

Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines

New Currents on the Neva River:
Proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar of
Young Tibetologists

В память о Павле Леоновиче Гроховском (1972–2018)

Edited by
Natalia Moskaleva, Franz Xaver Erhard, Daniel Wojahn,
Jed Forman, and Maria Smirnova



numéro cinquante-cinq – Juillet 2020

Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines

ISSN 1768-2959

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La périodicité de la *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* est généralement bi-annuelle, les mois de parution étant, sauf indication contraire, Octobre et Avril. Les contributions doivent parvenir au moins six (6) mois à l'avance. Les dates de proposition d'articles au comité de lecture sont Novembre pour une parution en Avril, et Mai pour une parution en Octobre.

Participation

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Comptes-rendus

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Langues

Les langues acceptées dans la revue sont le français, l'anglais, l'allemand, l'italien, l'espagnol, le tibétain et le chinois.

La *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* est publiée par l'UMR 8155 du CNRS (CRCAO), Paris, dirigée par Sylvie Hureau.

Hébergement: <http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/ret/>





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Tibetologists
Held at Saint Petersburg University on September 3–7, 2018

**Natalia Moskaleva, Franz Xaver Erhard, Daniel Wojahn, Jed Forman,
and Maria Smirnova**

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Editorial: “New Currents on the Neva River”

Natalia Moskaleva, Franz Xaver Erhard, Daniel Wojahn, Jed Forman,
and Maria Smirnova

We are pleased to offer *New Currents on the Neva River*, the proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists (ISYT)¹ held at Saint Petersburg University on September 3–7, 2018.

Ever since the first ISYT in 1977 convened by Martin Brauen and Per Kværne in Zurich and reinstated by Brandon Dotson and Tim Myatt in London in 2007, this conference has been growing consistently, establishing itself as one of the largest gatherings for Tibetan Studies scholars around the world. The Seminar promotes the advancement of international collaboration and exchange among doctoral students as well as early-career academics from various disciplines working on Tibet and its related cultures.

In 2018, the ISYT became the first major international Tibetological event to be held in Russia. Saint Petersburg University was honored with the responsibility to host this seminal meeting of young Tibetologists on the banks of the Neva River where eminent Russian institutions for the study of Tibet are located: the Faculty of Asian and African Studies of Saint Petersburg University, the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, also known as the Kunstkamera, the State Hermitage, and the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (OIM RAS).

After a rigorous double-blind peer review, 69 papers out of a total of 209 applications were accepted. Along with five additional observers, attendees hailed from 23 countries across Asia, Europe, and North America at the Fifth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists. The presentations covered a broad spectrum of materials, ranging from philosophical treatises, library catalogs and rare manuscripts to linguistic, historiographic, and religious works, including genres of classical Tibetan literature such as *gter ma*, *dkar chag*, *chos 'byung*, *rnam thar*, *rgyal rabs*, *gdung rabs*, *'das log*, or *zhus lan*, thus revealing a new trend of reconnecting with our discipline's deep philological roots. Although mostly based on a textual approach, the

¹ For details on the ISYT's history and statutes, its previous and upcoming seminars as well as the books of abstracts, visit <http://www.isyt.info>.

majority of papers incorporated theoretical developments in neighboring disciplines, including feminism and gender studies, ethnography and anthropology, Manchu, Mongolian, Tangut, and even Uyghur studies, legal, narratological, and environmental research, discourse analysis, and computational linguistics. Thus, the papers presented and these proceedings reflect the latest interdisciplinary currents in the field of Tibetan Studies.

We are very grateful to all those who participated in the Fifth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists, its abstract and article peer reviewers, the staff of Saint Petersburg University, the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, the *Kunstkamera*, the State Hermitage, and the volunteers from the Department of Tibetan and Mongolian Studies of Saint Petersburg University for their invaluable help and contribution to making our Seminar a great success:

Jean-Luc Achard, Kirill Alexeev, Robbie Barnett, Kenneth M. Bauer, Daniel Berounský, Yusuke Bessho, Jeannine Bischoff, Trine Brox, Polina Butsyk, Volker Caumanns, Olaf Czaja, Lewis Doney, Brandon Dotson, Cécile Ducher, Bruce Elleman, Franz Xaver Erhard, Kati Fitzgerald, Ruth Gamble, Emanuela Garatti, Holly Gayley, Elena Golovchenko, Alina Gribkova, Rachael Griffiths, Agnieszka Helman-Ważny, Yana Khramova, Kalsang Norbu Gurung, Paul Hackett, Jörg Heimbel, Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, Nathan Hill, Dan Hirshberg, Theresia Hofer, Dmitry Ivanov, LamaJabb, Berthe Jansen, Matthew King, Alexandra Kolesnikova, Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, Yuliana Kornilenko, Anna Kramskova, Per Kværne, Ekaterina Lekhno, Rory Lindsay, Cuilan Liu, William McGrath, Konstantin Mikhaylov, Ksenia Mikheeva, Natasha Mikles, Martin Mills, Bembya Mitruiev, Jake Nagasawa, Max Oidtmann, Ilya Orlov, Mikhail Piotrovsky, Fernanda Pirie, Jarmila Ptáčková, Charles Ramble, Ksenia Rastorgueva, Françoise Robin, Alexey Rodionov, Ulrike Roesler, Arkadiy Ryabov, Jonathan Samuels, Nicola Schneider, Anastasiya Shin, Elena Shutova, Nicolas Sihlé, Camille Simon, Alla Sizova, Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, Emilia Sulek, Olga Tikhomirova, Tashi Tsering, Nikolay Tsyrempilov, Anna Turanskaya, Maria Turek, Vladimir Uspenskiy, Sangseraima Ujeed, Sam van Schaik, Markus Viehbeck, Nicole Willock, Daniel Wojahn, Natalia Yampolskaya, Alexandr Zhukov, and Alexander Zorin.

We also want to thank Saint Petersburg University and the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR) for their financial support of the Seminar. Finally, we want to express our gratitude to Jean-Luc

Achard, who graciously made possible and oversaw the publication of the proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists in the esteemed journal *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*.

During the ISYT business meeting on September 6, 2018, a new president and board members were elected. As of September 7, 2018, the President of ISYT is Natalia Moskaleva (Saint Petersburg University) and the Secretary-General is Natasha L. Mikles (Texas State University). The ISYT Board of Advisers consists of the following eight scholars:

Maria Coma (University of Barcelona)
 Nyima Woser Choekhortshang (Charles University, Prague)
 Cécile Ducher (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris)
 Franz Xaver Erhard (Leipzig University)
 Lucia Galli (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris)
 Emanuela Garatti (Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich)
 Karma Tso (College for Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarah)
 Lobsang Thapka (Banaras Hindu University)

The ISYT Board has chosen the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia, as the venue for the upcoming Sixth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists to be held on August 9–13, 2021. We would like to congratulate the conveners of the Sixth ISYT—Andrew Taylor, Jue Liang, and Natasha Mikles—and wish them all the best for the exciting seminar ahead!

We want to dedicate the proceedings to our respected colleague and dear friend, Pavel L. Grokhovskiy, who is deeply missed. Pavel was an irreplaceable advocate for Tibetan Studies and a luminary scholar of the Saint Petersburg school of Tibetology, without whom the Fifth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists would not have been possible. Pavel was one of the conveners of the Fifth ISYT and was supposed to be the editor of the present proceedings volume, but he unexpectedly and untimely passed away on December 17, 2018, leaving us no chance to express our gratitude in person.

Pavel was born in Leningrad on April 11, 1972. He graduated with honors from the Faculty of Asian and African Studies of Saint Petersburg University in 1994, after which he enrolled in a Ph.D. program there. In 1998, he was appointed as a lecturer in the Department of Mongolian and Tibetan Studies.

In 2000, Pavel defended his Ph.D. thesis entitled "*Samādhirāja Sūtra* as a Literary Monument of Buddhist Canonical Literature." In 2001, he was promoted to Associate Professor in the same department, where he continued to teach most of the courses on Tibetan philology until his final days. Being a curious, open-minded, and passionate

scholar interested in the research on virtually every sphere of Tibetology, Pavel managed to successfully combine his academic activity with administrative duties. He served two terms as the Head of the Department (2003–2009 and 2016–2018) and as the Vice-Dean (2000–2004 and 2012–2018) and chaired the Academic and Methodological Commission of the Faculty for six years (2012–2018), thus actively shaping the institutional foundation of Asian and African Studies at Saint Petersburg University.

In recent years, Pavel spearheaded novel projects in corpus linguistics and encouraged new endeavors in the largely unexplored area of Tibetan natural language processing. His scholarly oeuvre is preserved in more than 20 publications and lives on in the numerous research projects he initiated. In addition, Pavel was a scrupulous academic advisor for many undergraduate and graduate students.

