina Turpeinen (2017) sur l'oubli supposé de Klong chen pa après le 14e siècle, oubli qui n'aurait pris fin qu'à l'époque de 'Jigs med gling pa, après une éclipse de plusieurs siècles, durant laquelle le *dGongs pa zang thal* aurait presque seul occupé le devant de la scène³⁴.

Dans l'index ci-dessous, je n'ai pas pris la peine de restituer les titres sanskrits des textes canoniques ou para-canoniques, ni même de les identifier autant qu'il aurait été possible (et pas davantage les personnages cités), car mon propos est seulement de montrer que le *Man ngag zab don mngon sum gsal byed* n'est en réalité rien moins qu'un manuel de pratique du *dGongs pa zang thal*. J'ai, en revanche, corrigé (dans la mesure du possible) l'orthographe défectueuse de l'édition consultée. Cette liste mérite l'intérêt par le nombre de textes inconnus qui y figurent — mais une part de notre impression d'étrangeté peut être due aussi à la graphie aberrante.

J'ai mis en gras, pour des raisons bien entendu différentes, les textes du *dGongs pa zang thal* (peu nombreux) et les références expresses à Klong chen pa.

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³⁴ Voir, par exemple, Turpeinen (2015), p. 210 : « In these days, Longchenpa is the single most known author of the pre-modern Nyingma tradition, and his impact to the Great Perfection tradition is unquestioned. Longchenpa's works are regarded in high esteem and studied widely in the Nyingma colleges (*bshad grwa*). His great influence is internalized in the tradition to the extent that many are unaware that Longchenpa's extensive popularity is a relatively recent development sparked by the revelations of Jikmé Lingpa (1730-1798) received in visionary encounters from Longchenpa and the subsequent academic turn of the Nyingma tradition inspired by figures like Mipham (1846-1912). However, in the 14th century, Nyingma Dzokchen audience was not particularly inclined to academic study, but generally focused on ritual and contemplative practice, and the time was not ripe for the sophisticated philosophical treatises of Longchenpa to reach wide circulation. »

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sNyan rgyud bar pa : 366.

³⁵ Cette référence est de toute première importance : c'est le texte le plus tardif de ceux qui peuvent être au moins approximativement daté, puisqu'il s'agit d'un *gter ma* de Padma gling pa (1450–1521). Or, il y a dans les *Kaḥ thog khrid chen bcu gsum* (vol. III, p. 45-50) un petit texte intitulé *Kun bzang dgons pa kun 'dus kyi dbu phyogs*, commençant par un hommage à la lignée, où l'on trouve (p. 47), après

Padma gling pa, directement « Tra ye ka tu », que nous savons être A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan, puis directement le *rtsa ba'i bla ma* de l'auteur. Ce dernier est identifié comme « *Kaḥ thog khrid chen bdun pa Bya bral ba bSod nams don 'grub* » (BDRC : P7966).

³⁶ Probablement le *Chos dbyings mdzod* de Klong chen pa.

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mDo phal po che : 202, 216-220,
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 ma » est la graphie courante

³⁷ Serait-ce un passage du *Chos dbyings mdzod* ?

- chez cet auteur pour Vi-
malamitra).
- dBang rnam par dbye ba* : 169,
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- « *'Bum dang Nyi khri* » : 240,
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- Mya ngan 'das mdo* : 203, 248,
370 (2 cit.).
- gTsong gtor chen po'i mdo* : 198 (2
cit.), 242.
- gTsong nag me 'bar gyi 'grel pa* :
303.
- rTsa rgyud dbang mdor bstan* :
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- Tshad ma rnam 'grel* : 213, 223.
- mTshan brjod ('Jam dpal —)* :
114, 255.
- mTshan brjod kyi 'grel pa* : 255 (2
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- rDzogs chen sangs rgyas mnyam
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- Zag med thig le'i man ngag* : 331.
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- Zangs yig can* : 232.
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- Yi ge med pa'i rgyud* : 210, 222,
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- Yid bzhin mdzod*** : 106.
- Yum* : 117 (2 cit.), 134, 197, 241
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354.
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- Rin chen spungs pa'i rgyud* : 248.
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- Sems nyid ngal bso* : 188, 222.
- Sras gcig sa bon gyi rgyud* : 121.
- gSang ba spyi rgyud* : 237 (2 cit.).
- gSang ba yongs rdzogs kyi rgyud*
: 355
- bSam gyis mi khyab ye shes 'khor
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- lHa rnams 'dus pa'i rgyud* : 361.
- lHa'i bu blo gros rab gnas kyis
zhus pa'i mdo* : 139.
- lHun grub kyi sgo'i mdzod* : 206 .

³⁸ Il s'agit bien du grand manuel du
mKha' 'gro snying thig composé par
Klong chen pa, dont *sPrul sku*

Tshul lo fera si grand usage dans
son propre *khrid yig*.

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216, 282.
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334 (3 cit.).
sMar pa Rin chen, *Chos rje* : 95.

³⁹ Je n'ai pas distingué les personnages historiques des figures « imaginaires ».

⁴⁰ Ce personnage ne peut guère être le *gTer ston* rDo rje bdud 'dul, un peu trop tardif (1615–1672 ; cf. Jan Ronnis 2006).

Zur mo ba, *Chos rje* — : 245, 269, 297.
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 Sangs rgyas gsang ba, *Slob dpon* — : 228.
 Seng ge dbang phyug, lCe *btsun* — : 316 (?), 320-324 (avec une sorte de titre de texte obscur), 360 (*lHa rjes lCe btsun gyi man ngag*).
 bSod nams mchog bzang : 95.
 A ba dhu ti pa, *Grub thob* — : 274, 300.

Je renonce à donner ici un résumé ou a fortiori une paraphrase complète de ce très long texte (près de 300 p.) : il est très peu probable que personne s'en soit jamais servi comme guide dans la pratique du *dGongs pa zang thal* ; loin d'éclaircir les manuels présents dans le *gter chos*, il est infiniment moins précis et moins concret. Il est également évident qu'il n'a servi de source d'inspiration à *sPrul sku* Tshul lo ni de près, ni de loin.

J'attire cependant l'attention des chercheurs sur les curieuses p. 376-387 — sorte de long chant de déploration, qui va bien au-delà des proclamations d'incompétence par lesquelles les auteurs tibétains aiment à conclure leurs œuvres portant sur des sujets réputés profonds. On a le sentiment, à lire Śā kya rgyal mtshan, qu'il s'est heurté à des obstacles presque insurmontables et qu'il a été plongé dans de profondes amertumes, dont les minuscules biographies que j'ai pu consulter jusqu'ici ne donnent pas la plus légère idée.

Dans ce texte composé apparemment un peu au fil de la plume (et qui, il est vrai, n'est pas servi par son édition dans les *Kaḥ thog khrid chen bcu gsum* — désastreuse, obligeant souvent à conjecturer le sens en corrigeant l'orthographe déplorable du copiste), on ressent, à un degré qui n'est pas commun chez les auteurs tibétains, l'expression d'une subjectivité un peu capricieuse, qui s'attarde sur ce qui lui tient à cœur, qui expédie ce qui l'ennuie, qui veut faire partager ses tristesses et surtout ses émerveillements. Le *Zab don mngon sum gsal byed* mériterait dans cette optique une étude approfondie : si j'en ai parlé avec une pointe d'impatience, c'est pour n'y avoir rien trouvé de ce qui

m'intéressait dans le cadre d'une recherche sur l'histoire des manuels et commentaires du *dGongs pa zang thal* — fait qui est intéressant comme tel : comment un tel texte a-t-il pu être regardé comme un *khrid yig* du *dGongs pa zang thal*, sans rien contenir qui corresponde à son titre ?

*Le Zab mo snying thig gi gnad thams cad bsdu pa'i don khrid lag len gsal
ba de Bu 'bor bo bKra shis rgya mtsho*

Plus court de moitié⁴¹ que le texte de Śā kya rgyal mtshan, celui-ci en procède manifestement, comme on va le voir, mais en diffère du tout au tout par le style. Son titre est plus honnête : il ne se donne pas pour un manuel du *dGongs pa zang thal* ; pourtant, les lignées sont présentées exactement dans les mêmes termes que chez Śā kya rgyal mtshan, c'est-à-dire que tout ce qu'il contient de rDzogs chen se place sous l'autorité de Rig 'dzin rGod ldem et de sa postérité.

L'identité de l'auteur est connue par une annotation dans le colophon (qui, au mot *bdag*, ajoute le nom : bKra shis rgya mtsho⁴²). Toutefois dans la présentation des lignées en début de volume, on a (f° 2b), après bKra shis rgya mtsho, *rtsa ba'i bla ma*, ce qui donnerait à penser que le texte aurait pu être composé deux générations plus tard⁴³ ; mais le lecteur familier des textes tibétains suppose naturellement que ce pourrait être une de ces très fréquentes notules ajoutées aux textes par les maîtres qui les transmettent et que les éditeurs ultérieurs y incorporent pieusement, suscitant de fâcheux anachronismes.

A la lecture, on reconnaît qu'on a bien affaire à un texte de la même tradition que le précédent, dont il se réclame expressément dans le colophon, où, du reste, l'auteur ne cache pas non plus son caractère éclectique⁴⁴. Cependant, son côté synthétique ne se manifeste pas du tout

⁴¹ 139 p. dans les *Kaḥ thog khrid chen bcu gsum*, numérotées à droite 388 à 527-528 ; folios numérotés à gauche de 1 à 70.

⁴² *Kho bos [bKra shis rgya mtshos] gud du phyungs nas bris pa la* | ... Voir ci-dessous note 44 pour le passage complet.

⁴³ S'il fallait prendre cet indice au sérieux, on devrait descendre de deux crans dans l'arbre récapitulatif des lignées pour trouver le véritable auteur de ce manuel. Notons que, parmi les candidats possibles, on aurait alors un A rdo dKon mchog rdo rje, ce qui pourrait peut-être expliquer ce qui semble être une méprise de *sPrul sku Tshul lo* dans sa *Vie de mGon po dbang rgyal : dGongs zang gi gnad khrid A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan gyis mdzad pa* devrait alors tout simplement se corriger par : *dGongs zang gi gnad khrid A rdo dKon mchog rdo rje yis mdzad pa*.

⁴⁴ F° 70a : *Zab mo snying thig chos so cog rnams las* | | *zab khrid mi 'dra rgya cher grangs mang yang* | | *zab gnad kun 'dus lag len 'di kho na* | | *zab zab yig tshogs mang pos dgos med snyam* | | *'di ni mtshungs med Śā kya rgyal mtshan gyis* | | *Zab don mngon sum gsal byed man ngag las* | | *bla mas zhal bzhes lag khrid byes pa rnams* | | *kho bos [bKra shis rgya mtshos] gud du phyungs nas bris pa la* | | *don du mi 'byung nyes skyon gang yod rnams* | | *bla ma yab sras gnyis la bzod par gsol* |, etc.

par l'accumulation de références tous azimuts, comme chez Śā kya rgyal mtshan — mais, à l'inverse, par l'omission totale (exceptionnelle dans les textes religieux tibétains de ce genre) de tout titre de texte, fût-ce à la faveur d'une simple allusion. Seule la lignée dont bKra shis rgya mtsho s'autorise en ce qui concerne le rDzogs chen oblige à mettre ce traité en rapport avec le *dGongs pa zang thal* ; pour ce qui est du contenu, il est très général et les quelques passages qui se trouveraient pratiquement à l'identique dans le *gter chos* de Rig 'dzin rGod ldem sont ceux qui, en fait, sont communs à toute la littérature du *sNying thig*. En somme, comme chez Śā kya rgyal mtshan, l'invocation de la lignée du *Byang gter* paraît n'être là que pour autoriser bKra shis rgya mtsho à parler des enseignements du rDzogs chen appartenant au registre du *sNying thig*.

Le *Zab mo snying thig gi gnad thams cad bsdu pa'i don khrid lag len gsal ba* porte à cet égard très bien son nom : « synthèse de tous les points clefs de la profonde quintessence » : il puise en effet à pleine mains dans le trésor commun des lignées qui ont conflué à Kaḥ thog ; cela lui est commun avec le texte de Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan. Mais, à la différence de ce dernier, il mérite bien le titre de *don khrid lag len gsal ba*, « manuel du sens [de cette synthèse] qui élucide la pratique » : autant Śā kya rgyal mtshan éludait tous les détails techniques, autant, en revanche, bKra shis rgya mtsho est précis et immédiatement pratique — à ceci près qu'il ne détaille jamais rien à tel point que son manuel s'inscrive plutôt dans une tradition que dans une autre.

Un petit détail, entre bien d'autres, permet de reconnaître immédiatement le degré de familiarité des auteurs de manuels avec la littérature du *dGongs pa zang thal* : la purification du corps (*lus sbyong*), prescrite d'une manière générale dans le *Bi ma'i 'grel tig* (p. 338), est précisée dans un autre texte du *dGongs pa zang thal*, le *gNad yig gsang sgron* (p. 144)⁴⁵ :

Médite [-toi] d'une couleur correspondant à ton élément [dominant] :
 Rats, bœufs et tigres méditent leur corps de la blancheur de l'eau ;
 Lièvres, dragons et serpents méditent leur corps jaune [comme] la terre ;
 Chevaux, moutons et singes méditent leur corps rouge [comme] le feu ;
 Oiseaux, chiens et porcs méditent leur corps de la verdure de l'air⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ Voir Arguillère (2016), p. 210.

⁴⁶ *Rang gi 'byung ba dang mthun pa'i kha dog tu bsgom ste ᅣ byi ba glang stag gsum chu'i lus dkar po bsgom ᅣ yos 'brug sbrul gsum sa'i lus ser po bsgom ᅣ rta lug sprel gsum me'i lus dmar po bsgom ᅣ bya khyi phag gsum rlung gi lus ljang gu bsgom ᅣ.*

Cette modification de la couleur de la visualisation en fonction de l'année de naissance est propre au *dGongs pa zang thal*, et même spécifiquement à la *Lampe secrète* : elle est inconnue même du *Chos nyid mngon sum gyi khrid yig* (p. 361). On ne la trouve pas dans les passages parallèles de Klong chen pa : ni dans le *dNgos gzhi 'od gsal snying po'i don khrid* (p. 7), ni dans le *Khrid yig sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor* (p. 243), ni dans le *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin* (p. 439). Les deux premiers prescrivent à tous d'imaginer leur corps de couleur bleue ; le dernier ne dit rien à ce sujet, et pas davantage le *Theg mchog mdzod* (p. 204 ; mais, de fait, ce texte est très allusif sur ces instructions de pratique ; il paraît plus soucieux de justifier leur authenticité en accumulant les références tirées des Dix-sept *tantra*). Dans le système du *Yang tig nag po*, l'exercice parallèle (qui n'est pas exactement identique par ailleurs, au demeurant) se fait en imaginant le vajra de couleurs différentes successivement (voir *Khrid rim don gsal sgron me*, dans le vol. III de ce cycle, p. 49)⁴⁷.

bKra shis rgya mtsho (f° 38a) propose bien la visualisation du *vajra* de la couleur de l'élément de naissance, avec les prescriptions propres au *gNad yig gsang sgron* — vrai signe d'une connaissance personnelle approfondie du *dGongs pa zang thal*. Il est vrai que cet auteur mentionne aussi la possibilité d'un *vajra* des cinq couleurs à la fois (comme il me semble que c'est parfois le cas dans le *Yang ti nag po*) et indique que le *vajra* pouvait être à trois ou à cinq pointes : mais, de sa part, il y va surtout du souci de produire un manuel synthétique, voire synchrétique.

Le texte est très bien structuré, comme on s'en rendra compte en aisément en consultant la table analytique que j'ai mise en ligne à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.arguillere.org/2017/09/analytic-table-sa-bcad-of-bu-bor-bo-bkra-shis-rgya-mtsho-s-practice-manual-of-the-dgongs-pa-zang-thal.html>. C'est là une agréable différence relativement au *Man ngag zab don mngon sum gsal byed* de Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan. Bien que le texte de bKra shis rgya mtsho puisse être regardé, en un sens, comme un abrégé de celui de son prédécesseur, on ne pourrait que conseiller à qui voudrait étudier le plus ancien de prendre appui sur le plus récent, qui est bien plus clairement charpenté. Les développements de Śā kya rgyal mtshan, souvent intéressants, mais profus et passablement mal équilibrés, se comprennent plus facilement à partir du texte concis et proprement ramifié de bKra shis rgya mtsho ; en l'ayant en tête comme en arrière-plan, on saisirait mieux comment articuler les unes aux autres les proliférations rhétoriques de son aïeul spirituel.

Relativement aux manuels de pratique qui se trouvent dans le

⁴⁷ Paragraphe repris de Arguillère (2016), p. 210, n. 3.

dGongs pa zang thal lui-même et au texte de *sPrul sku Tshul lo*, ces deux manuels de la tradition de Kaḥ thog se caractérisent, au-delà de leur caractère syncrétique relativement aux diverses branches du rDzogs chen, par leur volonté d'intégrer complètement la Mahāmudrā des bKa' brgyud pa, pratiquement substituée au Khregs chod (c'est plus net chez bKra shis rgya mtsho, non que cette tendance soit au fond plus accusée chez lui, mais simplement parce que son texte est moins confus). Il en ressort une profonde différence dans l'ordre des pratiques, qui, d'ailleurs, ne me paraît parfaitement claire ni dans l'un, ni dans l'autre texte : en somme, il semble que le « *khregs chod – Mahāmudrā* » soit proposé *avant* les préliminaires spécifiques du rDzogs chen, et non *après* comme chez *sPrul sku Tshul lo*, conforme à la tradition dominante en son temps.

L'insistance, véritablement obsessionnelle sous la plume de Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan, sur l'unité de sens du Madhyamaka, de la Mahāmudrā et du rDzogs chen demeure chez bKra shis rgya mtsho, quoiqu'atténuée (et surtout ramenée à quelques formules claires et fermes, là où Śā kya rgyal mtshan s'étendait sans mesure). De même trouve-t-on chez bKra shis rgya mtsho des allusions à Zhi byed et gCod, mais infiniment plus ramassées que chez Śā kya rgyal mtshan. Tous ces éléments seront totalement absents chez les maîtres du Tibet central et chez *sPrul sku Tshul lo*.