As a committed, energetic, and caring person, Pavel put significant effort into preserving the academic traditions of the Department of Tibetan and Mongolian Studies and ensured the excellence of its teaching. He succeeded in further reinforcing Saint Petersburg University as a well-known and distinguished center of Tibetology. Outside Russia, Pavel was a regular and highly welcomed visitor to libraries, research institutions, universities, and academic conferences, where he actively promoted international exchange and cooperation.

Whatever his goal, Pavel worked tirelessly to achieve it. Memories of him as a devoted Tibetologist, a talented leader, an inspiring teacher, a wise academic advisor, a kind person, and a dear friend with a fine sense of humor will be cherished by his grateful students and colleagues. We hope that this volume will carry Pavel's legacy to all those who knew him and those who did not alike.

The Faculty of Asian and African Studies of Saint Petersburg University was officially established in 1854 and ever since has stood as a citadel for the academic study of Asia. The Saint Petersburg school of Tibetan Studies has commonly been known as a center for classical Tibetology. Vladimir L. Uspensky's keynote address in the present issue further illustrates the unique history of Tibetan Studies in Russia and Saint Petersburg. However, in recent years, the diversification—initiated by Pavel—has made research more interdisciplinary. The results of this diversification were presented at the Fifth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists by Pavel's students.

This unique character of Saint Petersburg is also present in these proceedings with the inclusion of research firmly grounded in the classical Russian tradition of Tibetology, such as Alla Sizova's research on the Tibetan birch bark manuscript held at the Institute of

Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Anna Kramskova's comparative study of Tibetan musical and linguistic terminology, and Polina Butsyk's article on traditional Tibetan vocal music. New interdisciplinary directions such as the study of the Tibetan linguistic picture of the world using natural language processing by Maria Smirnova alongside Natalia Moskaleva's discourse analysis of the early periodical *The Tibet Mirror* reflect the latest interests of Pavel Grokhovskiy. These new currents of Tibetological research in Saint Petersburg thus have provided a fascinating ground for international exchange, interdisciplinary debates, and contemporary advances.

The editorial process of this volume—across three continents, all possible time zones, and working under the pressures of a global health crisis—was a challenging but rewarding task, and we hope our readers will share the satisfaction we felt in producing *New Currents on the Neva River*. Moreover, we hope that the Fifth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists and these proceedings will give our readers a glimpse of not only the multifarious nature of Tibetan Studies, but the far-reaching scope of one of its preeminent figures, Pavel Grokhovskiy.

We wish you inspiration in your research and look forward to seeing you at the Sixth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists!

The Editorial Team of
the Fifth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists



Keynote: Tibetan Studies in Saint Petersburg: Past and Present

Vladimir Uspensky

(Saint Petersburg University)

ear colleagues, young and not very young!
It has been a great honor for me to welcome the congregation of Tibetologists who came to Saint Petersburg both to share their scholarly achievements with their colleagues and to acquire fresh knowledge during the Fifth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists. Saint Petersburg¹ was originally founded not only to be “a window on Europe,” but with the particular purpose of becoming the capital of the Russian Empire to unite many peoples and cultures.

Today, Tibetan Studies is a special branch of Oriental Studies. You will not find Tibet on the political map of the world. However, in the same way that many great rivers flow to the oceans from the glaciers of Tibet, her spiritual accomplishments spread in all directions, crossing mountains and deserts, as well as political boundaries. For this reason, it is my opinion that when preceding the word “studies,” “Tibetan” should be understood not just in its geographical or ethnic meaning, but in its cultural and religious meaning. Tibetology is thus a world-embracing subject and is in no way limited to the hardly accessible mountainous country with “high peaks and pure earth.”

Russia is especially fortunate geographically since it is located in both Europe and Asia. Therefore, Asian languages and cultures are not something external and foreign—as they may be considered in Europe—but they are an inseparable and important part of Russian national culture. As a result, the study of Asian languages has always been seen as indispensable, and this emphasis has greatly contributed to the progress of Oriental Studies in Russia.

In relation to Tibetan Studies in Russia, it should be pointed out that:

- Tibetan Buddhism has had a long-standing place in the Russian Empire and is officially recognized in modern Russia.

¹ Named “Petrograd” from 1914 to 1924 and “Leningrad” from 1924 to 1991.

- Thousands of books in the Tibetan language have been written and printed in Russia, from which services have been performed—and are still performed—in many Buddhist temples.
- Russian Buddhist citizens themselves have contributed to the development of knowledge about Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism. Learned Russian lamas also have become versed in Western Buddhist Studies scholarship.

Russian familiarity with Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan language thus differs from the experience of Western Europe. Being a continental power, Russia is separated from Tibet by grasslands inhabited by various Mongolian and Turkic tribes. In the 13th century, Russia, which at that time occupied only a part of Eastern Europe, and Tibet were both incorporated into the great Mongol Empire. However, no written evidence about possible Russian–Tibetan contacts survive from that time. When in the mid–16th century Russia started moving eastwards and reached the Pacific Ocean a century later, she again met Mongols on her new eastern borders. Peoples of Mongol stock such as the Kalmyks in Southern European Russia and the Buryat Mongols in Eastern Siberia became Russian subjects. By that time, Tibetan Buddhism had become widespread among the Mongols, with the Khoshut Mongols even ruling over Tibet. As a result of contact with the Mongols, the Russians received their first exposure to Tibetan Buddhism and, by extension, their first exposure to the Tibetan language and Tibet herself.

In the field of Tibetan Studies, the city of Saint Petersburg occupies a special place, not only for Russia, but the whole world. The city was founded in 1703 and became the capital of the vast Russian Empire in 1712. The first Tibetan texts arrived in Saint Petersburg as early as in 1719. These Tibetan pages originated from the ruined monasteries of the Dzungar Mongols located in present-day Kazakhstan.² Since that time, Tibetan books and items have been brought to Saint Petersburg in ever-increasing quantities.

In 1724, by the order of the Czar Peter I, the Saint Petersburg Academy was founded. In its early decades, the Academy was largely staffed by foreigners, especially Germans from German principedoms and the Baltic provinces of Russia. In 1732, the first work on Tibetan Studies was published in Saint Petersburg: an article entitled “*Elementa litteraturae brahmanicae, tangutanae, mungalicae*” by Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer (1694–1638).³ In 1747, it was followed by “*De*

² For more information, see Zorin 2015.

³ Bayer 1732.

scriptis tanguticis in Sibiria repertis commentatio” by Gerhard Müller (1705–1783).⁴ The Tibetan language was called the “Tangut language” because at that time this name was used by the Mongols as a synonym for “Tibet.”

In 1764, the young Empress Catherine II appointed a learned lama, Bstan pa dar rgyas Zayaev (1710–1776), as the Head Lama of the Buddhists of Eastern Siberia—the Bandido Khamba Lama (Paṇḍita Mkhan po bla ma). This was a major event for the institutionalization of Tibetan Buddhism in Russia. Thus, Tibet became indirectly associated with Russia as the “lamaist clergy” steadily grew in numbers, causing anxiety to the Russian administration. Three years later, Zayaev, as the Deputy of the Buryat Mongols, participated in commission work that was specifically convened to create a new Russian legislation. He received a personal audience with the empress and submitted to her his account of Tibet where he had studied for many years.⁵

For two centuries, the Russian Christian Mission, which was established in Beijing in 1685, served as an important source for information about Tibet. The aim of this Mission was to serve the religious needs of the Russian soldiers and their descendants who were captured during the conflict between Russia and the Qing Empire. However, this permanent representation in Beijing was used by the Russian government as a source to collect all sorts of information about its neighbor. That is why, alongside Christian clerics (of whom many became outstanding scholars), these missions employed natural scientists, physicians, Orientalists, botanists, and others. It should be noted that in the days of the Manchu Qing Empire, its capital, Beijing, was an important center of Tibetan Buddhism with dozens of temples, thousands of lamas and workshops producing Tibetan Buddhist books and images in enormous quantities.

I will only mention two facts about this Christian Mission in relation to Tibetan Studies in Russia.

In 1844, a complete set of the Beijing edition of the *Bka' 'gyur* and the *Bstan 'gyur* was presented to the Russian Mission. The gift was reported to the Russian Emperor Nicholas I, who personally wrote in the report: “Excellent! But I do not know what sort of books they are.” In return, he ordered a collection of Russian books to be sent to China. This was the first official book exchange between Russia and China.⁶

A modern scholar should not forget that in the mid–19th century, it was a difficult task to bring such a heavy and bulky collection to Russia. Finally, it found its way to Saint Petersburg, and at present it

⁴ Müller 1747.

⁵ Tsyrempilov 2013: 72–80.

⁶ Uspensky 2011: 248–249.

is kept at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts. Russia was the first of the European countries to possess this excellent edition of the Tibetan Buddhist Canon. It became the basis of many Russian publications on Buddhist Studies. Publications of some canonical Buddhist texts in the famous series *Bibliotheca Buddhica* are largely based on this Beijing edition. Some of its pages still bear the pencil marks of such great scholars as Theodor I. Stcherbatsky (1866–1942), Baron Alexander von Staël-Holstein (1876–1937), and others.

In 1828, the first Russian book entirely dedicated to Tibet was printed in Saint Petersburg. This was a translation from Chinese of the *Description of Tibet (Wei zang tu shi 衛藏圖識)* made by the famous Russian Sinologist Father Hyacinth (Bichurin; 1777–1853) who was the head of the Russian Mission in Beijing in 1808–1821. The book was immediately translated into French and published in Paris.⁷

The foundation of the Asiatic Museum in 1818 was a major event for the progress of Oriental Studies in Russia. Its aim was “to bring together in one place the materials which are necessary for the study of Asian peoples living abroad and in Russia: their life-styles, languages, and history.”⁸ In 2018, we celebrated the 200th anniversary of this outstanding institution. Although throughout the turbulent Russian history of the 20th century it has changed names and affiliations, it has survived and is known today as the Institute of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IOM RAS). It possesses one of the world’s largest collections of Tibetan manuscripts and woodblock prints.⁹

Further progress in Tibetan Studies was largely the result of the untiring activity of the academician Isaac Jacob Schmidt (1779–1847), who originally came to Russia in order to propagate Christianity to Kalmyk Mongols. Consequently, he discovered that Tibetan was the language of the Buddhism confessed by them and so he learned it. The results of his efforts were impressive. He wrote a grammar of the Tibetan language, Tibetan-German and Tibetan-Russian dictionaries, and published the Tibetan text of the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish* and its German translation.¹⁰

Most of you are young Tibetologists who were born in the computer age and it probably seems strange to you that it used to be difficult to

⁷ Klaproth 1829 & 1830.

⁸ *Entsiklopedicheskiy slovar' Brokgauza i Yefrona* 1891: 232.

⁹ The electronic catalogue of this collection was created in 1994–2008 as a part of the Asian Classics Input Project. At present, a group of scholars is preparing a catalogue of several editions of the Tibetan Buddhist Canon and related materials kept at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts. Two volumes of this catalogue have already been published. See Zorin 2017 & 2019.

¹⁰ Schmidt 1839; 1841 & 1843.

print a text in Tibetan or in any other language. Nevertheless, it took a lot of effort to create the movable Tibetan type used at the printing house of the Academy of Sciences from the mid-19th century until the second half of the 20th century.

The Russian inventor and politician of German origin, Baron Paul Ludwig Schilling von Canstadt (1786–1837), was a passionate book-collector and was experimenting with printing Asian languages, including Tibetan. In 1830, Baron Schilling was sent to Eastern Siberia with the task of examining the current state of trade between Russia and China and also to inspect the “lamaist clergy.” Being favorably inclined towards Buddhism, Baron Schilling collected a great number of Tibetan books during his expedition, especially those copied for him by Buryat Mongol lamas. He was even presented a copy of the Sde dge edition of the *Bka' 'gyur* as a reciprocal gift for constructing prayer wheels containing a thitherto unattainable quantity of *dhāraṇī*. After his death, his Tibetan books found their way to the Asiatic Museum and laid the foundation for its Tibetan collection.¹¹

Meanwhile in 1833, a Chair of Mongol Studies was established at the city of Kazan on the banks of the River Volga at the local university. Its founder was Professor Józef Kowalewski (1800/01–1878), who had the opportunity to travel to Eastern Siberia and Beijing in preparation to teach Mongolian. Needless to say, he encountered lamas and collected a large number of Tibetan books printed in Beijing and Buddhist monasteries in Siberia.¹²

Within a few years, a decision was made to establish the Chair of Tibetan Studies at Kazan University. For this purpose, in 1840, Kowalewski's student Vasilii P. Vasilyev (1818–1900) was sent to Beijing with the task to study the Tibetan language and to collect Tibetan materials. For ten years, Vasilyev assiduously studied the Tibetan language and collected books not only in Tibetan, but also in Mongolian, Manchu, and Chinese.

In Beijing, Vasilyev established contacts with head lamas as well as with people who had visited Tibet and Tibetan traders. He managed to get from them some books that had been printed in Tibet. He also

¹¹ Vasilyev wrote about Baron Schilling: “Pour l’orient la Russie possédait un grand bibliomane dans la personne de feu le baron Schilling et c’est à ses efforts, sans doute, que l’académie des sciences est redevable de toutes ses principales richesses. Il n’épargnait ni dépenses ni peines pour acquérir non-seulement des livres, mais aussi d’autres objets servant à la connaissance de la vie dans l’orient” [For the Orient, Russia had a great bibliomaniac in the person of the late Baron Schilling, and the Academy of Sciences is undoubtedly indebted to his efforts for all its principal riches. He spared neither expenses nor pains to acquire not only books, but also other objects relating to life in the Orient] (Wassiliev 1856: 582–583).

¹² For more information about Kowalewski's stay in Beijing, see Uspensky 2009.

purchased the Snar thang edition of the *Bstan 'gyur*, now kept at the Saint Petersburg University Library.

Vasilyev was the first in Europe to discover several famous Tibetan historical works. These are Bu ston's *Chos 'byung*, 'Gos lo tsā ba's *Deb ther sngon po*, Sum pa mkhan po's *Dpag bsam ljon bzang*, Mgon po skyab's *Rgya nag chos 'byung*, Tshe 'phel gu shri's *Hor chos 'byung*, and some others. Among them was the *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* printed in 1478, which is the oldest Tibetan book in the Saint Petersburg University collection.¹³

Unfortunately, when Vasilyev returned to Kazan—having accumulated a unique knowledge of the Tibetan language and bringing with him the precious materials which he had collected—the decision to establish the Chair of Tibetan Studies was withdrawn. So instead of being the founder of Tibetan Studies in Russia, Vasilyev became the founder of Russian Sinology. This came as a blow to the emerging field of Russian Tibetology. In comparison with other fields in Oriental Studies, Tibetan Studies is fragile. When the transmission lineage is lost, it is not easily restored, as Russia's example vividly demonstrates. It took more than 150 years after Vasilyev's trip to Beijing to establish the Chair of Mongolian and Tibetan Studies at Saint Petersburg University in 2008, i.e., just 12 years ago.

In 1855, the Oriental Department of Kazan University moved from Kazan to Saint Petersburg with its professors and book collections. After being moved to Saint Petersburg, the library continued to be supplied with books in Asian languages. However, the bulk of the Tibetan collection was formed by the mid-19th century.

Vasilyev, who also moved to Saint Petersburg, soon became the Dean of the Oriental Department and submitted a project to establish the Chair of Tibetan Studies at Saint Petersburg University. However, his proposal was not supported. At the end of his long life, Vasilyev came back to Tibetan Studies and was even planning to undertake a trip to Tibet. His book *Buddhism* and his translation of Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India* (*Rgya gar chos 'byung*) remain classical works in Tibetan Studies. His last published book was his partial translation of the *Geography of the World* (*'Dzam gling rgyas bshad*) by Smin grol gling No mon han (1789–1839). In 2018, we celebrated the 200th birthday of this outstanding scholar.¹⁴

The academician Anton Schiefner (1817–1879) greatly contributed to Tibetan Studies. In 1859, he published a Sanskrit–Tibetan–Mongolian dictionary of Buddhist terms in Saint Petersburg under the name *Buddhistische Triglotte*. The woodblocks of this dictionary were

¹³ Wassiljew 1855: 353–363, Wassiljew 1856: 570–578, and Uspensky 2014: 154–161.

¹⁴ For more information about Vasilyev's contribution to Buddhist Studies, see Kapstein 2019.

engraved at the initiative of Baron Schilling von Canstadt in Eastern Siberia. Among other things, in 1869, he published his German translation of Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India*. Vasilyev accused Schiefner of having poor knowledge of Tibetan and claimed that Schiefner had plagiarized his Russian translation. All Russian scholarship on this issue support Vasilyev's view. However, documents reflecting Schiefner's position were also published recently.¹⁵ It seems that this kind of conflict was inevitable since the two outstanding scholars simultaneously translated one and the same Tibetan book. Their conflict is likely more a product of the psychology of the authors than the quality of their scholarship.