Remarquables chez nos deux auteurs sont les développements sur la pratique visionnaire dans l'obscurité (qui est l'objet exclusif d'à peu près 25 p. sur 140 chez bKra shis rgya mtsho, sans compter les allusions et explications complémentaires figurant ailleurs). Cette pratique ne sera tout simplement jamais mentionnée dans aucun des manuels de la tradition du Tibet central, et pas davantage chez *sPrul sku Tshul lo*. Son développement considérable ici est sans doute en rapport avec l'adjonction du *Yang ti nag po* aux *Khrid chen bcu gsum* de Kaḥ thog. Il serait évidemment intéressant de mener une enquête, parallèle à celle qui nous occupe, sur l'histoire du *Yang ti nag po* à Kaḥ thog.

*Les manuels du dGongs pa zang thal au Tibet central
(17e et 18e siècles)*

Les textes regroupés dans cette section ne présentent, pour une bonne part, aucune difficulté quant à la datation de leurs auteurs : Zur Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1669), Padma phrin las (1641–1717), 'Gyur med rdo rje (gTer bdag gling pa, 1646–1714) ou Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755 — on verra plus loin pourquoi ce personnage associé par ailleurs à Kaḥ thog se trouve ici placé en compagnie des maîtres du Tibet central) sont passablement connus ; quant à Kha'u dga' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol, si je ne me trompe pas quant à son identité, il

n'est pas plus obscur que les précédents, et pour cause.

*Le Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa'i bcud ka dag lhun grub kyi nyams khrid
thar gling chos sku'i zhing khams su bgrod pa'i nye lam de Zur Chos
dbyings rang grol (1604–1669)*

Ce bref manuel (28 p., numérotées de 305 à 322), tout à fait remarquable, est l'œuvre de Zur *chen*, ou Zur *thams cad mkhyen pa*, Chos dbyings rang grol, personnage qui nous est connu par une longue biographie (452 p. dans l'édition consultée), œuvre du cinquième Dalai-Lama. Il en existe un certain nombre d'autres ; je me contenterai ici de celle, beaucoup plus abrégée, du *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung* (p. 300-303).

Pour nous en tenir aux éléments qui nous intéressent ici, on y lit (p. 300) que Chos dbyings rang grol rencontra le *Byang bdag Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po* (1580–1639) dans sa neuvième année (1612) et que ce dernier lui fit la prophétie qu'il serait d'une grande utilité à la tradition Ancienne. Sa pratique principale en retraite (1619–1621?) semble avoir plutôt été le *mKha' 'gro snying thig* (*op. cit.*, p. 301), reçu de Ngag dbang ye shes grub (BDRC : P1076) vers 1615⁴⁸. Il fut l'un des principaux maîtres du cinquième Dalai-Lama et c'est lui qui reconnut Padma phrin las (1640–1718), le *sprul sku* de Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po. Cette biographie très abrégée ne nous dit rien de son intérêt pour le *dGongs pa zang thal* ; on en trouve davantage à cet égard dans les petites notes biographiques du commentaire de Padma phrin las sur le *Yang tig gces pa'i sgron me*, étudié un peu plus loin. Chos dbyings rang grol était visiblement dépositaire d'une énorme quantité de traditions diverses. Ce serait l'objet d'un approfondissement de la présente recherche que d'explorer le long *rnam thar* composé par Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho afin d'y voir plus clair quant à ses rapports précis avec le *Byang gter* en général et le *dGongs pa zang thal* en particulier. Pour le situer dans mon arbre des lignées du *dGongs pa zang thal*, je me suis réglé — provisoirement — sur les indications (résumées ci-dessous) du commentaire de Padma phrin las sur le *Yang tig gces pa'i sgron me*.

Le colophon du *Nyams khrid* de Zur Chos dbyings rang grol ne contient guère d'éléments exploitables du point de vue historique, sinon quant au fait qu'une autre main a pu être associée à l'édition finale du texte, apparemment élaboré sur la base de "notes" de Chos dbyings rang grol⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 300. Noter la formule curieuse : *mKha' 'gro snying thig bka' gter gnyis*.

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 332 : *rje btsun bla ma dam pa Zur thams cad mkhyen pa | Chos dbyings rang grol gyi zin bris su mdzad pa'i phyag bris su yig char zhal bshus pa'o l*. Ces "notes" (*zin bris*) auraient pu être (hypothèse peu vraisemblable) le *Yang tig gces pa'i sgron me'i*

Il ne fait aucun doute, en tout état de cause, que le texte qui nous intéresse a pour objet le *dGongs pa zang thal* : Chos dbyings rang grol le déclare expressément (p. 306 sq.), avec cette particularité, déjà soulignée (c'est peut-être une innovation de cet auteur) de considérer expressément le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* comme traitant l'aspect de « pureté primordiale » (autrement dit : le *khregs chod*), tandis que le *dGongs pa zang thal* à proprement parler aurait pour objet l'aspect *lhun grub* (c'est-à-dire le *thod rgal*)⁵⁰.

Certes, c'est une idée qui semble aussi naturelle que judicieuse, de compléter les textes du *dGongs pa zang thal* sur le *khregs chod* par les riches développements du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*. Force est cependant de constater que telle n'a globalement pas été la voie privilégiée dans la littérature secondaire du *dGongs pa zang thal* que nous étudions ici. Le manuel de Zur Chos dbyings rang grol fait, à cet égard, figure d'exception ; et de même est-il original sur de nombreux points de détail qu'il n'est pas possible de développer ici. En revanche, relativement aux manuels de Kaḥ thog, il est beaucoup plus conforme à ce que l'on trouve, de Klong chen pa à *sPrul sku* Tshul lo, quant à l'ordre des pratiques.

Le *Thar gling chos sku'i zhing khams su bgrod pa'i nye lam* présente un aspect excessivement concret et pratique. Comme celui de bKra shis rgya mtsho, il est très clair et bien charpenté — plutôt que nébuleux et profus comme celui de Śā kya rgyal mtshan. Mais, à la différence de bKra shis rgya mtsho, Zur Chos dbyings rang grol fonde son propos, jusque dans son moindre détail, sur la littérature du *dGongs pa zang thal* (au sens large, en incluant, comme on l'a dit, le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*).

Ainsi, par exemple, dans ce qui est appelé “préliminaires non-ordinaires” (de la section *ka dag*), est présentée (p. 313 sq.) une série de trois exercices que l'on n'avait pas rencontrés jusqu'ici — mais que l'on va bientôt retrouver — nommés respectivement *rdo rje dkar po la brten nas sems 'dzin pa*, *rdo rje mthing kha hūm yig dang bcas pas la sems 'dzin pa* et

khrid kyi rtsa tshig gsung rgyun rab gsal, texte évoqué ci-dessous. Mais la formulation en tibétain signifierait plutôt que l'édition imprimée procède directement d'un manuscrit autographe, moyennant peut-être un travail de finition de la part de l'éditeur.

⁵⁰ ...rGyud sde bco lnga'i dgongs don snyan rgyud drug gi nying khu Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal du bstan pa'i nges don rdzogs pa chen po'i khrid tshul zab mo gter las 'byung ba 'di nyid la gnyis te | *Ka dag rang byung rang shar gyis gnas lugs kyi don gtan* [307] | *la 'bebs pa dang* | *lhun grub dGongs pa zang thal gyis thod rgal gyi rang rtsal rjen par ston pa gnyis te* | ... Dans cette formule, le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* est bien traité comme une sorte de section d'un ensemble plus vaste, incluant le *dGongs pa zang thal* (au sens étroit), l'ensemble étant appelé lui-même “*dGongs pa zang thal*” — exactement comme le fait K. Turpeinen (2015).

thig le dkar dmar la brten nas sems 'dzin pa. Or, ces méditations proviennent directement d'un texte du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, le *Ma rig mun sel sgron me snying po bcud bsdus lam gyi gnad khrid kyi rim pa*⁵¹, qui est clairement la source principale de toute cette section *ka dag* du manuel de Chos dbyings rang grol.

Dans la partie *lhun grub*, Chos dbyings rang grol paraît dépendre étroitement du *Bi ma'i 'grel tig* (qu'il appelle *Bi ma'i snyan (b)rgyud*, ce qui est bien l'un de ses titres abrégés), plutôt que du *Chos nyid mngon sum gyi khrid yig* que sPrul sku Tshul lo appellera "*khrid gzhung*", manuel principal.

K. Turpeinen, on l'a déjà rappelé, revient souvent sur l'idée selon laquelle l'œuvre de Klong chen pa serait pratiquement tombée dans l'oubli, après la mort de son auteur, jusqu'à ce que 'Jigs med gling pa la replace sur le devant de la scène. Pendant ces siècles de latence, dit-elle en substance, c'est le *dGongs pa zang thal* qui aurait attiré toute l'attention. Or il serait aisé de nuancer cette opinion en faisant, comme je l'esquisse ici pour le *dGongs pa zang thal*, une histoire des manuels de pratique des deux *sNying thig* composés entre le 14e et le 18e siècles : on verrait que ce que dit K. Turpeinen vaut sans doute dans une certaine mesure pour les œuvres les plus spéculatives ou les plus énigmatiques de Klong chen pa (et encore : les citations du *Chos dbyings rin po che'i mdzdod* trouvées chez Śā kya rgyal mtshan devraient nous donner à penser), mais sans doute pas pour les instructions de pratique de la "quintessence" du rDzogs chen. En tout état de cause, Zur Chos dbyings rang grol, au 17e siècle, n'est pas moins lecteur de Klong chen pa que ne l'était Śā kya rgyal mtshan au 16e siècle : on peut s'en persuader au vu des dernières lignes des instructions sur la quatrième vision du *thod rgal* dans le *Nyams khrid thar gling chos sku'i zhing khams su bgrod pa'i nye lam* (p. 311 sq.) :

Pour les détails, on en prendra connaissance dans les *tantra* spécifiques à cette [tradition, c'est-à-dire, ceux qui sont inclus dans le *gter chos* de rGod ldem], dans les *Dix-sept tantra*, dans le *Kun bzang klong gsal*, dans les *six transmissions orales* et les *textes sur les mesures* [des niveaux de réalisation atteints], nectar de la parole de Dri med 'od zer, le spacieux *yogin* de la Grande Complétude⁵².

On notera ici que l'association du *dGongs pa zang thal* avec le *Klong gsal*, *tantra* fondamental du *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, est une constante, sinon

⁵¹ P. 195 sq. : mDun du khru bdun bcar ba'i sar ³ rdo rje dkar po rtse lnga pa g.yas su 'khyil pa rang gzugs ³...

⁵² Op. cit., p. 331-332 : Zhib par 'di'i sgos kyi rgyud sde rnam dang rgyud bcu bdun dang | Kun bzang klong gsal dang snyan rgyud drug dang rtag tshad kyi yi ge [332] rdzogs chen nam mkha' rnal 'byor Dri med 'od zer gyi gsung gi bdud rtsi las shes bya te |...

depuis le début, du moins depuis le 16^e siècle (13 citations dans le “manuel” de *Sā kya rgyal mtshan*), continuée ici par *Zur Chos dbyings rang grol*.

Le Chos dbyings lam bzang de Kha'u dGa' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol et le cycle du Yang tig gces sgron

1. *Le Ka dag rang byung rang shar gyi khrid yig Chos dbyings lam bzang de Kha'u dGa' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol et le Yang tig gces sgron zin bris de Padma phrin las*

A cette étape, il semble qu'un seul manuel de pratique du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* nous soit parvenu : il est l'œuvre d'un *Chos dbyings rang grol* qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec *Zur Chos dbyings rang grol*. L'auteur signe, dans le colophon, de deux noms : *Chos dbyings rang grol* et *Padma las rab rdo rje rtsal* ; une note ajoutée par les éditeurs précise : *Kha'u dGa' ldan pa grub dbang Dhar ma'i mtshan yin 'dug*. Le site BDRC/TBRC nous aide à identifier ce personnage (P6867) : « *rning ma* practitioner of the *rDo rje brag* tradition who held the hermitage of *Kha'u dga' ldan* in the *Nyang* area of *gTsang* » et pour lequel il renvoie au *dBus gtsang gi gnad yig* (p. 403) de *Chos kyi rgya mtsho, Kaḥ thog si tu III* (1880–1923/25). Cependant, le *dBus gtsang gi gnad yig* ne contient absolument rien qui permette de dater plus précisément notre *Kha'u dga' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol*.

Le colophon du *Chos dbyings lam bzang* (p. 372) nous donne toutefois quelques informations exploitables : l'ordre de composer ce manuel a été donné à l'auteur une année *shing khyi*. Le commanditaire de l'œuvre est également nommé : il s'agit d'un certain *Kun dga' bzang po*. Le colophon donne à penser qu'il existait déjà un manuel allant jusqu'au *guru-yoga*, peut-être composé par ce *Kun dga' bzang po* (maître de l'auteur ?) et que ce dernier a ordonné à notre *Chos dbyings rang grol* de le compléter⁵³. La tâche a été accomplie « l'année bois-porc suivante », à *dGa' ldan gsang sngags chos gling* (l'ermitage de l'auteur). Il mentionne encore son maître, cette fois sous le nom de *Kun bzang rgya mstho*⁵⁴, mais il s'agit sans doute de la même personne que *Kun dga' bzang po / Kun bzang dbang po*.

On pense d'abord au *Kun bzang dbang po* que l'on trouve mentionné sur le site BDRC/TBRC (P10284) comme l'un des maîtres de *Zur Chos dbyings rang grol*, « master in the transmission of the *Kun*

⁵³ Op. cit., p. 372 : ...*Kun dga' bzang po dang mjal te Ka dag khrid yig bla ma'i rnal 'byor yan legs par gnang ste | 'di man khyod kyis khrigs chags su grigs shig ces bgos bzhin du bka' stsal pa yid la brtan du bzung ste...*

⁵⁴ *bKa' drin 'khor med rje btsun Kun bzang rgya mtsho'i thugs rje las rdzogs chen gyi man ngag la cha tsam rtog pa tsam...*

bzang thugs gter of Byang chub gling pa dPal gyi rgyal mtshan ; little else is known about this teacher »¹⁰⁹ et l'on serait tenté d'en conclure qu'il n'y a en fait qu'un seul Chos dbyings rang grol, que la tradition aurait distingués par erreur (contrairement à sa tendance générale à « prêter aux riches », à condenser sous le nom d'un seul personnage célèbre les œuvres d'auteurs mineurs et mal identifiés), ou, éventuellement, que notre Chos dbyings rang grol serait un contemporain un peu plus jeune de Zur Chos dbyings rang grol.

Or, cette hypothèse ne tient pas, car l'auteur renvoie, comme à l'une de ses sources importantes au *Yang thig gces sgron khrid kyi zin bris* de Rig 'dzin Padma phrin las.

Le *Yang tig gces sgron zin bris* est un texte préservé dans le *Rin chen gter mdzod* (vol. XVIII, 86 pages numérotées 133 à 218 dans l'édition de sTod lung, Tshur phu, BDRC/TBRC : W20578), ainsi que dans le *Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal gyi chos skor* publié par gNas chung Śā kya yar 'phel (vol. IV, p. 7-108). Son l'auteur est très clairement le *Byang bdag* de ce nom (1640–1718). Son contenu est donné (p. 134) par Padma phrin las comme une rédaction de l'enseignement oral de « Zur chen rDo rje 'chang », c'est-à-dire, dans le contexte, Zur Chos dbyings rang grol. En fait, le texte de Padma phrin las est une très large amplification du *Yang tig gces pa'i sgron me'i khrid kyi rtsa tshig gsung rgyun rab gsal*, œuvre d'un Phrin las rab rgyas qui n'est autre, en effet, que Zur Chos dbyings rang grol. C'est dans le colophon (p. 131) qu'apparaît ce nom d'auteur. Or, la fiche consacrée à Zur Chos dbyings rang grol sur TBRC/BDRC nous apprend qu'un de ses noms était bien Phrin las rab rgyas ; ce qui confirme encore les éléments que l'on trouve dans le *Thugs sgrub yang tig gces sgron khrid kyi zin bris gzhung don rab gsal* de Padma phrin las.

Une fois cette filiation découverte, on s'avise immédiatement que le *Chos dbyings lam bzang* de Kha'u dGa' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol est, dans plusieurs de ses parties, une copie du *Yang tig gces sgron gyi zin gris* de Padma phrin las, texte procédant lui-même du petit texte de Zur Chos dbyings rang grol — ce qui permet de bien distinguer les deux Chos dbyings rang grol et aide à reconstituer la chronologie.

2. Qui est Kha'u dGa' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol ?

Dans le colophon du *Yang thig gces sgron khrid kyi zin bris* (p. 217),

¹⁰⁹ Il y a certes aussi un Kun dga' rgya mtsho dans la branche de lignée de transmission du *dGongs pa zang thal* qui aboutit à *sPrul sku* Tshul lo — mais c'est le propre maître de *Byang bdag* Padma phrin las. Ce Kun dga' rgya mtsho est du reste sans doute celui que mentionne Jann Ronis (2006 : p. 173) comme un maître de *gTer ston* bDud 'dul rdo rje (1615-1673) — ce dernier étant lui-même sans doute le « *gter ston* bDud 'dul » qui apparaît à l'extrémité d'une autre branche, à peu près au milieu du tableau récapitulatif (ci-dessous dans l'appendice).

Padma phrin las dit l'avoir composé dans sa soixante-douzième année, ce qui nous placerait environ en 1712 — *terminus a quo*, donc, pour la composition du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar gyi khrid yig chos dbyings lam bzang* de Kha'u dGa' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol. Or le colophon de ce dernier texte mentionne deux années, *shing byi* et *shing phag* : au plus tôt, 1754 et 1755. Le *terminus ad quem* est la date de la mort de Chos kyi rgya mtsho (Kaḥ thog si tu III), qui mentionne Kha'u dGa' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol dans son histoire des lieux saints du Tibet central — soit 1923 ou 1925. Cela qui ne nous laisse plus, comme seules autres possibilités de datation pour le *Chos dbyings lam bzang*, que 1814-1815 ou 1874-1875.

Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755) compte, parmi ses nombreux noms, celui de Chos dbyings rang grol. De plus, l'un de ses maîtres est un certain Kun bzang dbang po, dont il existe d'ailleurs un bref *rnam thar* dans le *Dus 'khor chos 'byung indra nī la'i phra tshom* de Blo gros don yod (p. 503-504)¹¹⁰. Cette petite biographie¹¹¹, tout en plaçant Kun bzang dbang po principalement dans le contexte de la transmission du système de Kalacakra des Jo nang pa, nous apprend qu'il était très versé dans les doctrines *rnying ma*¹¹².

Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu convient parfaitement pour la chronologie : 1755 est l'année de sa mort ; le passage qui mentionne Kun bzang dbang po donne d'ailleurs plutôt à penser qu'il lui est apparu dans une vision. Tshe dbang nor bu, quoiqu'étroitement associé à Kaḥ thog, a également passé beaucoup de temps dans le Tibet Central et il connaissait très bien les traditions de rDo rje brag. L'idée de composer un manuel pour le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, auquel il faisait défaut jusque-là, et, qui plus est, de le faire en remaniant à peine un texte de la meilleure autorité — celui de Padma phrin las — ressemble bien à son esprit à la fois encyclopédique et, à sa façon, conservateur.

Pour trancher définitivement cette question, il ne resterait plus qu'à se plonger dans les biographies les plus développées de Tshe dbang nor bu, pour voir si, parmi ses ermitages, il y en a bien un qui puisse porter le nom de Kha'u dGa' ldan¹¹³. Mais on sait déjà que l'un de ceux-ci dans le gTsang s'appelait dGa' ldan mkha' spyod. Kha'u est bien sûr un toponyme :

To the East of Sa skya there is the Kha'u lung valley. In this area are

¹¹⁰ BDRC : W00EGS1016994.

¹¹¹ Expressément inspirée de Kong *sprul* Blo gro mtha' yas.

¹¹² Op. cit., p. 485 : *Khyad par snga 'gyur bka' ma'i chos skor ma lus pa gsan bsam mthar phyin par mdzad* l.

¹¹³ Cf., pour commencer, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Rigdzin-Tsewang-Norbu/9372>.

several settlements (grong pa) that are known as the Khab po che¹¹⁴.

L'autre indice qui pourrait être exploité est le nom — apparemment, de *gter ston* — que l'auteur se donne dans le colophon : Padma las rab rdo rje rtsal. Je n'ai pas eu le temps de chercher de quel nom Tshe dbang nor bu a pu signer ses révélations.

En tout état de cause, nombre d'indices convergent pour attribuer le *Chos dbyings lam bzang* à Tshe dbang nor bu. Certes, la lignée par laquelle Tshe dbang nor bu a reçu le *dGongs pa zang thal*, telle qu'on peut la reconstituer à partir du '*Chad thabs 'od kyi 'khor lo* (qui est supposé être son *khrid yig* du *dGongs pa zang thal*, que j'étudie plus loin), ne semble pas passer par un Kun (dga') bzang (rgya mtsho) / dbang po. C'est un sujet de perplexité qu'il faudra creuser.

Toutefois, cette lignée, hormis ses premiers maillons, est bien pratiquement identique à celle dont se réclame l'auteur du *Chos dbyings lam bzang* dans le contexte du *guru-yoga* (p. 357 ; je ne mentionne que les maillons postérieurs à rGod ldem) : Nam mkha' grags pa, bDe legs rgyal mtshan, Se ston mGon po bzang po, Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan, mGon po zla ba, Nub dgon pa, Blo gros rgyal mtshan, Byam bzang, Śā kya rgya(l) mtshan, 'Brug sgra bzang po, Nam mkha' 'jigs med, Chos dbyings rang grol, *lHa btsun* Padma phrin las, *rJe btsun* Kun bzang rgya mtsho.

Voici, pour comparaison, la lignée du du '*Chad thabs 'od kyi 'khor lo* (p. 523 sq.) : rNam rgyal mgon po, bSod nams bzang po, Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, Chos kyi rin chen, Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, *Bya btang* Śā kya dpal bzang, Nub dgon pa Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, Blo gros rgyal mtshan, Byams pa bzang po, Śā kya rgyal mtshan, La stod pa 'Brug sgra bzang po, Theg mchog bsTan pa'i nyi ma, *dBon 'Jigs bral* Nam mkha', *Yongs 'dzin dam pa* Ratna bhadra, puis Tshe dbang nor bu lui-même.

L'avant dernier doit être Kun bzang rin chen, identifié sur le site BDRC sous le numéro P6990, ce qui nous donne une suggestion de plus pour ce qui est de Kun bzang rgya mtsho / Kun bzang dbang po. En tout cas, le problème de l'identité de Kha'u dga' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol, l'auteur du *Chos dbyings lam bzang*, est maintenant

¹¹⁴ Gene Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, p. 298. On trouve aussi le passage suivant dans une petite biographie de Thang po che Kun dga' 'bum (<http://www.jonangfoundation.org/masters/tangpoche-kunga-bum>) : « At the Sakya hermitage of Khau (kha'u) up the valley from Sakya monastery, he received many tantric transmissions from the master Yeshe Pal (ye shes dpal, 1281-1365), such as the *Vajrapañjara Tantra* and the *Samputa Tantra* of the *Hevajra Tantra* cycle, the esoteric instructions of the protector Caturmukha (*zhal bzhi pa*), the *Six Dharmas of Niguma*, and the *Six Dharmas of Naropa*. » L'association avec un des maîtres fondateurs du courant *jo nang pa* convient bien à Tshe dbang nor bu.

pratiquement résolu.

3. Qu'est-ce que le *Yang tig gces sgron* ?

En mentionnant le *Yang tig gces sgron zin bris* (1712) de Padma phrin las et le petit texte de Zur *chen* Chos dbyings rang grol sur lequel il repose, je ne suis pas encore remonté à la source de ces instructions joignant le *khregs chod* du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* à la pratique (de style tantrique) de *Guru rDo rje drag po rtsal*, la forme terrible de Padmasambhava la plus centrale dans le *Byang gter*.

Dans son *Thugs sgrub yang thig gces sgron khrid kyi zin bris gzhung don rab gsal* (désormais : *gZhung don rab gsal*), Padma phrin las commence (p. 136 sq.) par une histoire de la transmission dont son texte procède. Il mentionne la triple filiation du *Byang gter* « par le fils, par le disciple et par l'épouse » (*sras brgyud slob brgyud yum brgyud*) et il se réclame des deux premières. Voici le détail de la première des deux lignées à partir de rGod ldem, donnée p. 136 sq. :

(1) rNam rgyal mgon po (BDRC : P10100)¹¹⁵, *Rig 'dzin* Sangs rgyas byams bzang (P10127), (2) Se *ston* Nyi ma bzang po (P8839)¹¹⁶, (3) Se *ston* mGon po bzang po (P10120)¹¹⁷, (4) Se *ston* Rin chen rgyal mtshan (P8343)¹¹⁸, (5) *rGyal tshab* mGon po zla ba (P10130 — nous sommes maintenant au 15e siècle selon TBRC), (6) Nub dgon pa Byams pa chos rgyal mtshan (P6105)¹¹⁹, après qui l'on a quatre personnages que l'on retrouvera dans la lignée aboutissant à *Rig 'dzin* Tshe dbang nor bu : (7) Blo gros rgyal mtshan (P2737), (8) *mKhan chen* Byams pa bzang po (P10098 — dont il est dit (p. 139-140) qu'il était *rDzogs chen zang thal dang Lam 'bras kyi rnal 'byor pa mthar phyin pa* et qu'il fut l'abbé de Dam rin dGa' ldan byams pa gling), puis (9) Kun bzang chos kyi nyi ma et

¹¹⁵ Les dates de rNam rgyal mgon po ne semblent pas avoir été calculées jusqu'ici. Or selon *Guru bKra shis* (p. 669), il est dans sa dixième année lors de la mort de son père (1408). Il serait donc né vers 1399. Il avait reçu le *dGongs pa zang thal* l'année précédant la mort de rGod ldem, donc 1407. Il se marie vers 1416. Il n'a pas d'enfants. Il est surtout maître du *byang lcags mdzod nag po* ; le maître du *rDzogs chen* est plutôt rDo rje dpal ba. Il meurt dans sa vingt-cinquième année, donc vers 1424.

¹¹⁶ L'auteur du *rnam thar* de *Rig 'dzin* rGod ldem, BDRC W29603.

¹¹⁷ Padma phrin las mentionne expressément comme une erreur l'interversion, dans la lignée, de Nyi ma bzang po et mGon po bzang po, selon l'ordre que l'on trouve en effet sur TBRC/BDRC.

¹¹⁸ On possède de lui un commentaire sur le *rDo rje sems dpa' sgyu 'phrul drwa ba*, p. 7-22 du vol. LXXX du *bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa* de Kaḥ thog.

¹¹⁹ L'un des maîtres de *Byang bdag* bKra shis thob rgyal (1550?-1603) selon TBRC/BDRC. On serait donc brusquement passé au 16e siècle...

(10) *Rig 'dzin 'Brug sgra bzang po*¹²⁰. Après ce maître, la lignée redevient spécifique : son principal disciple fut (11) *Nam mkha' 'jigs med* (*Lha btsun Nam mkha' jigs med* — 1587–1650 ; P1691), qui le transmet à (12) *Rig 'dzin Phrin las lhun grub* (P359 : 1611–1662), disciple par ailleurs de *mKhas grub mDo sngags bstan 'dzin* (1576–1628 : P648) ; « plus tard... le cinquième Grand Vainqueur Omniscient fit lui-même son éloge ». Son principal disciple (p. 141) fut (13) *gTer chen 'Gyur med rdo rje* (1646–1714), « qui le donna à mon maître, (14) *Zur chen rDo rje 'chang le Grand, Chos dbyings rang grol* » (1604–1669)¹²¹. Le quinzième maître est donc *Padma phrin las* (1641–1717, *rDo rje brag rig 'dzin IV*).

On note que le maillon antérieur à *Zur Chos dbyings rang grol* est *gTer bdag bling pa*, quoiqu'il soit tout à fait de la génération de *Rig 'dzin Padma phrin las* lui-même. Or *gTer bdag gling pa* est l'auteur d'un texte qui pourrait bien être la source des "notes" (*zin bris*) de *Zur Chos dbyings rang grol* : le *Yang tig gces sgron gyi khrid rgyun* (*gSung 'bum*, vol. VI, p. 621–626), qui se rapporte lui-même à un texte sensiblement plus étendu (22 à 29 p., selon les éditions) du *gter chos* de *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* : le *Thugs sgrub snying po blang ba'i phyir yang tig gces pa'i sgron me smar khrid mngon sum gtan la dbab pa'i rgyud*.

Ni le *gter ma* de *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem*, ni le texte de '*Gyur med rdo rje* (qui en est une sorte de brève table analytique) ne contiennent encore la moindre allusion au *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*¹²².

C'est avec le *Yang tig gces pa'i sgron me'i khrid kyi rtsa tshig gsung rgyun rab gsal* de *Zur Chos dbyings rang grol* que le lien est expressément fait. Ce très bref texte (3 p. dans le vol. XVIII du *Rin chen gter mdzod*) combine en un développement continu les *gZer lnga*, les instructions pour la visualisation de *rDo rje drag po rtsal* et les pratiques

¹²⁰ On remarque encore une fois la familiarité avec l'œuvre de *Klong chen pa* à l'époque de la pleine floraison du *dGongs pa zang thal*, puisqu'il est dit de ce personnage (p. 140) : *Kun mkhyen chen po'i bstan bcos gSang 'grel phyogs bcu mun sel thugs la chud cing l, etc.* On dit encore de lui : *rDzogs chen zang thal gtso bor gyur pa bka' gter gyi zab chos mang du bzhugs pa rdzogs chen gyi 'chad nyan gtso bor mdzad pas Rong po rdzogs chen par grags*.

¹²¹ On s'étonne ici de voir '*Gyur med rdo rje* (*gTer bdag gling pa*) enseigner à son maître, de près de quarante ans plus âgé que lui. Mais *Padma phrin las* est tout à fait clair et il n'y a nulle équivoque dans l'identification des personnes. L'étude des biographies des trois protagonistes — *Zur Chos dbyings rang grol*, *gTer bdag gling pa* et *Rig 'dzin Padma phrin las* — permettra sans doute d'y voir plus clair.

¹²² Le *gter ma* porte principalement sur la nature de l'esprit et en parle dans des termes qui sont tout à fait du même style, du même registre que celui des textes du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, hormis l'accrochage initial sur des pratiques tantriques — lesquelles sont, au demeurant, très simplifiées, très proches de ce qu'on appelle les *sems 'dzin*, ces méthodes de type tantrique, mais arrachées au pesant contexte rituel des *sadhana* et réduites à leur plus simple expression en vue de produire les expériences qui en sont l'objet.

du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*. Naturellement, il faut bien connaître le contexte pour comprendre les formules très allusives de la p. 129 du texte de Zur Chos dbyings rang grol : *De bas ka dag sngon 'gro rdo rje dang | | hūm sngon thig le dkar dmar dmigs rim bskyang | | bar bar ngo bo bltas te shar grol btang | | de rjes khrid gzhung dngos gzhi la zhugs te | | mnyam bzhaḡ gsal stong 'dzin med ngo bo skyong |* — Les pratiques ici sommairement indiquées sont celles que détaille le *Ma rig mun sel sgron me* du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (p. 195-199) et, élément remarquable, c'est exactement cette matière que Chos dbyings rang grol avait aussi extraite du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* pour en faire les instructions de *khregs chod* de son propre manuel du *dGongs pa zang thal*.

Telle est la matrice du texte de *Rig 'dzin Padma phrin las*, qui donnera son plein développement à l'intuition de Zur Chos dbyings rang grol. Or, on l'a dit, le *Thugs sgrub yang tig gces sgron khrid kyi zin bris gzhung don rab gsal* de Padma phrin las est à son tour — c'est peu dire — la source du *Chos dbyings lam bzang*.

4. Comparaison du *gZhung don rab bsal* de Padma phrin las (1712) et du *Chos dbyings lam bzang* de Tshe dbang nor bu (1755)

Le texte de Padma phrin las, on l'aura compris, se donne comme un manuel de pratique de Guru rDo rje drag po rtsal, la forme terrible de Padmasambhava dans le *Byang gter* ; toutefois, en somme, à partir de la p. 169 (donc dans plus de la moitié du texte), Padma phrin las ne commente plus guère que des textes de rDzogs chen — principalement du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, même si le *dGongs pa zang thal* n'est pas absent. Quand on sait que les 28 premières pages sont principalement consacrées aux *gZer lnga*, autrement dit, qu'il n'y a somme toute que 9 pages consacrées exclusivement à la pratique de style tantrique de Guru rDo rje drag po rtsal comme tel, on voit bien qu'à peu de chose près, il aurait suffi à celui que je pense être Tshe dbang nor bu de retrancher ces neuf pages pour composer son *Chos dbyings lam bzang*. Dans une certaine mesure, c'est ce qu'il a fait. Une fois ce principe de composition compris, le texte de « Kha'u dGa' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol » devient tout à fait limpide, quoique bien peu intéressant en lui-même — sinon par la décision de doter le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* d'un manuel de pratique autonome.

Le paradoxe est le suivant : nous sommes dans la postérité de Zur Chos dbyings rang grol, qui avait audacieusement inauguré une véritable articulation des deux versants du corpus, *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* et *dGongs pa zang thal* — et voici qu'à peu près un siècle plus tard, le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* fait l'objet d'un traitement séparé, et cela

sous la plume d'un auteur — Tshe dbang nor bu, si c'est bien lui — qui vraisemblablement est celui qui a opéré la jonction des traditions du Tibet central et de celles de Kaḥ thog (où il a été initialement formé et où, comme il est bien connu, il a beaucoup œuvré à la fin de sa vie).

La comparaison détaillée des deux textes — l'œuvre de Padma phrin las et son "démarquage" par celui que je suppose être Tshe dbang nor bu — demanderait trop d'espace pour être menée à bien dans le cadre de cet article, et, au fond, elle nous emporterait loin de notre thème — l'histoire des manuels de pratique du *dGongs pa zang thal* — en consacrant au *Yang tig gces sgron gyi zin bris* comme tel encore plus de développements que je ne lui en ai accordés. Je me bornerai à quelques remarques.

Les pages du texte de *Rig 'dzin* Padma phrin las qui sont étroitement relatives à la pratique de Guru rDo rje drag po rtsal sont, on l'a dit et on ne s'en étonne pas, supprimées par Kha'u dGa' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol ; il supprime également la présentation liminaire de la lignée (cet inconvénient pour l'historien est compensé par une présentation de sa propre lignée dans le cadre de l'explication de la pratique du *guru-yoga* des *gZer lnga*). Par ailleurs, il étoffe les chapitres relatifs aux "quatre pensées qui détournent l'esprit du *samsāra*" ou au développement de l'esprit d'Eveil — à moins que l'auteur de ces modifications soit Kun bzang rgya mtsho / dbang po, le maître dont il se réclame¹²³. En revanche, et c'est le plus étonnant — et même, il faut le dire, le plus décevant — après la présentation des trois visualisations¹²⁴ tirées du *Ma rig mun sel sgron me*, Tshe dbang nor bu (?) bâcle, en quelque sorte, la fin de son manuel, en se contentant de coller bout-à-bout deux très longues citations, dont la seconde est assurément tirée du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, tandis que la première ne paraît pas s'y trouver, mais y ressemble beaucoup.

Paradoxalement, le seul vrai manuel de pratique du *Ka dag rang*

¹²³ Peut-être est-ce en ce sens qu'il faut comprendre les paroles attribuées au maître Kun bzang dbang po dans la vision de Kha'u dga' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol : la partie qui est clairement l'œuvre de ce dernier (l'ajout des instructions tirées du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* après le *guru-yoga* des *gZer lnga*) laisse apparaître beaucoup d'imperfections dans la composition — pour ne pas dire : une rédaction passablement négligée. Il serait paradoxal que le même auteur ait consacré tant de soin à développer élégamment la première moitié de son œuvre — la moins importante, puisque la moins originale quant à ses objets — pour la coiffer d'une fin répondant si peu aux attentes du lecteur. Ajoutons à cela que plusieurs parties des "préliminaires ordinaires" ont une saveur plutôt *sa skya pa* : il serait aisé de montrer ce que la présentation de la prise de refuge doit, notamment, au *Thub pa'i dgongs gsal* de Sa skya paṇḍita. Je ne serais pas surpris que ces développements scolastiques bien charpentés, rédigés dans un style concis, clair et ferme, soient d'une autre main que la fin (celle d'un moine formé dans les traditions de Sa skya ?).

¹²⁴ Celles que Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol avait été apparemment le premier à extraire du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* pour les inclure dans son *khrid yig*.

byung rang shar conservé dans la tradition du *Byang gter* est donc... le *Yang tig gces sgron zin bris* de Padma phrin las, qui, entre la p. 170 de l'édition citée et la dernière page (p. 218), agence et commente presque exclusivement des textes du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, en dépit de quelques références occasionnelles au *Thugs sgrub rDo rje drag po rtsal*¹²⁵. Si Tshe dbang nor bu (?) s'était contenté d'extraire les passages pertinents du *Yang tig gces sgron zin bris*, même sans y rien ajouter de son cru, il avait donc la matière pour un manuel bien plus étoffé, qui aurait été presque deux fois plus long que ne l'est le *Chod dbyings lam bzang*.

5. Réflexions sur les imperfections de composition du *Chos dbyings lam bzang*

Pourquoi l'auteur du *Chos dbyings lam bzang* n'a-t-il pas été au bout de ce qui semble avoir été son projet ? Les œuvres de Tshe dbang nor bu, dans l'état du moins où elles nous sont parvenues, comportent un certain nombre de textes inachevés¹²⁶ ; sans imputer à leur auteur un tempérament brouillon, on peut du moins supposer que le grand homme d'action qu'il fut par ailleurs n'a pas toujours eu le loisir de mener à

¹²⁵ Ne serait-il donc pas plus naturel, ou du moins plus traditionnel, de voir dans le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* en quelque sorte la "section rDzogs chen" du *Thugs sgrub rDo rje drag po rtsal* que de l'associer à toute force au *dGongs pa zang thal*, ainsi que K. Turpeinen (2015) le fait, comme si cela allait de soi — avec au fond pour seule raison la publication conjointe des deux corpus par A 'dzom 'brug pa et peut-être par Śā kya yar 'phel ? Dans le sens d'une jonction *Thugs sgrub – Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, on a aussi le témoignage de la vie de mGon po dbang rgyal par *sPrul sku Tshul lo*, qui nous indique, par exemple (p. 65) qu'en 1881, mGon po dbang rgyal a enseigné, au monastère de Shugs 'byung : *Byang gter yang tig gces sgron gcod khrid | byang gter rdzogs chen ka dag dang Byang gter rtsa rlung sngon 'gro rnams*. Même s'il s'ajoute le *gcod khrid* et le *rtsa rlung* (qui sont probablement le *gSang ba rmad byung* et le *Lung phag mo zab rgya* du *dGongs pa zang thal*), on a bien ici à nouveau la combinaison *Thugs sgrub rDo rje drag po rtsal | Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, et non un *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* utilisé pour le *khregs chod*, joint à un *dGongs pa zang thal* servant à présenter le *thod rgal*. Sans vouloir pousser les choses à cet extrême, il paraîtrait du moins raisonnable de considérer le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* comme un cycle tout à fait distinct du *dGongs pa zang thal*, tout en reconnaissant aux maîtres dépositaires de ces traditions la liberté de les combiner, comme le fait Zur Chos dbyings rang grol, ou de traiter le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* à part, selon la manière de *Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu*, ou encore de le composer avec le *Thugs sgrub rDo rje drag po rtsal*, à la manière de *Rig 'dzin Padma phrin las*... Sans parler des combinaisons avec des matériaux extérieurs au système du *Byang gter*, à la façon des maîtres de *Kaḥ thog* — et comme le fera très discrètement, mais très fermement, *sPrul sku Tshul lo*, qui, sans le dire, agence d'une certaine manière *dGongs pa zang thal* avec le *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, en puisant à pleines mains dans le *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin* de *Klong chen pa*.

¹²⁶ C'est notamment le cas de ce qui est présenté comme son manuel du *dGongs pa zang thal*, le *'Chad thabs 'od kyi 'khor lo*, que je vais étudier à l'issue de ce chapitre.

bien ses projets littéraires.

Le bricolage textuel honnêtement avoué par « Kha'u dga' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol » dans son *Chos dbyings lam bzang* — collage d'une section sur le rDzogs chen à un commentaire préexistant sur les préliminaires — est bien visible dans son texte : il se trahit par une incohérence entre le plan annoncé et celui qui est effectivement incorporé au texte. Le point où cette incohérence se matérialise est très probablement celui où l'auteur a repris un texte antérieurement existant pour le compléter. Rappelons que, dans la vision (?) qui l'a amené à composer le *Chos dbyings lam bzang*, il est dit¹²⁷ à l'auteur qu'il y a déjà un manuel de pratique allant jusqu'au *guru-yoga*, et qu'il doit le compléter pour intégrer l'ensemble de la pratique du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*.

Précisément, voici le plan annoncé au début (p. 335 du *Chos dbyings lam bzang*) :

1. sNgon 'gro
 - 1.1. Thun mong gi sngon 'gro
 - 1.2. Thun mong ma yin pa'i sngon 'gro
2. dNgos gzhi
3. rJes

On s'attendrait donc, tout naturellement, à la fin de l'exposé des *gZer lnga* (c'est-à-dire, précisément : à la fin du *guru-yoga*), à rencontrer un "deuxièmement", annonçant le *thun mong ma yin pa'i sngon 'gro* (qui, ici, consiste dans les trois pratiques suivantes, empruntées, *via* Padma phrin las et Zur Chos dbyings rang grol, au *Ma rig mun sel sgron me du Ka dag rang byung rang shar*). Or l'auteur continue avec un "sixièmement" (p. 361), un "septièmement" (*id.*), un "huitièmement" (p. 362), avant de s'aviser de son inconséquence (à la dernière ligne de la p. 363) et de procéder à un petit replâtrage, sans plus de souci de cohérence avec son annonce de plan : *'Di yan gyi thun mong ma yin pa'i sngon 'gro lus ngag yid gsum lam du 'dzud pa zhes bya ba sa bcad gnyis pa'o*.

Cette maladresse de composition intervient donc bien exactement au niveau de la suture à laquelle a procédé Tshe dbang nor bu (?) entre deux parties du texte de Padma phrin las, une fois évacué le développement relatif à Guru rDo rje drag po rtsal.

On s'explique cependant assez mal son erreur, puisque Padma phrin las, son modèle, ne s'égare pas et que l'on lit bien sous sa plume (p. 163) : *gnyis pa thun mong ma yin pa'i sngon 'gro sems 'dzin la gsum te l*,

¹²⁷ Op. cit., p. 372 : ...*Kun dga' bzang po dang mjal te Ka dag khrid yig bla ma'i rnal 'byor yan legs par ghang ste l 'di man khyod kyis khrigs chags su grigs shig ces bgos bzhin du bka' stsal pa yid la brtan du bzung ste...*

avec la subdivision en corps, parole et esprit que l’auteur du *Chos dbyings lam bzang* rattrape bien maladroitement après-coup. Mais, quand on y regarde de plus près, on voit qu’il s’agit de tout autre chose chez Padma phrin las, qui consacre les pages suivantes d’abord à la pratique préliminaire du corps, qui comporte elle-même trois parties, corps, parole et esprit : visualisation du corps de Guru rDo rje drag po rtsal (p. 163-167), puis ce qui concerne sa “parole” (p. 167-168) avant d’arriver à l’esprit (p. 168 sq.).

On débouche alors, chez Padma phrin las, sur une deuxième partie, liée à la parole (c’est là qu’il ne faut pas se perdre dans le plan, très maîtrisé, mais complexe, de cette œuvre), présentant le “*maṅḍala* de la parole” — toute une série de visualisations de la syllabe *hūṃ* qui rappellent ce qu’on trouve ordinairement dans les préliminaires spécifiques du *sNying thig* sous l’intitulé de “purification de la parole” dans la “purification du triple portail”¹²⁸. Les pratiques exposées par Tshe dbang nor bu (?) à la suite des *gZer lnga* commencent, chez Padma phrin las, p. 170, et sont placées sous l’intitulé : *gsum pa thugs phyag mtshan la sems ’dzin pa*. Ce dernier marque bien la transition des textes du *Thugs sgrub* à ceux du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (p. 172), en prenant la peine de citer très exactement le titre du texte auquel il emprunte la citation suivante : *rDzogs chen ka dag gi khrid yig gter gzhung Ma rig mun sel sgron me’am | snying po bcud bsdus kyi gnad khrid las |, etc.*

L’étrangeté signalée dans la structuration du texte de Tshe dbang nor bu (?) continue, au reste, pour les chapitres de ce qui devrait être la partie principale (*dnagos gzhi*) et la conclusion (*rjes*), puisque, jusqu’à la fin du *Chos dbyings lam bzang*, on ne rencontre plus qu’un “neuvièmement” (p. 363-364) un “dixième” (p. 364-365) et un “onzièmement” (p. 365-373 [fin]). Il y a encore d’autres petits défauts de structuration du même genre, pleins d’intérêt comme indices pour le travail du philologue.

Voyons maintenant la “partie principale” du *Chos dbyings lam bzang*.

Peut-être n’est-il pas inutile de rappeler que l’ordre des pratiques qui nous est le plus familier, parce qu’il domine entièrement à l’époque actuelle, n’a pas été gravé dans le marbre dès le commencement. Il régnait certes encore, même à l’époque qui nous occupe, ce qui peut rétrospectivement nous apparaître comme un certain désordre dans leur organisation. Dans un texte pourtant aussi tardif que le manuel du *rDzogs chen dgongs pa kun ’dus* composé par ’Gyur med rdo rje, certaines des pratiques préliminaires spécifiques du *rDzogs chen* sont bien accomplies avant le *khregs chod*, mais d’autres sont reportées entre

¹²⁸ Voir, par exemple, pour la forme propre de ces pratiques dans le contexte du *dGongs pa zang thal*, Arguillère (2016), p. 212-219.

le *khregs chod* et le *thod rgal*.

Cependant, pour ce qui est du *dGongs pa zang thal*, à s'en tenir aux textes eux-mêmes, il n'y a guère d'ambiguïté (sinon quant aux petits détails qui ont donné tant de fil à retordre à *sPrul sku Tshul lo* dans la rédaction de son manuel). En effet, dans ce que l'on appelle le *khrid gzhung*, "manuel-source" ou "manuel principal" — le *Chos nyid mngon sum gyi khrid yig* — la séquence est claire (p. 360-368) : si, en fait de préliminaires ordinaires et non ordinaires, le texte (p. 360) ne dit rien des *gZer lnga* et se contente du rappel de l'impermanence, ensuite, on passe bien aux préliminaires spécifiques du *rDzogs chen* (p. 360-367), suivis d'une partie principale (*dnegos gzhi*, à partir de la p. 367), comportant deux sections : *chos nyid stong pa'i ngang nas chos dbyings 'gyur ba med pa'i don gyi lta ba* (p. 368-379), correspondant au *khregs chod* (même si le terme n'apparaît pas en ce point du texte), puis *rang rig pa rang shar gyi dgongs pa ye shes mngon sum du gtan la dbab pa*, correspondant au *thod rgal* (p. 379-389).

Parmi les divers auteurs étudiés jusqu'ici, seul *Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol* est exactement fidèle à cet ordre, comme le sera *sPrul sku Tshul lo*. Mais dans le *Nyams khrid thar gling chos sku'i zhing khams su bgrod pa'i nye lam* de *Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol*, on avait, à l'intérieur même de cette structure prescrite par le *khrid gzhung*, un commencement d'intégration des pratiques du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, l'amenant à organiser ainsi sa matière :

1. *Ka dag rang byung rang shar gyis gnas lugs kyi don gtan* [307] | la 'bebs pa — p. 307
 - 1.1. *sNgon 'gro*
 - 1.1.1. *Thun mong = sNgon 'gro gzer lnga*
 - 1.1.1.1. *sKyabs 'gro*
 - 1.1.1.2. *Sems bskyed pa* — p. 309
 - 1.1.1.3. *Maṅḍala*
 - 1.1.1.4. *rDo rje sems dpa'i bsgom bzlas*
 - 1.1.1.5. *Bla ma'i rnal 'byor* [incluant la méditation de l'impermanence et des souffrances du *samsāra*]
 - 1.1.2. *Thun mong ma yin pa* — p. 312
 - 1.1.2.1. *rDo rje dkar po la brten nas sems 'dzin pa* — p. 313
 - 1.1.2.2. *rDo rje mthing kha hūṃ yig dang bcas pas la sems 'dzin pa*
 - 1.1.2.3. *Thig le dkar dmar la brten nas sems 'dzin pa*
 - 1.2. *dnegos gzhi byung gnas 'gro gsum gyi sems kyi gzhi rtsa gcod* — p. 314
 - 1.3. *rJes* — p. 316
2. *lHun grub dgongs pa zang thal gyis thod rgal gyi rang rtsal rjen par ston pa*, etc.

Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (?), très largement inspiré par Padma phrin las, va encore un peu plus loin, quoique sans beaucoup développer : si la “partie principale” (du *khregs chod*) se résumait, chez Zur Chos dbyings rang grol, à l’examen de la provenance, de la subsistance et de la destination (*byung gnas 'gro gsum*) de l’esprit¹²⁹, on voit apparaître dans le *Chos dbyings lam bzang* (mais déjà chez Padma phrin las) la vague suggestion d’une méditation sur le ciel dans l’instruction appelée *dpe dang dpe'i don zab mos rlung nam mkha'i dbyings su bstim pa la sems 'dzin pa* (p. 364)¹³⁰, neuvième point de son plan (passablement banal).

Cette méditation précède le passage à la “recherche de l’esprit” (*sems tshol ba*, p. 364-365), qui consiste dans l’examen de la provenance,

¹²⁹ Ce qui est assez conforme, en gros, au *Chos nyid mngon sum gyi khrid yig*.

¹³⁰ Je me demande si cette séquence (mettant bout-à-bout méditation sur le ciel — si c’est bien de cela qu’il s’agit, le texte n’est pas absolument clair — et recherche de la provenance, de la subsistance et de la destination de l’esprit) ne serait pas la matrice de l’étrange organisation de la section sur le *khregs chod* dans le manuel de *sPrul sku Tshul lo*. J’ai insisté ailleurs (Arguillère 2016 : p. 230-234) sur le caractère plutôt étonnant de cette section du *Khrid yig skal bzang re skong* qui présente deux systèmes de *khregs chod* mis bout-à-bout — le premier reposant sur le « brassage des trois cieux » (*nam mkha' gsum sprugs*) et le second incluant notamment la recherche de la provenance, de la subsistance et de la destination de l’esprit. J’ai indiqué (2016 : p. 231), les raisons internes qui ont pu pousser *sPrul sku Tshul lo* en ce sens — raisons à la fois exégétiques (un passage obscur du *Chos nyid mngon sum gyi khrid yig*) et pratiques (liées au caractère passablement insaisissable des instructions de ce même texte du *dGongs pa zang thal* sur le *khregs chod*). Mais, pour un auteur à la fois aussi rigoureux et aussi conservateur que *sPrul sku Tshul lo*, un point d’appui de ce genre chez ses devanciers pourrait avoir contribué à lui à faire franchir le pas de cette innovation un peu étonnante au vu des contraintes formelles qu’il se donne par ailleurs dans la composition dans son manuel du *dGongs pa zang thal*. On pourrait même aller plus loin et se demander, étant donné ce que l’on trouve dans la tradition de Kaḥ thog (où le *khregs chod* est franchement remplacé par le *zhi gnas – lhag mthong* de la Mahāmudrā des bKa’ brgyud pa), si la séquence *nam mkha' gsum sprugs* – recherche plus analytique de la nature de l’esprit n’en serait pas un prolongement, mais gouverné par le souci de respecter strictement le cadre du *dGongs pa zang thal*, *stricto sensu* (les seuls “quatre premiers volumes”). Ce n’est pas une pure spéculation de ma part : la motivation de cet ordre — méditation sur l’espace puis recherche de la provenance, de la subsistance et de la destination de l’esprit — est, en effet, bien exposée par Padma phrin las (p. 178) par analogie avec les pratiques de *zhi gnas* et *lhag mthong* : *De ltar thun mong dang thun mong ma yin pa'i sngon 'gro song rjes | dngos gzhi'i khrid rim pa sems chos nyid kyi dkyil 'khor ni | rTsa ba las | de rjes khrid gzhung dngos gzhi zhugs te | mnyam bzhag gsal stong 'dzin med ngo bo skyong | zhes gsungs pa'i don spyir zhi gnas sngon du btang ba'i mthar sems 'tshol gyi* (lire : *gyis*) *gdar sha bcad de sgom thog nas lta ba 'tshol ba dang | thog mar sems 'tshol dang de nas zhi gnas su phab te | lta thog nas sgom pa 'tshol ba ste lugs gnyis las | 'dir snga ma ltar yin pas | dang po sgom thog nas lta ba 'tshol ba ni | ...* Le texte de Padma phrin las est si riche qu’on aimerait le citer — et le traduire — en entier.

de la subsistance et de la destination.

Après cela, dans sa onzième partie, (p. 365-372) l'auteur ne fait plus que recopier de longs passages de deux textes *gter ma*. Je n'ai pas encore identifié la première citation (p. 365-367)¹³¹, mais les p. 367-372 sont la copie de plusieurs chapitres du *Gegs sel nor bu rin po che'i mdzod* (p. 279, l. 6 – p. 286, l. 2 du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*).

Le bKa' yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs chen kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal gyi khrid kyi 'chad thabs 'od kyi 'khor lo de Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755)

L'attribution à Tshe dbang nor bu ne présente pas les mêmes difficultés pour ce bref texte : s'il ne se trouve pas dans le *gsung 'bum* en 4 volumes édité par le Kargyud Sungrab Nyamso Khang (Darjeeling, 1973), il est en revanche dans l'édition en 6 volumes¹³² et, enfin, dans l'édition en trois volumes¹³³.