While 19th-century Tibet was a forbidden land for Europeans, Russian Buddhist pilgrims of the Mongol origin were able to visit there rather freely. So, the Imperial Russian Geographic Society and the Academy of Sciences decided to send Gombozhab Tsybikov (1873–1930), a Buryat graduate of Saint Petersburg University, to Central Tibet. Under the disguise of a pilgrim, he collected materials on Tibet, especially Tibetan books. His “pilgrimage” took place from 1899 to 1902. As a result, he brought back 333 volumes of Tibetan books purchased from the Zhol Par khang, the famous printing house of Lhasa.¹⁶

Tsybikov also took many photos of Tibet and described his travel in the book *A Buddhist Pilgrim to the Shrines of Tibet*.¹⁷ He presented his photo of the Potala to the *National Geographic* and added to the magazine's fame and popularity. At present, the books collected by Tsybikov are kept at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, while his glass photographic plates are stored at the archives of the Russian Geographical Society—also in Saint Petersburg.¹⁸ In 1899, the Oriental Institute was founded in Vladivostok, Russia's easternmost extremity. Tsybikov was teaching at that Institute for many years and published the first Russian textbook of colloquial Tibetan.

It should be noted that the (formerly Imperial) Russian Geographical Society possesses many valuable photos and travel reports. For example, it hosts a collection of photos made by a famous Russian traveler Piotr K. Kozlov (1863–1935) during the stay of the 13th Dalai Lama in Outer Mongolia when he fled from the British in 1904.

Another Buryat scholar, Bajar Baradiin (1878–1939), was sent to the great monastery of Amdo, Bla brang Bkra shis 'khyil, from 1906 to 1907, where he collected about 200 volumes of Tibetan books. These

¹⁵ See Walravens 2008.

¹⁶ Uspensky 1996: 180–182.

¹⁷ This book was first published in Petrograd in 1918. For its English translation, see Tsybikov 2017.

¹⁸ Andreyev 2003: 32n52.

books are mostly the collected works of the learned lamas of Amdo. They were printed mainly in Bla brang Monastery, but several of them came from Sku 'bum Monastery.¹⁹

In 1913, the Asiatic Museum received a bundle of Tibetan scrolls from Dunhuang 敦煌, which are mostly copies of the *Heart Sutra* and the *Sutra of Infinite Life*.²⁰

The expedition to north-western China headed by Kozlov from 1908 to 1909 unearthed the ruined town of Khara Khoto. Among the excavated items were found many book fragments in different languages and precious works of Buddhist art. At present, the Tibetan books and fragments are kept at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts and the art items are stored in the Hermitage Museum.²¹

Not only books, but also objects of Tibetan Buddhist art were collected by scholars and connoisseurs. The most prominent of the collectors was Prince Esper Uktomskiy (1861–1921), a close associate of the last Russian Czar Nicholas II. His collection numbered more than 2,000 pieces and was famous even outside Russia. A major part of his collection now forms the bulk of the Tibetan collection at the Hermitage Museum. Some parts of his collections are exhibited in the other museums of Saint Petersburg. For example, the Museum of the History of Religions possesses a beautiful sculpted image of Sukhāvati paradise made between 1904 and 1905 by lama-artisans of two Buryat monasteries.²²

The 18th and 19th centuries witnessed a rapid Russian growth in the number of Buddhist monks and in the building of new monasteries. Monasteries in Eastern Siberia printed many books in the Tibetan and Mongolian languages and became major centers of Buddhist learning, art, and medicine. Many lamas from Russia who were trained in Tibet subsequently made large contributions to the development of Buddhist Studies in Russia.

Books printed or copied in Amdo, Beijing, Mongolia, and, to some extent, in Central Tibet were brought to Russia. Many of them served as originals for the printing houses of local monasteries. The total number of Tibetan books printed in Russia is unknown. However, it would not be an exaggeration to assume that there are not less than a few thousands separate works, images of deities, and paper amulets. The Buryat monasteries printed Tibetan books relating to many

¹⁹ Uspensky 1996: 182–184. Baradiin's diary was published only 18 years ago. See Baradin 2002.

²⁰ For the description and the catalogue of these scrolls, see Savitskiy 1991.

²¹ See Piotrovsky 1993 and Samosiuk 2006.

²² The reproduction of this sculpted image can be viewed on the official website of the museum, http://www.gmir.ru/virtual/virt-collection/sukhavati_zoom/. Accessed April 29, 2020.

subjects: canonical sutras and tantras, ritual manuals, calendars, and books for the training of lamas in accordance with monastic curriculum. Many monasteries regularly published catalogues of their printed books.

Tibetan printing flourished in Russia, especially beginning with the second half of the 19th century. Eastern Siberia is rich in wood, and there soon appeared trained engravers. Russian white paper was used, and the printing quality was very high. For the most part, Tibetan books printed in Russia are much clearer and more legible than those printed in Central Tibet. By the end of the 19th century, there were 34 Buddhist monasteries in Eastern Siberia, of which 29 had their own printing houses (*par khang*).²³

The uncontrolled printing activities of Buddhist monasteries caused anxiety in local authorities, because no books were allowed to be printed in Czarist Russia without censorship. To settle the problem, the Head Lama of Eastern Siberia, who was appointed by the Czar, had to personally confirm with his seal and signature that the printed books were not harmful. Printing flourished until the early 1930s, when the monasteries were closed, and their printing activities stopped. Despite this sad fact, a considerable part of their book production escaped destruction and was moved as “cultural relics” to Soviet museums and institutes. Books from closed monasteries now constitute the bulk of the Tibetan collection at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts here in Saint Petersburg. Many of them bear the monastic seals of their former owners.

There is a landmark in Saint Petersburg of the extreme northward spread of the Buddhist Teaching in the pre-modern times (60° N): this is the Buddhist temple in Saint Petersburg, the capital of the former Russian Empire. Its founder was the legendary Agvan Dorjiev (1853/54–1938), a learned lama from Russia, who became a confidant of the 13th Dalai Lama. This had great political consequences, which finally resulted in the so-called Younghusband mission of 1904. In 1908, Dorjiev, under the Dalai Lama’s request, proposed the Russian government build a Buddhist temple in the capital of Russia. Despite numerous hindrances, the temple was built within only a few years. Russian scholars gave their support for the construction of the temple. The famous painter Nicholas Roerich designed its stained-glass windows. It was consecrated in August 1915 under the name “The Source of the True Dharma of Buddha, Merciful to Everybody” (Kun la brtse mdzad thub dbang dam chos ’byung ba’i gnas).

²³ See Uspensky 2010. For a long but an incomplete list of the woodblock prints in Tibetan and Mongolian produced in Eastern Siberia, see Rinchen 1959.

Dorjiev's plan to make the temple a center for a small monastery failed: the Czar allowed permanent residence to only nine lamas. Though religion was greatly oppressed after the 1917 Revolution, Dorjiev managed to secure diplomatic immunity for the temple as he himself was the Dalai Lama's Minister Plenipotentiary in the USSR.

The Buddhist temple in Saint Petersburg was closed in the late 1930s and was handed over to Buddhists only in 1990. However, it survived political oppression and enemy artillery shelling during the World War II. The temple has been restored and is now an active place of worship for the local Buddhist community.²⁴

It should be especially noticed that contacts with educated lamas were very beneficial for Buddhist Studies in Russia. Such great Russian scholars as Theodor I. Stcherbatsky, Eugene E. Obermiller (1901–1935), and Andrei I. Vostrikov (1902–1937) worked in constant contact with Buryat lamas and often visited Buddhist monasteries in Eastern Siberia.

I am pleased to end my article optimistically. Today the Tibetan language is included in the academic curriculum of Saint Petersburg University. Museums of Saint Petersburg such as the Hermitage, the Kunstkammer, the Museum of the History of Religions, the Russian Ethnographical Museum, and others exhibit many superb works of Tibetan Buddhist art.²⁵ The huge collection of Tibetan books kept at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts is being catalogued and studied by a younger generation of Tibetologists. The marvelous Buddhist temple has been restored, and services in the Tibetan language are being performed daily. Here, in Saint Petersburg, the words of Matthew Kapstein deserve attention: "In view of the small number of qualified researchers in the field, Tibetan studies now suffer in fact from an embarrassment of riches."²⁶ This sounds like a "Tibetological remake" of Christ's words: "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:37). Thus, Saint Petersburg is a highly valued destination for every Tibetan scholar. The fact that leading Tibetan scholars of the future have gathered here for the Fifth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists is a fortuitous sign.

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²⁴ For the most recent publications about this temple, see Andreyev 2012 & 2017.

²⁵ Several books about these Buddhist art collections have been published in the recent decade. See Elikhina 2010 & 2015; Zorin 2013; Ivanova and Dubrovin 2014.

²⁶ Kapstein 2006: 24.

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Sounds of Speech and the Tiger's Roar: Two Ways of Perceiving Vocal Music in Tibet in the 13th–17th Centuries¹

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Music has to be perceived and interpreted by the human mind in order to make it a part of the mental world. Due to differences in their cultural background, people from different cultures understand and describe musical sounds differently. Among the factors that influence the manner in which any melody is perceived are everyday experiences of surrounding sounds, the historical development of a given society, mythology and religious beliefs, philosophical discourse, systems of thought, and education. From the 13th to 17th centuries, the Tibetans documented their understanding of music and sound; hence enabling modern scholarship to trace distinctive features of the perception of music shared by Tibetan scholars at that time.

For my research I have used five well-known treatises and encyclopedias written by Tibetan authors in the 13th to 17th centuries concerning the vocal music field:²

¹ This research was conducted with the support of the research grant of the Russian Foundation for Humanities: 15-04-00428 "Annotated Translation and Investigation of the 'Treatise on Music' by Sakya Paṇḍita Kunga Gyeltsen."

² To denote the scope of "vocal music," a term widely used in this article, I will list a number of Tibetan terms, which I consider as pertaining to this category: 1) *glu* (a song), with the verb *len pa* (to sing); 2) *dbyangs* (a melody; also, a type of ritual chant); 3) *don* (to recite; a recitation); 4) *gyer* (to sing; also, a type of ritual chant); 5) *rta* (a melody; also, a type of ritual chant). There is also a special Tibetan term for "vocal music"—*lhan cig skyes pa'i rol mo* (simultaneously-produced music), but it is not widely used nowadays. There has been much discussion about these Tibetan terms: about the change of their meaning through the times, about their use in various contexts, in different monasteries and regions of Tibet, see Ellingson 1979a: 211–220; Ellingson 1979b; Helffer 1998; Canzio 1986; Henrion-Dourcy 2017; Liu Cuilan 2018. I used these Tibetan terms during the research to outline the area of my interest.

1. *Treatise on Music*³ by Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182–1251);
2. The commentary on the above treatise⁴ by A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod noms (1597–1659);
3. *Explanation of the [Ritual] Items, Garments, Ornaments and Music—the Wealth of the Ocean of Vajrayana Vidyadharas of Early Translations—the Ornamenting Flower of a Mantradhara*⁵ by Bkra shis rgya mtsho⁶ (15th century);
4. *Achieving Selflessness after Mastering All Sciences*⁷ by Stag tshang lo tsā ba Shes rab rin chen (1405–1477);

³ *Rol mo'i bstan bcos*. There are several editions of the treatise: in *A Book of Medicine, One of the Five Outer Subjects*, by Sakya-pandit (Dharamsala 1969), in *Bod ljongs zhib 'jug* (1983 no. 2), in *Rol mo'i bstan bcos* (Beijing 1986), in the *Gsung 'bum* of Sa skya Paṇḍita (Lhasa 1992), in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (to name just a few recent publications: Dehradun 1993; Kathmandu 2006); in *Zlos gar dang mkhas 'jug* (Beijing 2004), in a condensed version of the *Gsung 'bum* of Sa skya Paṇḍita (Beijing 2007). There are also some old manuscripts of the treatise, preserved and digitized by the Buddhist Digital Resource Center. All these versions of the treatise vary insignificantly. For this article I have used the first version, published in 1969 in Dharamsala.

⁴ The full name in Tibetan reads: *Rig pa'i gnas lnga las bzo rig pa'i bye brag rol mo'i bstan bcos kyi rnam par bshad pa 'jam dbyangs bla ma dgyes pa'i snyan pa'i sgra dbyangs blo gsal yid 'phrog 'phrin las yongs khyab*. There is a number of publications of this commentary: in *A Book of Medicine, One of the Five Outer Subjects*, by Sakya-pandit (Dharamsala 1969), in *Rol mo'i bstan bcos* (Beijing 1986), in *Bod ljongs sgyu rtsal zhib 'jug* (1988 no. 2, 1989 no. 3), in the *Gsung 'bum* of A mes zhabs ngag dbang kun dga' bsod noms (Kathmandu 2000), in *Zlos gar dang mkhas 'jug* (Beijing 2004). There are also manuscripts and xylographs of this commentary. The versions of the commentary listed above vary significantly. More spelling errors and even omissions of some passages were found in the *Gsung 'bum* of A mes zhabs published in Kathmandu in 2000. For the present article I used the publication of 1969 (Dharamsala).

⁵ *Snga 'gyur rdo rje theg pa'i rigs 'dzin rgya mtsho'i longspyod chas gos rgyan dang rol mo'i rnam bshad sngags 'chang rgyan gyi me tog*. To my knowledge, only one publication of this work is accessible now, that is in *Gsang rnying rgyan dang rol mo'i bstan bcos* (Lhasa 1996).

⁶ Little information is known about the author. The preface to the *Gsang rnying rgyan dang rol mo'i bstan bcos* states that he was a disciple of Zhang mkhar ba bsod noms bzang po and a holder of the *Rnying ma smin grol gling* tradition of early translations. His name is mentioned in the *Blue Annals* by 'Gos lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal, but no precise date of his birth or death is given in this historical work. The author of the preface, Bu byung dbang 'dus, presumes that Bkra shis rgya mtsho lived in the 14th or 15th century (*Gsang rnying rgyan* [Treatises on the Ornaments] 1996: 1–2).

⁷ *Rig gnas kun shes nas bdag med grub pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos*. This treatise is included into the *Gsung 'bum* of Stag tshang lo tsā ba. Two recent editions of the *Gsung 'bum* were printed by Sachen International (Kathmandu 2007) and by the Dpal brtsegs Research Institute of Old Tibetan manuscripts (Beijing 2007). For the present article I use the latter one, printed in Beijing.

5. *Treasury of Explanations—A Wish-Fulfilling Jewel*⁸ by Don dam smra ba'i seng ge⁹ (15th century).

In the process of analyzing the texts listed above, I searched for special expressions, epithets, and logic schemes that, to some extent, could reveal the author's position in understanding vocal music. On the basis of these written sources, I have distinguished two principal ways of perceiving vocal music sounds: one in relation to human speech and language and one that draws similarities to the sounds of the surrounding world or mythical phenomena. In the present article, I will describe these positions in more detail and will provide a number of examples from the above-mentioned Tibetan texts.

1. Vocal Music and the Sounds of Speech

Vocal music is sometimes considered the oldest form of music. The creation of vocal music does not require any musical instrument except the human body. It only requires the vocal apparatus, which is also used for oral communication and speech. In terms of theory, this fact predisposed the creation of logical and terminological correlations between phonology and vocal music theory. These correlations are clearly observed in some of the texts, which will be analyzed in the present article.

In Sa skya Paṅḍita's *Treatise on Music*, one can find evidence that the author perceived vocal music as closely associated with language and speech. According to the text, the main components of vocal melody (*dbyangs*) are the four types of intonational contours (*nga ro*):¹⁰ *'dren pa* "sustaining," *bkug pa* "bending," *bsgyur ba* "changing,"

⁸ *Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu* (another version of the title: *Bshad mdzod chen mo*). Two editions of this work are available: by Lokesh Chandra (New Delhi 1969, with an introduction by E. Gene Smith) and by Kunsang Topgey (Thimphu 1976).

⁹ The author is said to be a member of a princely family of Gru shul or a household priest of this family. His encyclopedic work is said to have been written after 1457. For more information about the author, see E. Gene Smith's *Introduction to the New Delhi edition*.

¹⁰ Several translations of the term have been proposed by researchers of Tibetan music: 1) "melodic type" (Canzio 1978: 56); 2) "intonational contours" or "intonational components of melody" (Ellingson 1979a: 420, 422); 3) "inflexion mélodique" or "l'intonation prolongée des chants" (Helffer 1998: 146, 155); 4) *yindiao* 音调 "tone" (*Yue lun* 乐论 [Treatise on Music] 1989: 23). The concept of *nga ro* is complex and has been studied by several scholars including M. Helffer, T. Ellingson and R. Canzio. Yet, they have not come to a consensus on the actual meaning of this term, but it seems clear that *nga ro* is understood by Sa skya Paṅḍita as a basic musical component, which includes such characteristics as pitch,

ltengs pa “weakened-strengthened.”¹¹ Sa skya Paṇḍita wrote:

There are four kinds of intonational contours
 In simultaneously-produced music:¹²
 Sustaining, bending,
 Changing and weakened-strengthened.
 I will explain how [they] become different
 Because of the distinction [between the ways of their] uttering.
 One should utter sustaining with straight,
 Raised, curved, high, and low intonational contours.
 The bending [intonational contour] can be either single or multiple,
 And if so, double, triple, quadruple, and so on.
 The changing [intonational contour] can be guttural, lingual, or nasal,
 [All of] them may be of two [kinds]—long or short.
 The weakened-strengthened [intonational contour] can be long or short,
 There is a specific feature of this [type]—it is coarse in the beginning
 and in the end.¹³

loudness, timbre, tongue position, resonance cavity used and the vowel sung. Since there was not any notion of discrete pitches, intervals, scales or modes in Tibet in the 13th century, theoretical description of music necessitated the introduction or coining of adequate terms in order to explain musical phenomena. *Nga ro* is one of these early terms; its meaning remains rather obscure, but the core of its concept is evidently based on the manner of voice production and the timbre of voice, rather than the pitch characteristics of melody. The sequence of different *nga ro* constitutes a “melodic” line of a song (Ellingson 1979a: 419). Since the focus of Sa skya Paṇḍita’s attention was rather on the timbre of the sound and not on the pitch, I prefer to define the sequence of *nga ro* as a “timbre-acoustic” aspect of a song. A “timbre-acoustic” dimension can be understood as a sequence of the timbre changes of the voice, not necessarily accompanied by the pitch changes.