Il s'agit, de toute évidence, d'un fragment : le texte, bien loin de remplir tout le programme indiqué par son titre, s'interrompt brusquement à la fin des "préliminaires extraordinaires" — autant dire qu'il n'aborde même pas le rDzogs chen.

Une première remarque importante, cependant : ce texte n'est pas excessivement semblable au précédent (on aurait pu craindre, en effet, que ce fragment sur les préliminaires soit en fait celui que "Kha'u dga ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol" avait hérité de son maître Kun bzang dbang po ; mais il n'en est rien, c'est un texte sensiblement différent).

En effet, conformément au *Chos nyid mngon sum gyi khrid yig*, il commence par cinq points : examen des qualités du disciple, des lieux, des temps, des compagnons et de l'équipement. Ces points sont cependant simplement mentionnés et non développés. Il enchaîne sur un sixième point : l'histoire de la transmission. Là encore, le texte se borne, en gros, à l'énoncé de principes, mais, point très intéressant, Tshe dbang

¹³¹ Apparemment, Tshe dbang nor bu a dû l'emprunter à Padma phrin las qui entrelace des textes du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* et des passages du *Yang tig gces pa'i sgron me smar khrid mngon sum gtan la dbab pa'i rgyud, gter ma* de rGod ldem dont le style est extrêmement semblable à celui du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*. N'ayant pas trouvé le passage cité par Tshe dbang nor bu dans le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, je crois — ce serait l'ultime signe d'un certain manque de soin dans la composition de son manuel — qu'il l'a, à son insu, tiré du *Thugs sgrub rDo rje drag po rtsal* en recopiant un passage chez Padma phrin las sans prendre la peine d'en vérifier la source.

¹³² Damchoe Sangpo, Dalhousie, 1976-1977 : vol. IV, 22 pages d'un manuscrit en *dbu med*, numérotées 517-538, la première étant la page de titre et la dernière étant blanche.

¹³³ Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, Pékin, 2006 : vol. II, p. 204-211. C'est cette dernière édition que j'ai utilisée.

nor bu nomme trois maîtres dont il a reçu le *dGongs pa zang thal* : *sPrul pa'i sku* Kun dga' bstan 'dzin, Nam mkha' chos rje de La stod dPal mo chos lding et *Yongs 'dzin dam pa* Ratnabhadrā de mNga' ris gung thang, à la grotte dite Ra la za 'od phug.

Il restitue ensuite les lignées par lesquelles cet enseignement lui est parvenu. La première (celle qui aboutit à Ratnabhadrā) est celle que j'ai restituée ci-dessous dans l'arbre récapitulatif des lignées ayant abouti aux divers manuels connus du *dGongs pa zang thal*. En voici une autre : elle est identique à la première jusqu'à Śā kya rgyal mtshan, puis elle passe à Yol me bsTan 'dzin nor bu, à gCung Phyag rdor puis à *sPrul sku* Kun dga' bstan 'dzin de qui Tshe dbang nor bu l'a reçue.

La troisième est conforme à la première jusqu'à Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, après qui elle passe à *sNgags 'chang* gSang sngags rdo rje, puis à *rJe* Sangs rgyas seng ge, à Blo gros rab gsal, à *Thugs sras* Ras chung rdo rje, à *sNgags 'chang* Nam mkha' gzi brjid, à Nam mkha' kun bzang, à Nam mkha' rdo rje, puis à *rDo rje 'dzin pa* Nam mkha' chos rje qui l'a passée à Tshe dbang nor bu.

Il en ajoute encore une quatrième, qui nous intéresse davantage, parce que nous la connaissons déjà : de *Rig 'dzin* rGod ldem à bSod nams mchog bzang, puis à Don yod rgyal mtshan, Thang stong rgyal po, Zab lung *gter ston* Kun dga' nyi ma, Ratnaketu, Ratnavajra, Bo dhe sing ha, bKra shis rgya mtsho, bsTan pa seng ge, Chos nyid rgya mtsho, Shes rab rgya mtsho, Klong gsal snying po, *Khyab bdag 'khor lo'i mgon po* Padma bde chen gling pa, puis Tshe dbang nor bu.

Il s'agit de la lignée de Kah thog, aisée à reconnaître à travers la sanskritisation des noms : « Ratnaketu » est cet A rdo dKon mchod rgyal mtshan qui a diffusé le *dGongs pa zang thal* à Kah thog ; « Ratnavajra » n'est autre que Rong po dKon mchog rdo rje ; Tshe dbang nor bu (ou le copiste) oublie Śā kya rgyal mtshan et passe directement à un « Bo dhe sing ha » qui n'est autre que Byang chub seng ge ; après qui l'on arrive à bKra shis rgya mtsho en qui nous reconnaissons l'auteur du deuxième *khrid yig* étudié ci-dessus. Dans la suite, nous reconnaissons une lignée partant de bKra shis rgya mtsho, dont nous connaissons déjà les premiers maillons par *Guru* bKra shis, mais que Tshe dbang nor bu continue jusqu'à Klong gsal snying po (par une autre voie que celle indiquée par *Guru* bKra shis) et dont il donne le maillon intermédiaire jusqu'à lui : Padma bde chen gling pa (BDRC : P669 ; 1627 ou 1663(!)-1713), qui n'est autre que Padma mati — très probablement l'auteur de l'immense manuel du *Yang ti nag po* conservé dans les *Kah thog khrid chen bcu gsum*, le *Zab lam don gsal me long* (il occupe tout le vol. VIII, p. 1-595¹³⁴).

¹³⁴ Le *rnam thar* de mGon po dbang rgyal par *sPrul sku* Tshul lo nous apprend (p. 23) que mGon po dbang rgyal a reçu le *Yang ti nag po* de son père, *gTer chen* Nus ldan

Autre particularité intéressante de ce fragment : il détermine clairement la fonction des cinq consécration (dbang) qui caractérisent le *dGongs pa zang thal*, par contraste avec le système à quatre consécration qui domine partout chez Klong chen pa : la consécration du vase est préparatoire à la phase de développement (ici, plus spécifiquement : les pratiques des *Zhi khro*) ; la consécration secrète est préparatoire à *gtum mo* ; la consécration de *shes rab ye shes* est préparatoire à la voie du "messenger" (toutes deux correspondent aux pratiques développées dans le *Lung phag mo zab rgya*) ; enfin, ce qui est le plus original : la consécration du mot est préparatoire au *khregs chod*, tandis que la cinquième, le *rig pa'i rtsal dbang*, est préparatoire au *thod rgal*¹³⁵. Voilà une explication que l'on ne trouve pas chez Klong chen pa, et pour cause.

Dans la suite, Tshe dbang nor bu combine clairement le *Chos nyid mngon sum gyi khrid yig* et les *gZer lnga*. Tshe dbang nor bu (ou son éditeur) recopie intégralement le texte des *gZer lnga* jusqu'au « clou » de l'impermamence, à l'occasion duquel il reprend la parole pour mentionner brièvement les *blo ldog rnam bzhi* et l'importance de les méditer assidûment. Il recommence alors de copier les *gZer lnga*, avec simplement quelques notules dans la pratique du *guru-yoga*, dont la plus importante renvoie au *Bi ma'i snyan rgyud khrid gzer bu gsum pa*, lequel présente en effet un *guru-yoga* propre au *dGongs pa zang thal*. On en revient alors au texte des *gZer lnga*, recopié jusqu'à la fin du *guru-yoga*, et le texte s'achève brusquement, en queue de poisson, si l'on ose dire, par un *dge'o* sans doute ajouté par les éditeurs à ce fragment.

Aucun indice dans le texte ne permet de savoir s'il s'agit d'une œuvre inachevée ou d'un fragment conservé d'une œuvre non retrouvée jusqu'ici. Les deux éditions disponibles s'arrêtent exactement au même point ; mais il est très vraisemblable que celle que j'ai utilisée (en *dbu can*) procède directement de l'autre (manuscrit en *dbu med*). L'inexistence ou la disparition de la suite, qui aurait fait de ce texte un véritable *khrid yig* du *dGongs pa zang thal*, est bien dommage, car la partie que nous en avons donne le sentiment d'une véritable familiarité avec le texte et du souci d'en donner un manuel conforme à sa lettre, sans adjonction d'éléments étrangers. C'est tout ce que l'on peut en dire.

rdo rje de 'Khor gdong ; ce dernier l'avait reçu en 1813 de *Bla ma sKal bzang yon tan* (cf. *'Khor gdong gter chen 'gro phan gling pa gro log rtsal gyi rnam thar* de Ye shes don rtogs, p. 10).

¹³⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 190 : *bskyed rim gyi sngon 'gro bum dbang dang | gtum mo'i sngon 'gro gsang dbang | pho nya'i sngon 'gro sher dbang | khregs chod kyi sngon 'gro tshig dbang | thod rgal gyi sngon 'gro rtsal dbang sogs...*

Le Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal gyi dgongs don phyogs gcig tu bkod pa khrid yig skal bzang re skongs rig 'dzin dgongs rgyan de sPrul sku Tshul lo (1884–1957)

Parvenant au dernier maillon de la *catena aurea* des manuels du *dGongs pa zang thal* et, avec lui, à la fin de cet article, force m'est de conclure que la récolte a été un peu maigre. Les deux premiers *khrid yig* (*Śā kya rgyal mtshan, bKra shis rgya mtsho*) ne portent pas vraiment sur le *dGongs pa zang thal* et le premier n'est même pas précisément un *khrid yig*. Le *Chos dbyings lam bzang*, outre le fait qu'il ne traite que du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, n'est qu'un bricolage passablement mal fait à partir d'un texte de Padma phrin las, lequel est plutôt relatif au *Thugs sgrub rDo rje drag po rtsal* (mais ce n'en est pas moins l'une des rencontres les plus riches que j'aie faites au fil de cette recherche). Quant au manuel de Tshe dbang nor bu, ce n'est hélas qu'un fragment sans conséquence, quoique non dénué de tout intérêt.

En somme, dans la vaste étendue de temps qui sépare les manuels inclus dans le *gter chos* de celui que *sPrul sku Tshul lo* a composé dans la première moitié du siècle dernier, seul se dresse, à la manière d'une île au milieu de l'océan (selon une image suggérée par son titre), le *Thar gling chos sku'i zhing khams su bgrod pa'i nye lam* de Zur Chos dbyings rang grol.

Au reste, même si *sPrul sku Tshul lo* était probablement héritier aussi de la tradition de Kaḥ thog (que son maître mGon po dbang rgyal avait reçue, comme on l'a vu), la lignée principale dont il se réclame est bien celle du Tibet central. L'arrivée du *Byang gter* au monastère de 'Khor gdong et dans ses filiales est nettement plus tardive encore qu'à Kaḥ thog. En effet, on trouve une histoire abrégée de 'Khor gdong dans la vie de mGon po dbang rgyal par *sPrul sku Tshul lo*, qui compte de nombreuses générations de maîtres depuis la fondation par *Grub chen Sangs rgyas rdo rje* jusqu'à l'époque de *Grub dbang Shes rab me 'bar* qui, le premier, a établi le lien avec la tradition du *Byang gter* : il reçoit les initiations du *dGongs pa zang thal* de *bsKal bzang Padma dbang phyug* (rGod ldem VIII ; TBRC : P89 ; 1720–1771 selon *Treasury of Lives* ; *alias* Khams gsum zil gnon ou rDo rje thogs med rtsal) à Mi nyag ra ba lha sgang¹³⁶.

¹³⁶ Il a écrit une longue autobiographie, *lHa rigs kyi btsun pa bsKal bzang padma'i ming can rang nyid kyi rtogs par brjod pa* (TBRC : W30122) dont l'étude permettrait sans doute de dater précisément ce moment inaugural du passage du *Byang gter* à 'Khor gdong. En ce qui concerne *gTer chen Nus ldan rdo rje* et son disciple mGon po dbang rgyal, leurs biographies montrent que chacun d'entre eux a reçu le *dGongs pa zang thal* à de nombreuses reprises, de divers maîtres ; ils ne dépendent pas étroitement d'une tradition unique. En revanche, la préférence absolue des maîtres

Dans son *rnam thar*, *sPrul sku* Tshul lo fait de *gTer chen* Nus ldan rdo rje de 'Khor gdong, alias 'Gro phan gling pa gro lod rtsal (maître de son maître, mGon po dbang rgyal), le disciple direct de ce Shes rab me 'bar ; on retrouve la même chose dans le *rnam thar* du *gTer chen* composé par Ye shes don rtogs et, bien sûr, dans son *gSang ba'i rnam thar* (autobiographique).

Cependant, dans un autre de ses écrits, le *Byang gter bka' dbang spyi sbyor rung gi lo rgyus gsal ba'i me long* (f° 26b sq. de l'édition xylographique en 8 vol.), voici comment *sPrul sku* Tshul lo présente la lignée à l'usage de ceux qui auraient à accomplir les rituels de consécration (*dbang*) du *Byang gter* : Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, rNam rgyal mgon po, thugs sras rdo rje rnam gnyis, mtshan ldan bla ma rnam gnyis, Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, Chos rgyal bsod nams, Śā kya bzang po, sngags 'chang yab sras rnam gnyis, Rig 'dzin sTobs ldan dpa' bo, Padma dbang rgyal, Kun bzang rgya mtsho, Padma phrin las, bsTan pa'i rgyal mtshan, Padma dbang phyug, Padma bshes gnyen, Khams gsum zil gnon, bsTan 'dzin chos rgyal, mDo sngags bstan 'dzin, Nus ldan 'gro phan gling pa, *gSang 'dzin dPa' bo* dgyes rab rtsal, *drin chen bla ma* (en l'occurrence : lui-même).

Il se peut que « bsTan 'dzin chos rgyal » soit un autre nom de *Grub dbang* Shes rab me 'bar. Pour ce qui est de mDo sngags bstan 'dzin, on en connaît bien un de ce nom dans cette région à peu près et non sans liens avec les maîtres de 'Khor gdong — le *sprul sku* de Dar thang, disciple de Mi pham et de mKhyen brtse'i dbang po (BDRC : B6169). Mais, né en 1830 et mort en 1892, il est plutôt de la génération des disciples de *gTer chen* Nus ldan rdo rje qui était de 1802¹³⁷ et qui est mort en 1864 (*shing byi*), selon son *rnam thar*, ou en 1867 selon la *Vie de mGon po dbang rgyal* (p. 41).

La tradition du *Byang gter* était encore si peu affermie à 'Khor gdong au 19e siècle que, selon la même source (p. 26 sq.), Nus ldan rdo rje a envoyé mGon po dbang rgyal à rDo rje brag vers 1863 (*chu phag lo*) pour vérifier soigneusement la conformité des pratiques liturgiques de 'Khor gdong à celles du monastère-mère du *Byang gter*.

En tout état de cause, c'est bien directement des traditions du Tibet central que dépend principalement *sPrul sku* Tshul lo pour ce qui est du *dGongs pa zang thal*. Certes, son maître mGon po dbang rgyal, on l'a dit, a reçu en 1857 (*me sbrul*), d'un certain *rJe dbon* Byang chub rdo rje, la transmission de ce qui est appelé (sans doute par erreur) « le manuel

de 'Khor gdong pour le *dGongs pa zang thal* ne fait absolument aucun doute, précisément à la mesure de leur souci évident de s'instruire auprès de tous les spécialistes possibles de ce système.

¹³⁷ Il y a là une difficulté, car le même *rnam thar* qui le fait naître en 1802 et mourir en 1864 affirme qu'il est mort « dans sa soixante-treizième année », ce qui nous reporterait plutôt en 1792 pour son année de naissance.

des points clefs du *dGongs pa zang thal* composé par A rdo dKon chog rgyal mtshan »¹³⁸, et il est bien possible qu'il l'ait transmis à *sPrul sku Tshul lo* ; mais ce dernier ne se réclame nulle part de cette tradition de Kaḥ thog et on n'en voit aucune trace dans son propre manuel.

En somme, il faut bien l'avouer : toute cette méticuleuse exploration de l'histoire des manuels du *dGongs pa zang thal* n'a guère jeté de lumière complémentaire sur les aspects les plus curieux du *khrid yig skal bzang re skongs rig 'dzin dgongs rgyan* de *sPrul sku Tshul lo*.

L'une des énigmes auxquelles je me suis heurté dans ma longue étude de ce texte a été celle de l'identification d'un certain *Las 'bras mun sel sgron me*, qui fait l'objet de quatre très longues citations (Arguillère 2016 : p. 107, 108, 109, 110). Il est enfin accessible maintenant : c'est un très beau texte du *Byang gter*, inclus dans le cycle d'Avalokiteśvara, le *Las rgyu 'bras kyi dbye ba mun sel sgron me* (*Byang gter phyogs grigs*, vol. IV, p. 237-278). C'est une initiative de *sPrul sku Tshul lo* que d'avoir adjoint ces passages peu connus des révélations de *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* au chapitre sur la fructification des actes de la section sur les préliminaires ordinaires ; il n'y a aucun précédent en ce sens, du moins dans les manuels conservés du *dGongs pa zang thal* ou du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*.

Pour le reste, j'ai montré en grand détail, dans les notes du *Manuel de la transmutation immédiate*, comment l'auteur, en plus de combiner tous les *khrid yig* inclus dans le *gter chos*, se servait très abondamment (sans jamais le nommer) du *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin* de Klong chen rab 'byams — à tel point qu'il n'est pas exagéré de dire qu'il l'a constamment eu sous les yeux en composant toutes les parties de son *khrid yig*, des préliminaires spécifiques du *rDzogs chen* jusqu'à la fin. Sur ce point également, on ne trouve rien d'équivalent chez aucun de ses prédécesseurs. La seule chose que l'on puisse dire, c'est que les citations du *Klong gsal* (et donc le rapprochement implicite avec le *mKha' 'gro snying thig*) apparaissent dès les plus anciens des *khrid yig* étudiés, comme la recension ci-dessus des citations chez Hor po Śā kya rgyal mtshan suffit à le montrer (13 citations).