¹¹ The term *ltengs pa* was translated by Ellingson as “rises” (1979a: 422–423), the “ascending” melodic type by Canzio (1978: 56), and as the “mouvement ascendant,” by Helffer (1998: 151). I propose to translate *ltengs pa* as “weakened-strengthened,” because it cannot be judged from the texts of the treatise and of the commentary if an ascending movement of the melodic line is indeed implied. Sa skya Paṇḍita stated that *ltengs pa* is “coarse” (*rags pa*) in the beginning and in the end, but at the same time it is “weak in the center” (*dbus zhan*) (Sa skya Paṇḍita 1969: 3, 13). According to this description, Canzio suggests that a melodic feature of the type “low-high-low” is meant by *ltengs pa* (1978: 106). This suggestion is worth considering, but, as we are not able to reconstruct the melody that was described in the treatise, a translation closer to the original text seems to be more reasonable.

¹² *lhan cig skyes pa'i rol mo*. It is translated as “simultaneously-produced music” by Ellingson (1979a: 393), and “music, produced together with the body” by Canzio (1978: 35). In a broad sense it can stand for any sound produced by the human body (including the sounds of clapping of hands, whistling, etc.). In the *Treatise on Music* this term denotes vocal music.

¹³ *de la lhan cig skyes pa yi// nga ro rnam pa bzhi yin tel// 'dren pa dang ni bkug pa dang// bsgyur ba dang ni ltengs nyid dol// de dag 'dren pa'i dbye ba yis// tha dad 'gyur ba'ang bshad par bya// drang po bsgreng dang bkug pa dang// bstod dang smad pa'i nga ros drang // khugs la rkyang dang brtsegs pa stel// de la gnyis gsum bzhi sogs so// bsgyur la mgrin lce sna ldan tel// de la ring dang thung gnyis sbyar// ltengs la ring dang thung ba stel// de la khyad par thog mtha' rags//* (Sa skya Paṇḍita 1969: 2–3).

Sa skya Paṇḍita's system could be summarized in the following way:

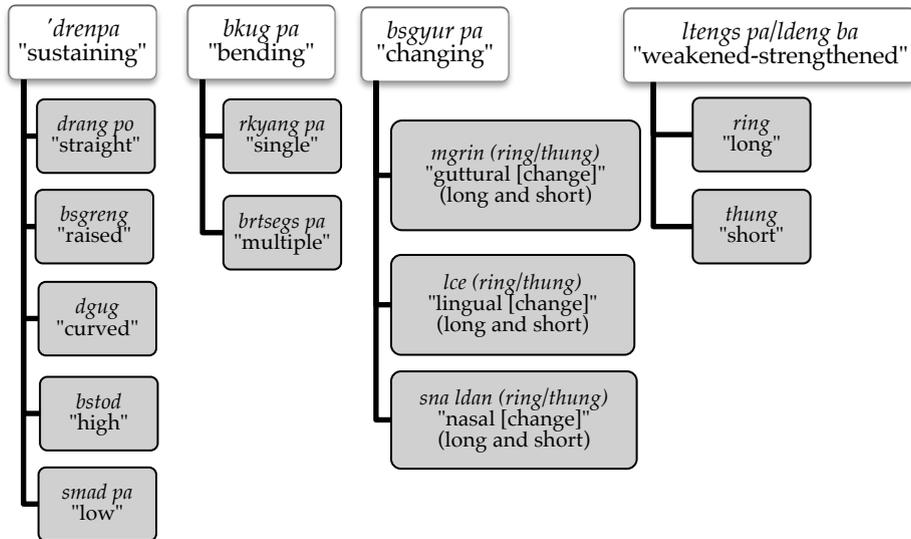


Fig. 1 – Different types of nga ro

As explained in the commentary by A mes zhabs, the first intonational contour (*'dren pa*) is divided into five types according to the vowel sung: the “straight” type is sung on the vowel “a”; “raised” on the vowel “e”; “curved” on the vowel “i”; “high” on the vowel “o”; and “low” on the vowel “u.”¹⁴ This system demonstrates a strong resemblance to the explanation of phonemes in other Tibetan treatises on phonology from the same time period. For example, Bsod nam rtse mo's *An Easy Introduction to Reading for Beginners* (*Yi ge'i bklag thabs byis pa bde blag tu 'jug pa*) uses a similar terminology for describing Sanskrit vowels:

It is said, that “a” is straight, “i” is curved,
 And “u” is low.
 [...]
 It is said, that “e” is a raised *nga ro*,
 “ai” is raised and curved,
 “o” is high.

¹⁴ A mes zhabs 1969: 36.

It is said, that “au” is high and low,
“am” has a nasalization.¹⁵

Thus, I conclude that Sa skya Paṇḍita, having borrowed some elements from phonetic analysis, brought this into the field of music theory and used these concepts for his research on vocal melody.¹⁶

The structure of melody is presented in the *Treatise on Music* as a line of consecutive *nga ro*. They are repeated or alternated in a particular order so that they construct a melodic “layer” of a song. As for the text that is sung, Sa skya Paṇḍita makes a distinction between words (*tshig*, or meaningful syllables) and intercalary syllables (*dbyangs*, or syllables without any meaning).¹⁷ The type of singing, in which the syllables of actual text are intermingled with the meaningless ones is now as widespread as it was several centuries ago and is used in the ritual practice of Sa skya monasteries. For example, in the chant manual (*dbyangs yig*)¹⁸ entitled “The Notation of the Chants to the Glorious Vajrakīla—The Sound of the Brahma Voice” (*Dpal rdo rje phur pa’i dbyangs yig tshangs pa’i dbyangs kyi nga ro*) one can find many verses with intercalary syllables, such as “yā,” “a’i,” or “yāyā,” as can be seen in the following example (see Fig. 2):

namma/ mkha’iyi/ mtha’wa/ dangnga’a/ mnyam/ mā/ ’a’i/ māma’a/ pa’i/
yā/ ’a’i/ yā/ ya’a’i/ yāyā/ dkyil/ li’iyi/ ’i’a/ līlī/ ’khor/ rā/ wāyā/ yāyā/ nas/
g.ya’ya’/ ’a’i/ yāyā/

zhiyi/ khrowo/ rabba/ ’byamsma/ lha’a/ yā/ ’a’i/ yāyā/ tshogs/ yā/ ’a’i/ yā/
ya’a’i/ yāyā/ byin/ ne’iyi/ ’enā/ nīnī/ rlabs// ba/ wāya/ yāyā/ can/ na’ayā/ ’a’i/
*yāyā/*¹⁹

¹⁵ *a ni drang po i bkug pa/ u ni smad pa zhes bya ste/ [..] e ni bsgreng pa’i nga ro ste/ ai bsgreng zhing bkug pa yin/ o ni bstod pa zhes bya ste/ au ni bstod de smad pa yin/ aṅ ni sna ldan zhes bya ste/* (Bsod nams rtse mo 2007: 506).

¹⁶ Ellingson 1979a: 387–389.

¹⁷ In other written sources, alternative terms for the meaningless syllables are used: *gyer lhad* (Bkra shis rgya mtsho 1996: 167), *tshig lhad* (Don dam 1969: 468).

¹⁸ Music notation in Sa skya school of Tibetan Buddhism consists of wavy lines placed above or below the words or syllables of the text. These lines are called “snake strokes” (*sbrul shad*), because the shape of these lines resemble moving snakes or serpents (Helffer 1994: 150–152; Egyed 2000: 106). There are six “snake strokes” in this type of notation—upper left, upper middle, upper right, lower left, lower middle, and lower right. The actual meaning of these lines is interpreted differently by the scholars. Helffer writes in her book *Mchod-rol: Les instruments de la musique tibétaine* that these lines correspond to the movements of the drumstick (1994: 149). Egyed argues in her MA thesis that these lines are “the main melodic components for Sa skya pa chant manuals” (2000: 108). The meaning of these six lines is also explained in the introductory part of the chant manual *The Notation of the Chants to the Glorious Vajrakīla—The Sound of the Brahma Voice* (*Dpal rdo rje phur pa’i dbyangs yig tshangs pa’i dbyangs kyi nga ro*), see Bsod nams dbang po 1977: 3.

¹⁹ Bsod nams dbang po 1977: 7–8.