Relativement au beau manuel composé par Zur Chos dbyings rang grol, celui de *sPrul sku Tshul lo* se caractérise par le refus d'intégrer les matériaux du *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*. Globalement, on pourrait caractériser l'entreprise de *sPrul sku Tshul lo* comme *puriste* : dans toute la mesure du possible, il s'efforce de produire un maximum de

¹³⁸ *Vie de mGon po dbang rgyal*, p. 21 : *Ka dag gter gzhung dang | dGongs zang gi gnad khrid A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan gyis mdzad pa...*

passages du *dGongs pa zang thal* et de les expliquer soit en les paraphrasant au minimum¹³⁹, soit en les glosant par d'autres textes tirés du même corpus.

Un examen de l'*index nominum* du *Manuel de la transpiration* (Arguillère 2016 : p. 463-475) permet de vérifier rapidement que *sPrul sku Tshul lo* ne cite *aucun* auteur tibétain¹⁴⁰ en tant qu'auteur (il en mentionne seulement quelques-uns au passage¹⁴¹, comme exemples de grands hommes que l'impermanence n'a pas épargnés). En cela, il se fait doublement l'émule de Klong chen rab 'byams : une fois en le recopiant abondamment, une deuxième fois en omettant jusqu'à son nom avec celui de tous les autres Tibétains — ce qui est une habitude de composition du maître de Gangs ri thod dkar, qui a sans doute pour sens de montrer que l'on ne dépend que des meilleures et des plus sûres des sources — de ce que les Tibétains appelleraient des *gzhung*, des textes fondamentaux ayant un statut canonique ou para-canonique. Comme Klong chen pa, *sPrul sku Tshul lo* ne cite directement, outre le *gter chos* de Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, que des textes ayant un tel statut, au moins pour les rNying ma pa (dont, comme on le sait, le canon tantrique est plus large que celui des autres branches du bouddhisme tibétain).

Outre le souci de gloser le *dGongs pa zang thal* autant que possible par lui-même, ou bien par les *Dix-sept tantra* et le *Klong gsal*, on peut supposer que c'est l'influence des *khrid yig* de Klong chen pa, et notamment du *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin*, qui a amené *sPrul sku Tshul lo* à évacuer les matériaux puisés par Zur Chos dbyings rang grol au *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*. En effet, ces trois *sems 'dzin* supplémentaires n'ont guère de pendant dans les textes comparables chez Klong chen pa. Il n'en reste pas moins que cela implique une décision forte, tout à l'opposé de la ligne d'interprétation favorisée par K. Turpeinen : celle de considérer le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* comme un cycle de révélations complètement séparé du *dGongs pa zang thal*, — comme un

¹³⁹ A telle enseigne qu'on s'étonne par endroits de la lourdeur de son style ou de l'obscurité de son propos (c'est le cas notamment dans ce que j'ai appelé le « deuxième système de *khregs chod* », Arguillère 2016 : p. 232-234 pour des réflexions générales, et p. 265-285 pour la traduction annotée), alors que *sPrul sku Tshul lo* est par ailleurs, sinon un prosateur élégant et fluide, du moins un esprit extrêmement clair, ferme et pénétrant, exprimant sa pensée dans un style très concis et précis. Quand on s'avise que son mode de composition, dans le *khrid yig*, est résolument celui du *patchwork* de textes avec un minimum de paraphrase ajoutée, on s'étonne moins du caractère passablement filandreux de certains paragraphes.

¹⁴⁰ A vrai dire, il y a un bon nombre d'auteurs tibétains dans mon index : mais ce sont presque intégralement ceux que je cite dans les notices et notes.

¹⁴¹ Op. cit., p. 100.

autre système qu'il n'y aurait rien à gagner à lui mêler¹⁴².

En somme, pour parvenir à une intelligence authentiquement philologique du texte de *sPrul sku Tshul lo*, c'est la voie (somme toute an-historique) que j'avais privilégiée dans les notes du *Manuel de la trans-parution immédiate* qui s'avère la plus féconde : regarder l'œuvre de *sPrul sku Tshul lo* comme un habile et savant montage d'extraits de textes, dont (pour ce qui concerne le *rDzogs chen*) la quasi-totalité appartient soit au *dGongs pa zang thal* lui-même, soit à ce qui est considéré comme la base de tradition orale ininterrompue (*bka' ma*) commune à tous les enseignements de ce niveau (les *Dix sept tantra*, plus le *Klong gsal*, qui relève, lui, des "trésors cachés"). Pour ce qui est de ces derniers éléments, certains (notamment les *Dix sept tantra*) sont cités par les textes mêmes du *dGongs pa zang thal* et c'est de là qu'ils sont puisés ; les autres (notamment tout ce qui se rapporte au *Klong gsal*) sont pris exactement tels quels dans le *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin* de *Klong chen pa*.

Autrement dit : si l'on ne considère que la composition du *khrid yig*, abstraction faite de la transmission des instructions de pratique, il n'y a aucune médiation littéraire importante entre le *gter chos* de *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* et *sPrul sku Tshul lo*. Contrairement à beaucoup d'auteurs tibétains, il ne réécrit pas un prédécesseur, outre les emprunts très abondants à *Klong chen pa*, qui sont directement de son fait (mais c'est une autre affaire : cela n'ôte rien à l'originalité de son œuvre comme manuel du *dGongs pa zang thal*, d'autant d'ailleurs que ces emprunts sont extrêmement maîtrisés et ne l'amènent jamais à suivre *Klong chen pa* là où il ne pourrait le faire sans trahir le système propre au *dGongs pa zang thal*).

Même si *sPrul sku Tshul lo* ne pose pas expressément ce jugement, son attitude de retour au texte même du *dGongs pa zang thal*¹⁴³ en même temps que son exclusion de tous matériaux étrangers à l'exception du *Klong gsal* implique le projet de remettre en selle un système passablement tombé en désuétude, sur ses propres bases et sous une forme qui ne le subordonne à aucune autorité étrangère — *rang gzhung*.

Il m'est difficile cependant, quant au *Klong gsal*, de trancher entre deux hypothèses herméneutiques : les nombreuses citations de ce *tantra* empruntées à *Klong chen pa* expriment-elles une volonté d'hybrider l'enseignement du *dGongs pa zang thal* avec ceux du *mKha' 'gro snying thig* / *mKha' 'gro yang tig* ? Ou bien l'omission du nom même de

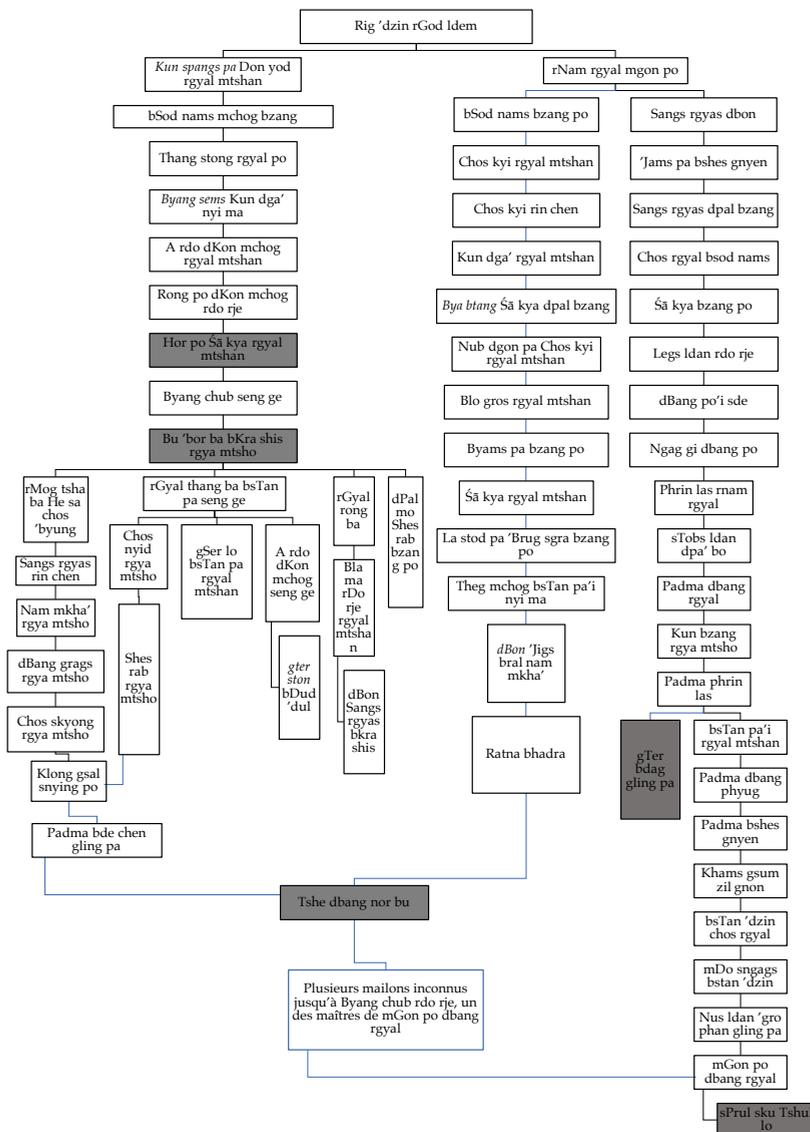
¹⁴² Hormis bien sûr les *gZer lnga*, mais on a vu comment, dès le 16e siècle au moins, ils ont tendu à s'imposer comme "préliminaires extraordinaires" pour tout le *Byang gter* et non seulement pour le *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*.

¹⁴³ Attitude d'ailleurs conforme à l'esprit le plus ancien du *rDzogs chen* compris comme *rang gzhung*, reposant sur ses propres fondements scripturaires ne devant pas être mélangés à des éléments étrangers.

cet auteur dénote-t-elle plutôt l'intention de ne se servir de tous ces enseignements dérivés du *Klong gsal* qu'à un titre purement instrumental, ancillaire, au service du *dGongs pa zang thal* ? Il est vrai que *sPrul sku Tshul lo* ne fait là que suivre la tendance générale de ses prédécesseurs en l'amplifiant à l'extrême — mais, précisément parce qu'il agit là à l'opposé du parti-pris qu'il manifeste systématiquement par ailleurs, c'est un sujet de perplexité.

Pour conclure par où l'on avait commencé, demandons-nous aussi pourquoi, si *sPrul sku Tshul lo* entendait s'émanciper du modèle et de la tutelle des courants dominants, il n'a pas suivi Zur Chos dbyings rang grol plutôt que Klong chen pa — en intégrant des matériaux empruntés au *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*. Ou, aussi bien, pourquoi il n'a pas composé un manuel intégrant les instructions correspondant aux trois premières consécration (*dbang*) du *dGongs pa zang thal* : pourquoi, par exemple, alors qu'il y a dans son œuvre un *khrid yig* très bien fait pour le *Lung phag mo zab rgya*, n'en a-t-il pas inséré le contenu entre les "préliminaires extraordinaires" (les *gZer lnga*) et les préliminaires spécifiques du rDzogs chen ? Il se serait ainsi éloigné du modèle procuré par les *khrid yig* des deux *sNying thig* écrits par Klong chen pa (et notamment du *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin* qu'il affectionne tant, et de la manière propre à Klong chen pa de gloser à part les éléments de *yoga* interne de type tantrique du *mKha' 'gro snying thig*). Mais, s'il avait privilégié ce type de présentation, conforme à la pratique réelle de certains adeptes du *dGongs pa zang thal* (comme on l'a vu par l'exemple de Maratika Lama), il se serait rapproché, après tout, par exemple, du grand commentaire de Klong chen pa sur le *gSang ba snying po*, le *Phyogs bcu'i mun sel*. Dans ce texte, en effet, les quatre visions de *thod rgal* se trouvent présentées au sommet d'un vaste édifice tantrique incluant toutes sortes de pratiques de *yoga* interne. Cela coïncide bien avec la représentation que K. Turpeinen donne du *dGongs pa zang thal* et aux raisons qu'elle attribue à son succès (sans peut-être assez voir qu'il n'est pas extrêmement différent sur ce plan, par exemple, du *mKha' 'gro snying thig*). Peut-être aurait-il craint, ce faisant, de trop s'éloigner de l'idée qu'on se faisait en son temps de ce que devait être un manuel de pratique du rDzogs chen ; peut-être a-t-il pensé que, s'il allait dans ce sens, il paraîtrait rabaisser le rDzogs chen au niveau des "véhicules subalternes", et notamment des deux classes de *tantra* qui, dans les doxographies *rnying ma*, lui sont immédiatement subordonnées ?

Appendice : arbre des lignées de transmission du *dGongs pa zang thal* aboutissant à des *khrid yig* conservés



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(2) L'édition de *Chos rje Śā kya yar 'phel*, dont on a deux reproductions distinctes :

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Signification and History in Zhang Nyi ma 'bum's *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*

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Dany texts in Tibetan Buddhism speak to Buddhists' preference for meaning over word. Words may be necessary to access the truth, but they should not be mistaken for the goal. Thus the famous metaphor from the *Lañkāvatāra*, of mistaking the pointing finger for the referenced object. "Childish people," the passage concludes, "... abandon the object of the pointing fingertip, which is [itself] a mere signifier, and do not understand the true meaning."¹ Klong chen pa goes even further when he refutes what he considers to be the heretical view that word and meaning are connected at all. In his *White Lotus: A Commentary on the Precious Wish-Fulfilling Treasury* (*Yi bzhin rin po che'i mdzod kyi 'grel pa padma dkar po*), he writes: "There is no word that indicates any meaning, because the word is a mere signifier and the meaning lacks [any part of] that signifier; no connection between the two may be established."² Some five centuries later, Mi pham adds some further explanation of this view that mere words will never get you there: "Mistaking [the word] for being inherent [to the object], one understands it to be inherent to [that object]. However, apart from just being a general signifier, there is no word nor concept that could ever express directly what is truly inherent [to any object]; [words and concepts] are simply incapable of doing so."³ Not only are words inferior to meaning; for Klong chen pa and Mi pham, they do not even provide reliable pointers to that meaning.

Some Buddhist authors, however, take a markedly different approach. Great Perfection (*rDzogs chen*) authors of the early *sNying thig* tradition, at least in its twelfth-century form, repeatedly insist that word and meaning are in fact inseparable. The Vimalamitra-

¹ *Lang kar gshegs pa'i theg pa chen po'i mdo*, 133b.5-6: *sgra ji bzhin gyi sor mo'i rtse mo'i don spangs la/_don dam pa khong du chud par bya ba ni mi byed do*.

² *Yi bzhin rin po che'i mdzod kyi 'grel pa padma dkar po*, 413: *tshig gis don ston pa med de/ tshig sgra spyi dang/ don sgra med gnyis 'brel ba ma grub pa'i phyir*.

³ *brDa shan 'byed the tshom drwa ba gcod pa'i ral gri zhes bya ba mchan dang bcas*, p. 433: *rang mtshan du 'khrul nas rang mtshan go bar 'gyur tel spyi las gzhan du rang mtshan nyid/ dngos su rjen par brjod pa'i sgra dang rtog pa med de mi nus so*.

attributed commentary to the *sGra thal 'gyur*, for instance, explains that, "The connection between word and meaning is indivisible, like a thread. They inhere [within each other] continuously, like a sesame seed pervaded by its oil... Relying on words, one should teach the words and verses of scripture that directly settle the meaning in its immediacy."⁴

It is significant that Vimalamitra makes this claim, of a direct and immediate intertwining of word and meaning, from the perspective of the result, i.e. of ultimate realization. That the indivisibility of word and meaning is specific to the perfection of the path is borne out in another early *sNying thig* text that makes a similar claim. The *Sevenfold Opening of Sites* (*Gnas 'byed bdun pa*) appears in the second half of the *Great History* (*Lo rgyus chen mo*) and comprises a set of biographies of the early Indian lineage holders of the *sNying thig* tradition. When the all-important master Vimalamitra receives the last testament of his teacher, Jñānasūtra, in the form of a jeweled casket that descends into his hand, his final realization is described as follows: "Words lacked nothing, and meanings were unmistakable."⁵ Elsewhere, the first part of the *Great History*, a work likely compiled by Zhang ston bKra shis rdo rje (1097-1167), ends by describing the transmission of its teachings in nearly identical terms: "Its words lacked nothing, and its meanings were unmistakable, like a sealed jewelled vessel or a sealed royal decree."⁶ When all is at its best, then, as it is said to be in the *sNying thig* teachings, word and meaning are indivisible. It is only when we fall from this state of realization that the unbridgeable gulf opens between them.

This paper explores the unusual treatments of language, history, and time in Great Perfection *sNying thig* thought by focusing on the writings of Zhang Nyi ma 'bum (1158-1213), and particularly on the

⁴ *Pañ chen dri med bshes gnyen gyi dgongs nyams sgron ma snang byed 'bar ba'i gsang rgyud sgra thal 'gyur rtsa 'grel*, 19: *tshig don 'brel pa dbyer mi phyed pa thag pa lta bu dang/ rgyun du gnas pa til 'bru la mar gyis khyab pa lta bu dang/... tshig la brten nas don mngon sum rang thog tu 'bebs par byed pa'i gzhung tshig dang yi ger bcad pa cig bstan par bya*. See also in the same commentary pp. 35.5: "Through relying on the signs of the transmission of accomplishment, one realizes the indivisibility of word and meaning" (*bsgrub brgyud kyi brda' la brten nas tshig don dbyer med du rtog[ls] pa*).

⁵ *rDzogs pa chen po snying tig gi lo rgyus chen mo*, 196: *tshig la lthag chad med/ don la 'khrul ba med par gyur to*.

⁶ *rDzogs pa chen po snying tig gi lo rgyus chen mo*, 161: *tshig la lthag chad med cing don la 'khrul pa med pa stel dper na rin po che'i snod la rgyas btap pa lta bu dang/ rgyal po'i bka' rtags lta bu'o*. "These [pith instructions]," he concludes a few lines later, "are the thought transmission of the conquerors" (*de dag ni rgyal ba dgongs pa'i brgyud pa'o*), i.e. the immediate, non-dual transmission of awakening that occurs within the fourth time (on which more will be written below).

introductory comments that open his *Eleven Words and Meanings on The Great Perfection* (*Rdzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*). That the title of Nyi ma 'bum's work focuses on eleven "words and meanings" already suggests the centrality of this early *sNying thig* view of signifier and signified as indivisible. The eleven topics may be discussed in words, we seem to be told, but they are taught and should be read and understood in such a way as to allow their meanings to be established "immediately," in the very words themselves. How exactly one should do this remains a question, but it would seem to suggest an approach to reading that allows the words to enter the reader's present experience and transform him or her.