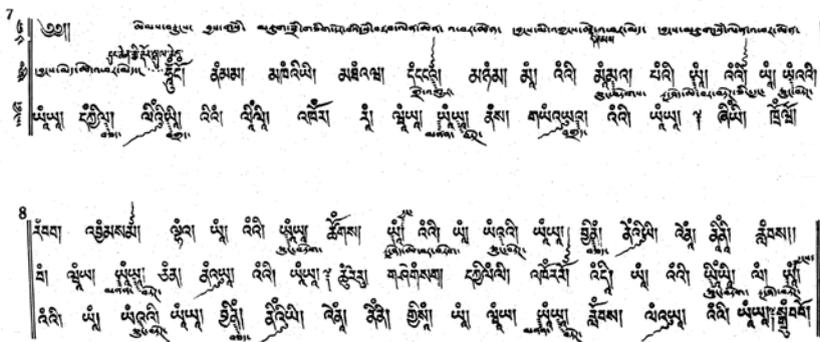


Fig. 2 — Pages seven and eight from the chant manual *The Notation of the Chants to the Glorious Vajrakīla—The Sound of the Brahma Voice*

I have marked the syllables of the main text with bold, leaving all intercalary ones unchanged. If written without intercalary syllables, these two lines would look as follows:

nam mkha'i mtha' dang mnyam pa'i dkyil 'khor nas//

zhi khro rab 'byams lha tshogs byin rlabs can//

The blessed group of the countless deities, both peaceful and wrathful,

[Which arose] from the mandala equal to the reaches of space...

Intercalary syllables, inserted into the text, are mainly the syllables *a*, *ya*, *wa*, and their modifications. They are put into correlation with the vowel and the last consonant of the previous syllable of the main text. Intercalary syllables make the actual text obscure and hidden, creating a distinctive type of singing.²⁰

According to the *Treatise on Music*, two types of syllables (i.e., the meaningful and the meaningless) are combined during the actual performance and are sung with the help of different *nga ros* (i.e., intonational contours). In chapter one, Sa skya Paṇḍita introduces a number of “conditions” (*rkyen*)²¹ that regulate the process of choosing a certain type of the intonational contour (see Table 1). These “conditions” for “intonational contours” are the vowels, sonorants,

²⁰ For more information about intercalary syllables, see Canzio 1978: 72–73, Ellingson 1979a: 417–419, Helffer 1998: 152, Egyed 2000: 116–126.

²¹ Canzio translates this term as “context for the occurrence” of a certain type of *nga ro* or “circumstances” (1978: 72), Ellingson translates it as “occasion” (1979a: 417).

and semivowels of the text sung (including both meaningful and meaningless syllables). “Conditions” act as indicators for a certain type of intonational contour and can be conceived as a connecting link between the text and the vocal melody.

<i>nga ro</i> “intonation contour”	<i>rkyen</i> “conditions”
<i>'dren pa</i> sustaining	<i>a a</i>
<i>bsgyur ba</i> changing	<i>la lo</i>
<i>bkug pa</i> bending	<i>ai (a yi)</i>
<i>ltengs pa</i> weakened-strengthened	<i>a a</i>

Table 1 — Types of *nga ro* and their respective “conditions”

The precise rules for the correlation of intonational contours with the phonetic shape of text were not explained in detail in the treatise. If these rules were strict, there would be a vocal melody dependent entirely on the phonetic structure of the text. For example, if we have two syllables with the vowel *a*, like *nam mkha'*, or with the vowel *i*, like intercalary syllables *li'i* given in the example above (Fig. 2), then we should apply the sustaining (*'dren pa*) intonational contour for these syllables. If there is combination of the suffix *pa* with a joined genitive marker *'i*, then one should use a bending (*bkug pa*) intonational contour to create a melody. In this way, the following pattern of the vocal melody structure for “*nam ma mkha'i yi*” (the first syllables of the first line in Fig. 2) can be drawn:

	<i>nam</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>mkha'i</i>		<i>yi</i>
Lexically significant aspect	<i>tshig</i> (meaningful)	<i>dbyangs</i> (meaningless)	<i>tshig</i> (meaningful)		<i>dbyangs</i> (meaningless)
<i>rkyen</i> "conditions"	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>nga ro</i> "timbre-acoustic aspect"	' <i>dren pa</i> (sustaining)	' <i>dren pa</i> (sustaining)	<i>bkug pa</i> (bending)		' <i>dren pa</i> (sustaining)

Fig. 3 – The correlations between different aspects of a song

In this pattern, the first line stands for the lexically significant aspect of a song—a sequence of the meaningful syllables of the text and intercalary meaningless syllables inserted between them. In order to give an illustrative example of this aspect of a song, I have written the first five syllables of the chant from the manual (Fig. 2): *nam ma mkha'i yi*. The first, third and fourth syllables are meaningful (*tshig*), while the second and the fifth are meaningless (*dbyangs*). The second line stands for the "conditions" that include the vowels of *tshig* and *dbyangs*: *a, a, a, i, i*. The third line is a timbre-acoustic aspect of the song. This aspect consists of the intonational contours, chosen according to the "conditions." Every pair of vowels in line two gives an intonational contour in line three. Therefore, the first two intonational contours in our case are the sustaining (*'dren pa*) ones (*a-a, a-a*), the third is the changing (*bkug pa nga ro a-i*), and the fourth is also sustaining (*i-i*).

According to the treatise, this aspect of a song corresponds with (and, perhaps, is constructed in accordance with) the vowel/sonorant/semivowel sequence of the second line. The sound of the vocal melody is thus represented as a clear reflection of the phonetic characteristics of the text line. If the phonetic shape is changed, the sound also changes. As Ellingson states in his thesis, "the theory of 'Four Occasions' may once have constituted a system of vowel-generated melody, with each new text vowel introducing a specific melodic development."²² This kind of strong dependence, described in the treatise, suggests the conclusion that the sound of vocal music with the entirety of its acoustic characteristics was perceived by Sa skya Paṇḍita as inseparable from the phonetic shape

²² Ellingson 1979a: 417.

of a text.

There is another interesting fact which provides additional specifics of Sa skya Paṇḍita's view on vocal music: he refuses to give a detailed description of classical Indian music in his treatise because the Tibetan language differs from Sanskrit in terms of phonetics (*sgra*).²³

In his commentary on this treatise, A mes zhabs explains Sa skya Paṇḍita's position on vocal music by referring to the place music occupied in the system of traditional Indo-Tibetan sciences (*rig pa'i gnas lnga*). According to the encyclopedia by Stag tshang lo tsā ba, the five traditional sciences include arts and crafts (*bzo rig pa*) medicine (*gso rig pa*), phonology (*sgra rig pa*), logic (*tshad ma*), and "inner" science (*nang rig pa*).²⁴

Arts and crafts are grouped into six categories according to the following criteria: 1) main (*gtso*) or ordinary (*phal pa*), depending on the area of application; 2) the arts of body (*lus*), speech (*ngag*) and mind (*yid*), depending on the "gate" (*sgo*) which is predominant in a particular art type. As a result, there are main and ordinary arts of body; main and ordinary arts of speech; main and ordinary arts of mind (see Fig. 4).

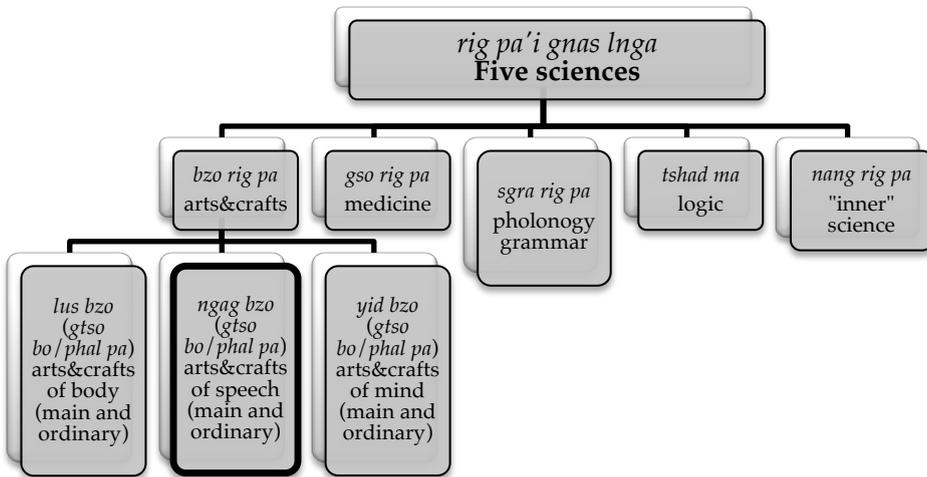


Fig. 4 — The system of traditional Tibetan sciences

In this system presented by Stag tshang lo tsā ba, vocal music is

²³ *drug las skyes sogs glu'i sbyor ba// rgyal bas gsungs pa du ma mthong // gal te khyod kyang glu'i sbyor ba// de nyid 'chad par rigs zhe na// skad dang gdangs kyi khyad par gyis// bod kyi sgra la 'jug pa dka'//* (Sa skya Paṇḍita 1969: 15).