Nyi ma 'bum's father was none other than Zhang ston bKra shis rdo rje, and his mother was rGyal mo g.yang. It is said that when his mother was pregnant, she had a dream in which many suns rose simultaneously. Upon the child's birth, Zhang ston then proclaimed, "You will become the rays of the sun which will dispel the darkness of ignorance of all sentient beings." Thus he gave the name Nyi ma 'bum, meaning one hundred thousand suns. Zhang ston performed various rituals, including Vajrakīlaya and Yang dag to remove obstacles for his son.⁷

It is further said that Zhang ston interpreted his wife's dream of many suns to mean that the "Unsurpassable Secret Teachings" (*gSang ba bla ma med pa*) would benefit many sentient beings. What were these teachings? Earlier, according to Zhang ston's biography, he had received a vision of various spiritual beings informing him that the *Unsurpassable Secret Cycle of the Great Perfection Pith Instructions* (*Man ngag rdzogs pa chen po gsang ba bla na med pa'i skor*) were located at a lion-like rock.⁸ "You should bring these to benefit beings," he was told. Proceeding to this rock in 'O yug, Zhang ston revealed 108 "indexes" (*kha byang*) relating to these teachings. Further information on this revelation may be gleaned from the closing pages of the *Great History*, where we read:

In that way, thirty years after lCe btsun passed away into the invisible realm, lCe sgom nag po of mNar mda' in Rong revealed the spoken transmissions of the three—outer, inner, and secret—and

⁷ The biography also suggests that a certain passage in the *Unimpeded Sound Tantra* offers a prophecy that considers Nyi ma 'bum to be an emanation of Vajrapāṇi; see *sGra thal 'gyur*, 41: *de 'og lag na rdo rje yi/ sprul pa badzra pha las 'dzin*. dPa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba also presents the lines as a prophecy of Nyi ma 'bum (see *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, 576). For more on the biography of Nyi ma 'bum, see Achard's article in the forthcoming issue of the RET.

⁸ *Bla ma rgyal ba zhang chen po'i rnam par thar pa*, 126-27.

was instructed not to circulate them to others beyond himself. They were spread and promulgated in dBus and gTsang. Fifty years after lCe sgom revealed them, I [i.e. Zhang ston] revealed this cycle of the unsurpassed secret and was instructed not to circulate them to others beyond myself.⁹

Here, Zhang ston represents his new “Unsurpassed Secret Teachings” as exceeding the three cycles of Great Perfection teachings (i.e. outer, inner, and secret) that had previously been transmitted within the lCe clan, “presumably,” as Germano suggests, “to distinguish himself from other redactors/codifiers of the broader movement.”¹⁰ He is thus portrayed as the first to reveal and formulate what would become the *sNying thig* tradition, here under the name of the “Unsurpassable Secret Cycle” (*gsang ba bla na med pa'i skor*). And when Zhang ston, upon hearing his pregnant wife's dream of many suns, proclaimed that the suns were a portent both of his son's birth and of the great benefit that sentient beings would gain from the Unsurpassable Secret Teachings, he was in effect establishing his son Nyi ma 'bum as the heir to his *sNying thig* lineage.

Nyi ma 'bum's own text on the eleven words and meaning was extraordinarily influential in later *sNying thig* writings. Both Klong chen pa and rGod ldem can copy Nyi ma 'bum's work nearly *verbatim* into their famous *Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*) and *Great Aural Transmission of Vimalamitra* (*Bi ma mi tra'i snyan brgyud chen po*), respectively.¹¹ Nyi ma 'bum cites some precursors for his eleven-fold scheme, quoting two of the *Seventeen Tantras* (*rGyud bcu bdun*)—the *Unimpeded Sound* (*sGra thal 'gyur*) and, especially, the *Pearl Garland* (*Mu tig phreng ba*)¹²—but his primary

⁹ *rDzogs pa chen po snying tig gi lo rgyus chen mo*, 219: *de ltar lce btsun mi snang ba'i sar gshegs nas lo sum bcu na rong gi mnar mda'i lce sgom nag pos phyi nang gsang bag sum gyi bka' brgyud rnam bton nas rang las gzhan la ma spel bar gdams pa'o/ dbus gtsang du dar zhing rgyas par mdzad do/ lce sgom gyis thon nas lo lnga bcu na bdag gis gsang bla na med pa'i skor 'di rnam bton nas rang las gzhan la ma spel bar gdams pa'o.*

¹⁰ See Germano 2005, 18. The *Great History* claims that Śrī Siṃha had already established the four cycles at his time, presumably around the eighth century.

¹¹ Klong chen pa's collected works also contain an even more faithful copy of Nyi ma 'bum's work, that one titled *Tshig don bcu gcig pa*; on this work, see Scheidegger 2009. On rGod ldem's writings, see Turpeinen's piece in this same issue; for a translation of his *Great Aural Transmission of Vimalamitra*, see Smith 2016.

¹² See *Rin po che 'byung bar byed pa sgra thal 'gyur chen po'i rgyud*, 102.4-103.2, and *Mu tig rin po che'i phreng ba*, 535.4-536.5. Note that the *Unimpeded Sound* passage only includes Nyi ma 'bum's eleven topics embedded within a series of 168 questions that structure the tantra's overall content.

inspiration may have been his own father, Zhang ston, who introduces his *Great History* by describing it in the following terms:

Regarding that, I will explain the significance of the “history.”
 In this there are two aspects:
 On the history specific to buddhas,
 The eleven words and meanings have been taught before;
 The history of those [lineage-holders] who cherish that [i.e. the
 history of buddhas] will [now] be explained.¹³

Zhang ston thus presents the *Great History* as a history of the lineage-holders and the literary companion to a history of buddhas that was structured around eleven topics and had been written at some previous point. It is unclear whether Zhang ston refers here to an earlier text based on the eleven words and meanings that he had composed himself, or merely to the appearance of the eleven topics in the *Pearl Garland*, as mentioned above.

In Nyi ma 'bum's own discussion of his use of the term “history,” he very much follows his father's lead by distinguishing the history of buddhas from that of the lineage-holders: “There are two topics [in discussing] histories [that are taught] for belief: So that an individual who is the basis [for such stories] may gain attainment, the history of buddhas and the history of sentient beings are [both] established by means of precious narratives.”¹⁴

Zhang ston closes his *Great History* with a brief explanation of the term “history” (*lo rgyus*) as he uses it in that context: “History’ means familiarity (*rgyus*) with what occurred many years (*lo*) [prior]. Because it presents [those events] as if they were being seen right now, it is called a ‘history.’”¹⁵ This explanation is obviously relevant for the *Great History*, which (as we have seen) is a history of the lineage holders of the past, in that it brings their lives into the present experience of the reader. But the same explanation may also be understood as pertinent to the *Eleven Words and Meanings*, which are understood to constitute a “history of buddhas.” In this sense, the eleven topics tell the story of the entire arc of saṃsāra, from beginning to end. It is a cosmogonic history, yet it is one that brings

¹³ rDzogs pa chen po snying tig gi lo rgyus chen mo, 114-115: de la lo rgyus don gyis bshad/ 'di la rnam pa gnyis yin te/ sangs rgyas nyid kyi lo rgyus ni/ tshig don bcu gcig gong du bstan/ de la gces pa'i lo rgyus bshad.

¹⁴ rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa, 13: yid ches pa'i lo rgyus kyi don gnyis stel rten gyi gang zag cig thog par byed pa la sangs rgyas kyi lo rgyud dang/ sems can gyi lo rgyus gtam rgyud rin po ches gtan la phab pa'o.

¹⁵ rDzogs pa chen po snying tig gi lo rgyus chen mo, 655.5-6: lo rgyus zhes bya ba la du ma long pa'i rgyus/ da lta mthong ba dang 'dra bar gtan la phebs pas nas lo rgyus zhes bya'o.

that cosmogony of the primordial buddha Samantabhadra into the present moment of the reader/practitioner, "as if they were being seen right now." It is not just an explanation of that history, according to Zhang ston, but a vehicle for its appearance in the present.

The very idea that the buddhas have a history at all is a strange one. Normally, given that buddhas are empty and thus beyond time and language, they would not partake of history, yet with his eleven words and meanings, Nyi ma 'bum proceeds and elaborates his "history of buddhas." It is a history, then, of events that never occur, a narrative that is somehow beyond time as it collapses past and present. Nyi ma 'bum justifies his writing such a history of buddhas, i.e. his elaboration of the eleven words and meanings, by presenting it as a response to critics who might complain that the Great Perfection teachings do not offer any practices. "Some people with misconceptions," he writes, "say that, while we may have the five excellences [of place, teacher, followers, teaching, and time] in this way [i.e. read as mere aspects of awareness], we lack procedures for clear realization that is gained through experiential integration, that is, the skillful means for achieving buddhahood."¹⁶ To answer this hypothetical complaint, he then lists the eleven topics and embarks on his presentation of them.

Some explanation may be needed here to make sense of Nyi ma 'bum's point: The five excellences (*phun sum tshogs pa lnga*) constitute a set of interpretive categories that are commonly used to set the stage for a given text: the place where it was originally taught, the teacher who taught it, the followers who received it, what the teaching actually was, and the time when it was taught. How this fivefold scheme applies to the *sNying thig* tantras is the focus of much of Nyi ma 'bum's "introduction" to his *Eleven Words and Meanings on The Great Perfection*. He starts by distinguishing the five excellences as seen through the lenses of his own "extraordinary" (*thun mong ma yin pa*) system and the "ordinary" (*thun mong*) systems of other Buddhists. The former he further subdivides into how the five excellences apply to (i) the ground (*gzhi*; Skt. *ālaya*) and (ii) how the teaching resides in the body. The five excellences of the ground are basically five aspects of awareness, taken from a non-dual perspective. Where the teaching resides in the body then involves a discussion of the Great Perfection subtle body and the visions of *thod rgal*. In both cases, Nyi ma 'bum's main point is that the five

¹⁶ *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, 13.

excellences, “the ‘place’ and so forth, do not need to be sought elsewhere; they are termed the ‘self-originating gnosis.’”¹⁷

One can see, then, how Nyi ma 'bum's presentation of the five excellences in this way lacks reference to any actual practice. He explains the followers as the five gnoses, five-colored lights, and so forth, i.e. the visions that accompany the teacher, awareness (*rang shes rig gi rgyal po*). He explains the teaching as the non-conceptual bliss that arises in dependence on the Great Perfection channels and winds (*rtsa rlung*). But nowhere in all of this does he describe any practice. To fill this lacuna, he offers his “history of buddhas,” the eleven words and meanings.

Despite his engagement with this history, however, Nyi ma 'bum constantly and in various ways reminds his readers that it is actually unfolding beyond time. From the ultimate perspective of the ground (the first topic), the idea that the three times and thus history exist is itself mistaken. When one strays from the ground in the second topic, one slips out of timelessness and into past, present, future, and the turmoil of history. The history then proceeds until the eleventh topic, when one returns to the ground and sees that history is in fact an illusion. In this sense, it is significant that Nyi ma 'bum describes this last eleventh topic of “liberation itself” as a return to “the beginning” (*grol ba nyid ni thog ma'o*). He explains this idea as follows: “‘The beginning’ is the entity of the initial ground, which is the natural way of abiding, the primordially pure gnosis, which I taught at the beginning of the eleven topics.”¹⁸ The “history” of the eleven words and meanings, then, is circular and ever recurring.

In this sense too, the ground pervades not only the first and last topics, but all eleven, for none of them is truly separate from the ground. Nonetheless, Nyi ma 'bum introduces his eleven words and meanings in the following terms:

1. The teaching on how, at the very beginning, the ground—the abiding reality of the nature of phenomena—abides prior to the emergence of either realization, i.e. of a buddha, or the absence of realization, i.e. of a sentient being;

¹⁷ *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, 7: *gnas la sogs pa gzhan nas btsal mi dgos pa rang byung gi ye shes zhes bya'o*. For the “ordinary,” non-Great Perfection perspective, he provides a fairly abstract reading of the same five excellences, each addressed in terms of the three bodies and the buddhafiels. Thus, for example, the *dharmakāya* place is the *dharmadhātu*, the *sambhogakāya* place is Ghanavyūha, and the *nirmāṇakāya* places are further fields such as Alakāvati (lCang lo can).

¹⁸ *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, p. 119.

2. Establishing how confusion emerges within that way of abiding;
3. Teaching how, even if sentient beings are confused, the fields of completely perfect buddhas and the seeds [of awakening] still abide within them;
4. Precisely where that same abiding resides;
5. The pathways through which the gnosis that resides in that way emerges;
6. The gates through which the gnosis of awareness that has emerged through those pathways then dawns forth;
7. The objective sphere in which that gnosis of awareness that has dawned through the gateways now appears;
8. How that gnosis of awareness that appears within the objective sphere is then experientially integrated by qualified beings;
9. The signs and measures by which one can ascertain that experiential integration;
10. How all this dawns within the intermediate state of ultimate reality for those who do not have time to practice because [they are] distracted by indolence, even though they have the pith instructions;
11. Teaching the ultimate great liberation.¹⁹

In reading the *Eleven Words and Meanings*, one is led from the original ground of existence, through the arising of ignorance when one fails to recognize that ground. At this point sentient beings begin to differentiate from the ground-Samantabhadra (*gzhi kun tu bzang po*). In the third topic, one is reminded that, even so, Samantabhadra and oneself share the same nature, i.e. the ground, buddha-nature, or reflexive-awareness. The fourth topic leads us to the residence of that awareness within our embodied experience, and more specifically within our own fleshy hearts. The fifth, sixth, and seventh, and eighth topics then describe the channels running from our heart

¹⁹ *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, 13-14: *thog mar rtogs te sangs rgyas ma byung/ ma rtogs te sems can ma byung ba'i sngon rol nal/ gzhi dangos po gshis kyi gnas lugs ji ltar gnas pa bstan dang/ de lta bur gnas pa de las 'khrul pa ji ltar byung tshul gtan la dbab pa dang/ 'khrul na sems can la yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kyi zhing khams sa bon ji ltar gnas bstan pa dang/ de nyid gnas pa rang gang na gnas pa dang/ de ltar gnas pa'i ye shes de lam gang nas byung dang/ de ltar lam nas 'byung ba'i rig pa'i ye shes sgo gang na 'char ba dang/ sgo nas shar ba'i rig pa'i ye shes de yul gang la snang ba dang/ yul la snang ba'i rig pa'i ye shes de rten gyi gang zag gis ji ltar nyams su blangs pa dang/ nyams su lon pa'i rtags dang tshad gang gis bzung ba dang/ 'di nyid de lta bu'i man ngag yod kyang le lo g.yengs nas nyams su len longs ma byung nal/ chos nyid kyi bar do la ji ltar 'char ba dang/ mthar thug grol ba chen po gang yin pa bstan pa'o.*

through which awareness travels, the gateways (our physical eyes) through which awareness emerges, the objective sphere within which awareness appears, and how those appearances are then engaged through contemplative practice. The ninth topic reviews the signs of one's progress in those practices. The tenth deals with the intermediate state of the *bardo*, and finally the eleven topic explores one's ultimate liberation.

Despite the clarity and sequential order of these eleven stages, the problems of such a historical approach haunt Nyi ma 'bum's presentation throughout. The very idea of a primordial ground and the original arising of ignorance already is problematic in Buddhist thought, which elsewhere consistently refuses to acknowledge a beginning to *samsāra*. Similarly, other Buddhists insist there was never a first buddha of the sort Samantabhadra seems to represent. In Sthiramati's commentary to the *Sūtrālaṅkāra*, for example, we read:

There is nothing whatsoever to call an original buddha. Why? Because it is not reasonable that one could become a buddha without accumulating the accumulations of merit and wisdom, and it is impossible for there not to have been another buddha who [previously] gave the teachings on that accumulation of merit and wisdom. Therefore, that buddha needs another buddha, and *that* buddha needs still further buddhas.²⁰

According to Sthiramati, the concept of an original buddha is impossible because the need for a teacher leads to an infinite regress of previous buddhas. Nonetheless, Nyi ma 'bum writes of the ground as a time before the emergence of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and thus before the original buddha Samantabhadra, apparently flying in the face of centuries of Buddhist thought. "Samantabhadra," he writes, "attains buddhahood without practicing the slightest particle of merit."²¹

In his *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle* (*Theg mchog mdzod*), Klong chen pa is careful to justify the *sNying thig* position on this point, almost as if in answer to Sthiramati: "It has been said that Samantabhadra attained buddhahood within the original ground without practicing the slightest particle of merit. Upon examination,

²⁰ *mDo sde'i rgyan gyi 'grel bshad*, 143b.5-6: *Thog ma'i sangs rgyas rgyas zhes bya ba gang yang med del ci'i phyir zhe na/ bsod nams dang ye shes kyi tshogs ma bsags par 'tshang rgya par ni mi rigs la bsod nams dang ye shes kyi tshogs kyang de'i lung 'bogs pa'i sangs rgyas gzhan med du mi rung bas sangs rgyas de'i lung 'bogs pa'i sangs rgyas gzhan yang dgos la/ de la yang sangs rgyas gzhan dag kyang dgos te.*

²¹ *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, 30: *Kun tu bzang po'i [sic] dge ba rdul tsam cig ma byas par sangs rgyas pa.*

[Samantabhadra's] self-recognition is an ocean of stainless self-originating merit, so his great merit is primordially complete."²² Klong chen pa's solution (and Nyi ma 'bum might agree) is thus to suggest that Samantabhadra's merit is self-originating, without any practice, nor even the thought to do so.

Nyi ma 'bum, and Klong chen pa following him, thus defy earlier Buddhist positions by introducing the idea of a primordial buddha. Such a starting point is necessary for the apparently linear narrative of the history of buddhas that Nyi ma 'bum was writing, and it leaves him to negotiate carefully between, on the one hand, the standard Buddhist view of saṃsāra as without beginning and without end and, on the other hand, the *sNying thig* view of a history that begins and ends with the ground-Samantabhadra.

Despite Nyi ma 'bum's narrative need for some kind of linearity, we have seen that his history is ultimately circular, ending where it begins. This is a point on which Klong chen pa parts ways with his predecessor, most explicitly in his *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle*, a work often paired with his *Treasury of Words and Meanings*.²³ When Nyi ma 'bum reaches his eleventh "word and meaning," he describes this last topic of liberation as a return to "the beginning" (*grol ba thog ma'o*), and basically the same line closes the *Pearl Garland*.²⁴ He explains this line as follows: "Regarding that, 'the beginning' is the entity of the initial ground, which is the natural way of abiding, the primordially pure gnosis, which I taught at the beginning of the eleven topics. Its actualization was taught by the Great Master Vimalamitra as final liberation."²⁵ As we have seen, for Nyi ma 'bum final liberation thus brings us full circle back to the beginning. For Klong chen pa, however, such a position is problematic:

Saying that [Samantabhadra] liberates right within the ground is clumsy (*rtsings*). He is liberated when the ground's manifestation dawns out of the ground. He is liberated at the moment of raising up from the ground. Where is he liberated? Saying he is liberated

²² *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod*, vol. 17, 355: *Kun tu bzang pos dge ba rdul tsam cig ma byas par gzhi thog nas sangs rgyas pa'o zhes grags kyang/ dpyad na rang ngo shes pa de zag med rang byung gi dge ba rgya mtsho yin pas/ tshogs chen yer rdzogs pa.*

²³ See Germano 1992, 1.

²⁴ *Mu tig rin po che'i phreng ba: grol sa nyid ni thog ma'o*. The slight difference between this line and Nyi ma 'bum's rendering of it will be addressed below; see n. 39.

²⁵ *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, p. 119: *de la thog ma zhes bya ba ni/ thog ma'i gzhi dngos po gshis kyi gnas lugs ka nas dag pa'i ye shes nyid bcu gcig pa'i thog mar bstan cing/ de mngon du gyur pa mthar thug grol ba yin par/ slob dpon chen po bye ma la mi ſas gsungs pa.*

back into the ground is also clumsy. He is liberated in the place of spontaneously present completion.

If he were liberated back into the ground, he might relapse [back into to *samsāra*], because that ground has been posited as that within which confusion can occur, that is, because it is the ground of both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Suppose one says, “in the line, ‘the place of liberation itself is the beginning,’ isn’t this ground the beginning [ground]?” One can explain the way of abiding as the beginning,²⁶ but it is not the ground of the first [topic]. In short, when one recognizes one’s own face (*rang ngo shes*), one completes the good qualities of the sphere, whereby one is liberated into fruition through being devoid of obscurations.²⁷

Here Klong chen pa insists that buddhahood cannot be identical with the ground, because that would entail the possibility that the buddha might stray back into *samsāra*, as described in the second topic. That the buddha could contain any such impurity that might give rise to ignorance and thus *samsāra* goes against all Buddhist teaching and would certainly open the *sNying thig* tradition to criticism by followers of other schools.

This is a substantial concern, but one that did not bother Nyi ma ’bum, perhaps because it rests on a reification of the eleven-part “history of buddhas,” a reification that Nyi ma ’bum does not accept. Indeed, in discussing final liberation, he raises the possibility of this very objection: “As for someone who objects to the line, ‘liberation is the beginning,’ [I would reply,] there really is nothing that relapses nor is a relapser, nor is there anything that seems to dissolve [into buddhahood]; the realization of the way of abiding has been explained above.”²⁸ There is no one, in other words, to fall into

²⁶ Dpal brtsegs mistakenly has *thog med* instead of *thog mar*, which is seen in other editions; see, for example, W22920, published in Chengdu in 1999.

²⁷ *Theg pa’i mchog rin po che’i mdzod*, vol. 17, 355: *gzhi thog nas grol zer ba rtsings te/ gzhi las gzhi snang du shar dus grol bas/ gzhi las ’phags pa’i skad cig la grol ba’o/ gang du grol na/ gzhi thog tu grol zer ba yang rtsings te/ mthar phyin lhun grub kyi sa la grol ba’o/ gal te gzhi thog tu grol na yang ldog par ’gyur te/ gzhi de ’khrul pa ’byung rung gi cha nas gzhag pa’i phyir te/ ’khor ’das kyi gzhi yin pa’i phyir ro/ grol sa nyid thog ma’o zhes/ gzhi thog ma yin nam zhe na/ gnas lugs la thog med [sic] bshad pa yin gyi/ dang po’i gzhi ma yin no/ mdor na rang ngo shes shes dus dbyings kyi yon tan mthar phyin te/ sgrib pa dang bral bas ’bras bur grol ba zhes bya’o.*

²⁸ *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, 127: *yang kha cig na re/ grol ba thog ma’o zhes gsungs la/ slar zlog bya dang zlog byed du yod pa’am/ thim pa lta bu cig yog pa lta bu ni ma yin ste/ gnas lugs rtogs par gong du bshad.* Note that Nyi ma ’bum’s explanation here, which refers the reader to his discussion of the “way of abiding” (*gnas lugs*) may be precisely what Klong chen pa refers to in the above-cited passage when he writes, “One may explain the way of abiding as the beginning...”

samsāra, nor anyone who enters nirvāṇa. And even the *appearance* of these apparent events does not exist. For Nyi ma 'bum, what is important is whether one understands the way of abiding: "Our own scriptural system teaches the assertion of a special kind of understanding that is without consideration for whether it is deluded or undeluded—that is called 'awareness' or 'gnosis.'"²⁹ If there never really is any delusion nor slipping into samsāra, in other words, then there is no need to worry about the buddha slipping.

Nevertheless, the perceived possibility of a return is enough for Klong chen pa to draw a distinction between the ground of the first topic and that of the last, between the original ground and final buddhahood. Indeed, he does not even mention of the line, "the place of liberation itself is the beginning" anywhere in his treatment of the eleventh topic, despite the fact that he labels the topic with that very line from the *Pearl Garland* in his first chapter. Following his above-cited criticism of the "clumsy" view that one might be liberated back into the ground, he proceeds to set forth six qualities (*chos drug*), elsewhere called "the six distinctive qualities" (*khyad chos drug*), that distinguish Samantabhadra from the original ground: "He is raised up from the ground, he appears to himself, he distinguishes difference, he is liberated right within that distinction, he does not arise from other [conditions], and he rests in his own place."³⁰ Whereas the original ground is neutral, in that it is the basis for both samsāra and nirvāṇa to arise, Klong chen pa's final ground of liberation is distinct because it *knows*: "The original ground," he concludes, "and the ground's manifestation that has been liberated into fruition are distinguished by the wisdom of realization."³¹

In distinguishing the original ground from the ground of liberation, Klong chen pa takes a more linear view of the eleven topics than Nyi ma 'bum and his circular approach. In many respects, this more linear view does not fit comfortably with the overall

²⁹ *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, 30: 'khrul ma 'khrul gyi rtsis med shes pa'i khyad par 'dod pa rang gzhung du bstan pas rig pa'i zhes pa'am/ ye shes so zhes pa. It has to be said that Klong chen pa includes similar lines in his own writings. Thus at the beginning of the second topic, for example, he writes: "[Awareness] is not really deluded, but when the conditions are right, there is the imputation [of delusion]" (*Tshig don rin po che'i mdzod*, 26b.4: 'khrul pa dngos ma yin yang rkyen byas dus btags pa). Nonetheless, the possibility that the liberated ground (*grol gzhi*) could give rise to delusion appears to have been a serious problem in Klong chen pa's view.

³⁰ *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod*, vol. 17, 356: *gzhi las 'phags pa/ rang ngor snang ba/ bye brag phyed pa/ phyed thog grol ba/ gzhan las ma byung ba/ rang sar gnas pa*.

³¹ *Theg pa'i mchog rin po che'i mdzod*, vol. 17, 356: *gdod ma'i gzhi dang gzhi snang 'bras bur grol ba ni/ rtogs pa'i shes rab kyis byed pa ste*. Here we read *phyed pa* in place of *byed pa*.

narrative of the eleven words and meanings, which were originally intended as a history of buddhas that never really goes anywhere. Nyi ma 'bum's history that ends where it begins is a narrative non-event, and as such it threatens to undo the entire rationale for the Buddhist path.

Four centuries later, 'Jigs med gling pa goes out of his way to emphasize the alleged importance of Klong chen pa's distinction:

Most people assert this place of liberation as being right back into the initial ground. However, if that were the case, since the ground is asserted as an aspect in which delusion can arise, it would have the flaw that delusion can always arise again. Therefore this is a very terrible point of error. As Klong chen pa says: "Both the primordially pure final place of liberation and the indeterminate spontaneously present ground may be alike in their qualities of awareness—in their essence, nature, compassion, and so on—but they are differentiated by the one being pure of stains and the other not, and by one acting as the ground for delusion and the other not. It is very important that people of our school should understand this, so they should not make clumsy assertions, saying that fruition is liberation within the original ground." Someone might wonder, "But doesn't the *Pearl Garland* say, 'the place of liberation itself is the beginning'?" Regarding that, having recognized with awareness the primordial purity of the beginning, one attains awakening in the place of the two purities. By that means, the cause is reversed and the ground of delusion is thereafter extinct, whereupon its name changes to "the place of liberation" or "fruition." As explained above in the context of the ground, the crucial point is to understand that they are distinguished by having stains or not.³²

We may surmise that Klong chen pa's distinction was still not fully appreciated even in the eighteenth century. This is somewhat understandable given what 'Jigs med gling pa writes here. That Klong chen pa's original ground simply withers on the vine, "extinct" and abandoned upon liberation, is clearly not what Nyi ma

³² *Dri lan rin po che'i bstan bcos lung gi gter mdzod*, 133a.5-133b.2: *phal cher gyis grol sa 'di thog ma'i gzhi thog tu 'dod pa yod de/ de lta na gzhi de 'khrul ba 'byung rung gi cha nas bzhag pa'i phyir da dung 'khrul ba'i skyon yod pas nor sa rngam po che yin te/ kun mkhyen chen pos mthar thug gi grol sa ka dag dang/ nges med gzhi'i lhun grub gnyis rig pa'i yon tan ngo bo rang bzhin thug rje la sogs pa 'dra yang/ dri ma dag ma dag dang 'khrul gzhi byed mi byed kyis khyad yod do/ rang gi sde bas khyad 'di shes pa gal che bas/ 'bras bu gzhi thog tu grol zer nas rtsing por ma smra zhig/ ces gsungs so/ 'o na mu tig phreng ba las/ grol sa nyid ni thog ma'o/ zhes pas bstan pa ma yin nam snyam na/ de ni thog ma'i ka dag la rig par ngo shes nas dag pa gnyis ldan gyi sar byang chub pas/ phyin chad rgyur ldog pa'i 'khrul gzhi zad pas grol sa'am 'bras bu zhes bya bar ming 'gyur ba yin no/ gong du gzhi'i skabs su bshad pa ltar khyad par dri ma yod med kyis phyed ba shes par bya ba gnad dam pa'o.*

'bum (nor the *Pearl Garland* when it ends as it does) intended. When Nyi ma 'bum writes that the ground is “primordially pure, pure from the very first, and thus originally pure, pure from the beginning,”³³ the idea that the ground is stained with impurities is hard to understand. In a non-dual system in which words and their meanings arise simultaneously and interdependently, with the ultimate meaning immediately complete within the word, the idea that final awakening is distinct and not the same as the ground makes an ill fit.

Why, then, is Klong chen pa so much more concerned than Nyi ma 'bum about the possibility of the buddha slipping back into saṃsāra? Possible factors are suggested when we consider some other differences between the two authors' presentations of the eleven words and meanings. Nyi ma 'bum's writings are significantly more closely involved with the *Seventeen Tantras*, most of which were probably compiled during the century just prior to his writing. In the homage that opens his “introduction,” for example, the twelfth-century author focuses on Mahāvajradhara, the highest buddha in the tantric literature of the gSar ma schools but rarely seen in early rDzogs chen supplications. One other place where he does appear is in chapter eight of the *Pearl Garland*, which frames its canonical presentation of the eleven topics by praising “Vajradhara of the sixth family” for his teaching of all the tantras condensed into this single eleven-fold teaching.³⁴ This is one of only five occurrences of Vajradhara in the tantra and the only presentation of the eleven topics used by Nyi ma 'bum that appears in the *Seventeen Tantras*,³⁵ so it makes sense that Nyi ma 'bum supplicates this same buddha in the opening homage to his own text on the eleven words and meanings. It also indicates just how involved with the nuances of the *Seventeen Tantras* Nyi ma 'bum was.

Klong chen pa, however, focuses his own opening praises for his *Treasury of Words and Meanings* on Samantabhadra, perhaps reflecting his temporal distance, relative to Nyi ma 'bum, from the *Seventeen Tantras*. By the fourteenth century, Klong chen pa appears to have been less concerned with making the sNying thig tradition cohere with the *Seventeen Tantras* and more with bringing it into line with wider Buddhist norms. Indeed, in his *Treasury of Words and Meanings* and *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle*, he quotes regularly from exoteric

³³ *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, 23-24: *dang po nas dag pas thog ma dag la gdod ma nas dag pa zhes bya*.

³⁴ *Mu tig rin po che phreng ba*, 534.

³⁵ As mentioned above (n. 12), the *Unimpeded Sound* does include the eleven topics embedded within a larger structure.

Buddhist sūtras, a fact that contrasts sharply with Nyi ma 'bum, who works exclusively from the *Seventeen Tantras* and, only occasionally, other rNying ma and gSar ma tantras.

Nyi ma 'bum's more inward-looking writings reflect a period when the *sNying thig* tradition was still in flux in other ways too. Not surprisingly, given that Zhang ston was the first to reveal these "Unsurpassable Secret Teachings," Nyi ma 'bum still had to defend their authenticity. Thus he goes to considerable lengths to defend the opening words, "Thus have I taught," (*'di skad bdag gis bstan pa yin*), that open some Great Perfection tantras in place of the more common "thus have I heard."³⁶ Nyi ma 'bum's response is to point to the **Guhyagarbha*, which opens similarly, a move that suggests that the criticisms he addresses were coming from within the rNying ma school, from rNying ma pa who readily accepted the authority of the **Guhyagarbha* but had yet to accept the recently revealed *Seventeen Tantras*. Compare this to Klong chen pa's introduction to his *Treasury of Words and Meanings*, which is comprised of a lengthy supplication but lacks any defense against critics.

Similarly, in the supplication section of his "Introduction," Nyi ma 'bum complains that, "the words taught by the buddhas are corrupted by those who hope to be experts in commentaries and writings."³⁷ Nyi ma 'bum's comment here suggests that *sNying thig* orthodoxy had yet to be fully established, and again, Klong chen pa's work is less explicitly concerned with controlling the *Seventeen Tantras* and their doctrinal standards.

Stylistically too we see differences between Nyi ma 'bum and Klong chen pa that may relate to their doctrinal disagreement, for Nyi ma 'bum writes in what might be called a less linear way. Perhaps as a result of his being so strongly rooted in the *Seventeen Tantras*, when he quotes them, he often does so in an idiosyncratic way, taking lines from different parts of a given chapter and reordering them to make his own point. In discussing the excellence of time, for example, he cites the *Jewel Mound* (*Rin chen spungs pa*) as follows:

Within the non-existent empty source of phenomena (*dharmodaya*),
 Out of the distinctive features of the awareness and gnosis
 Of the very first primordial buddha,
 The self-resounding of the emptiness of reality
 Is the turning of the primordial wheel of dharma;

³⁶ *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, 11-12.

³⁷ *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, 1-2.

It is without beginning, middle, or end.³⁸

With only minor differences, these lines all appear in the *Jewel Mound*, but Nyi ma 'bum draws them from various places. Most are from chapter two, pages 84-5, but one line is from chapter one, page 78. And whereas Nyi ma 'bum quotes these lines in the context of the excellence of time, the tantra itself uses them in discussing the followers. For Nyi ma 'bum, the *Seventeen Tantras* were still very much alive and open to reinterpretation.

All this is quite unlike Klong chen pa, who follows the tantras precisely when quoting them. For him, the *Seventeen Tantras* represent a closed canon, sacred texts to be cited word-for-word alongside other *sNying thig* sources such as the *Bi ma snying thig*, the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, and so on.

Perhaps, then, Klong chen pa's more linear interpretation of the eleven words and meanings is rooted in his interests in working the *sNying thig* teachings into the larger world of Tibetan Buddhism, of grounding it in exoteric sutras, careful canonical citations, and sometimes even the language of *pramāṇa*. Nyi ma 'bum's earlier approach, being closer to the revelatory roots of the tradition, is characterized by more paradoxical, radical understandings of signification and history.

In this paper, we have attempted to define some unique features of Nyi ma 'bum's *Eleven Words and Meanings on The Great Perfection*. In particular, we have highlighted his treatments both of word and meaning and of the original ground and buddhahood. In each case, we have seen that he takes a markedly circular approach, such that meaning is established immediately upon reading the word, and buddhahood is identical with the original ground. Each of Nyi ma 'bum's eleven words and meanings circles upon itself, its illusory dualities collapsing back into the ground, and each doing so within the larger circular trajectory of the history as a whole. This circularity allows Nyi ma 'bum to claim that everything happens simultaneously, yet nothing ever happens. For him, Great Perfection history—be it a history of sentient beings or buddhas—brings the past into the present, unfolding in the immediacy of one's experience through the reading of the tantras. All of this is quite different from the approach seen in the later writings of Klong chen pa and 'Jigs med gling pa, both of whom prefer a more linear understanding of the eleven words and meanings. Close readings of the *sNying thig*

³⁸ *rDzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, 5: *med pa stong pa'i chos 'byung nas/ ye thog dang po'i sangs rgyas kyi/ rig dang ye shes khyad par las/ chos nyid stong pa'i rang sgra ni/ ye nas chos kyi 'khor lo bskor/ thog ma bar mtha' med pa'o.*

teachings in their earliest formulations thus reveal how the tradition developed between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, as it gained acceptance within the rNying ma school and became increasingly concerned with its reputation among the followers of other Tibetan Buddhist schools.

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