²⁴ Stag tshang 2007.

included into the arts of speech (*ngag bzo*) and as such is considered connected with speech and language. The passage dedicated to the arts of speech in the encyclopedia of Stag tshang lo tsā ba is rather small and describes only the “main arts of speech”:

As for the arts of speech, the chants of praise [sung during] the offering to the Victorious One and other [chants] pertain to the main [arts of speech]. They should be performed in a state of faith, without insolence and inattention. The way of chanting²⁵ praises, veneration chants, and Tripartite Tridaṇḍaka is explained in detail in sutras and tantras. Therefore, in order to remain steadfast on the medicine, examination, and manner of the method in which a loud and pleasant voice resounds, as well as avoiding the opposite, after acquiring mastery in the [performance of melodies], which have six [qualities]—changes, bends, raises, interruptions, broad and subtle [sounds]—and [mastery in the performance] of many other manifestations of the melody, it is necessary in accordance with the oral tradition of knowledgeable [lamas] to study properly the chants of the Sutra tradition that were previously renowned in Tibet, yoga chants—which were distributed by great and lesser translators—praises and exhortations for the peaceful and wrathful protectors of the Dharma, and other [chants].²⁶

This type of classification has influenced the way in which music was represented and described in Tibetan encyclopedias and other theoretical texts. For example, in the *Treasury of Explanations—A Wish-Fulfilling Jewel* (*Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*) written by Don dam smra ba'i seng ge, the art of reciting sacred scriptures with the help of melody (*dbyangs*) is included in chapter eleven entitled “Treatise on Grammar and Phonology.”²⁷ The same tendency is apparent in the works of Klong rdol bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang (1729–1794) and 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899). Some modern Tibetan authors are also predisposed to use this classification in their works.²⁸

The tendency of Tibetan scholars to perceive vocal music as being connected to speech and language finds a vivid manifestation in vocal

²⁵ *dbyangs kyi nga ro bya ba.*

²⁶ *ngag bzo ni/ rgyal ba mchod pa'i bstod dbyangs sogs ni gtso bo ste/ rgod bag med par dad pas bya dgos par/ bstod phyag dang rgyun chags gsum kyi dbyangs kyi nga ro bya bar mdo lung dang rgyud sder rgyas par gsungs so/| des na skad gdangs che zhing snyan pa 'byung ba'i thabs kyi sman dang dpyad dang spyod lam bsten cing zlog phyogs spang la/ 'gyur dang khugs dang 'degs dang 'jog sbom dang phra ba ste sgrug ldan la sogs pa'i gdangs kyi rnam 'gyur du ma la byang bar byas nas bod snga ma la grags pa'i mdo lugs kyi dbyangs dang / lo chen lo chung gis spel ba'i yo ga'i dbyangs dang / chos skyong zhi drag gi bstod bskul la sogs pa yang mkhas pa'i ngag rgyun las legs par bslab dgos la/ (Stag tshang 2007: 42–43).*

²⁷ Don dam 1969: 491–506.

²⁸ 'Jam dpal skal ldan 2005: 6–7.

music terminology. This subject was discussed in detail by M. Helffer in her article entitled "Du son au chant vocalisé: La terminologie tibétaine à travers les âges (VIIe au XXe siècle) [From Sound to Vocal Chant: Tibetan Terminology through the Ages (7th–20th Centuries)]."²⁹ I would like to provide here just a few examples of terminological homonyms which indicate related but not identical phenomena in phonetics and vocal music and which occur in the analyzed texts:

- 1) The term *dbyangs* in the Tibetan grammatical tradition means "vowel," while in music it stands for a special type of ritual song which is based on the minute variations of tone, timbre, articulation and loudness and is characterized by its slow tempo and prolonged vowels. The term *dbyangs* can also stand for intercalary syllables that are inserted into the main text of a chant.
- 2) *Nga ro* generally denotes "a sound/roar." In phonetics (*sgra rig pa*), it stands for a sound of speech, while in vocal music theory, it can be used to indicate a way of singing, a type of sound production, that can be defined as timbre-articulation unit of melody. It has distinct acoustic characteristics that include a phoneme sung, resonance cavity used, the corresponding way of articulation, as well as loudness, tessitura, melody movement, etc.
- 3) In the Tibetan grammatical tradition, phonemes are sometimes divided into masculine (*pho*), feminine (*mo*) and neutral (*ma ning*).³⁰ In vocal theory, though, these terms stand for three registers (*sgra*) of the human voice with respective differences in timbre and sound quality.

Research in Tibetan music generally agrees that the predisposition of Tibetan scholars to consider music as being connected to speech is based on the Indian tradition. As Ellingson states in his thesis:

[M]usical theory derived from articulatory phonetic concepts originating in India and developed further in Tibet; and melodic theory is based on a systematic analysis of vowel articulation and vocal intonation.³¹

Therefore, it can be assumed that the correlations drawn by Tibetan authors between vocal music and phonology were deeply rooted in the Indian scholastic tradition and were brought to Tibet with the adoption of Buddhism.

²⁹ Helffer 1998.

³⁰ Lung du ston pa rtags kyi 'jug pa 2004: 402.

³¹ Ellingson 1979a: 391.

2. *The Tiger's Roar: Deriving Inspiration from Nature and Myths*

In any society, music in the early stages of its development was not based on the notion of discreet pitches. It was rather conceived as timbre variations, different from ordinary oral communication.³² People imitated the sounds of nature—animal noises, voices of birds, or the whistle of the wind. Nature was their first music teacher and gave people their inspiration to create music.

In Tibet, this earliest stage of music development left a rich heritage of expressions, phrases and terminology preserved in written sources until today. The earliest views on music are reflected in the texts of the Bon tradition and the Rnying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism.³³ Although the Gsar ma schools differ from the Rnying ma, one can still find some traces of ancient heritage in the works of the Gsar ma scholars.

To give some examples, I will return to the discussion of the *Treatise on Music* by Sa skya Paṇḍita. In Chapter 3 of the treatise, the author lists examples (*dpe*) of the application of melody (*dbyangs*):

[Singing] in the middle of the gathering [can be called] the roaring of the lion.

[Singing] in a secluded place [is like] the humming of the bee.

[Singing] in front of the experts [is like] the song of the parrot.

[Singing] among the ignorant [can be called] the charming beauty of the peacock.³⁴

In this excerpt, to illustrate the way in which a song should be performed depending on the situation, Sa skya Paṇḍita provides several epithets for different songs. Although they are not explicit, these examples show the notion of animal voices used as patterns for the vocal sound production.

In the commentary on the treatise, one can also find the usage of animal noises in describing the sounds of the human voice and the composition of vocal melody. In Chapter 3, there is a number of similes used by A mes zhabs to characterize the voices of people from different regions of Tibet:

The voice tone of the people from Dbus is mostly thundering and

³² Sisauri 2008: 29.

³³ Ellingson 1979a: 97–108. On the basis of the written sources of Bon tradition, Ellingson gives a list of animal voices used by Bon musicians as models for voice production: tiger, dog, horse, *khyung* (the “King of birds”), parrot, lion, lark, dragon, and cuckoo.

³⁴ *shogs su seng ge'i nga ro stel// dben par bung ba rol pa'i tshul// mkhas pa'i mdun sar ne tso'i dbyangs// rma bya'i 'jo sgeg rmongs nang du//* (Sa skya Paṇḍita 1969: 13).

fluctuating, and [thus] is similar to the voices of geese and bees; the voices of the people from Gtsang are mostly clear and brilliant, and [thus they] are similar to the voices of the domestic fowl or horse; similarly, since the [voices] of the people from Stod mnga' ris are squeezed and jerky, and those of the people from Khams are thick and inflexible, they all are bright and coarse, and [thus] are similar to the voice of a donkey.³⁵

In the end of Chapter 3, A mes zhabs recounts a story that explains the origins of some ritual chants (*dbyang*s) composed by Rin chen bzang po (958–1055) and is well-known in the Sa skya school of Tibetan Buddhism. This story was masterly translated by Ellingson, Canzio, and Egyed.³⁶ A mes zhabs cites the biography of the translator, where it is stated that Rin chen bzang po used the tiger's roar, the swaying of three branches as the wind whistled through them, and the movements of the waves of a river as the basis for composing chants (*dbyang*s). Thus, one could see that not only animal sounds served as models for describing the characteristics of vocal music, but also the sounds and visual patterns of surrounding natural phenomena.

I will now proceed with the analysis of the next Tibetan scholarly work on music, the *Explanation of the [Ritual] Items, Garments, Ornaments and Music—the Wealth of the Ocean of Vajrayana Vidyadharas of Early Translations—the Ornamenting Flower of a Mantradhara*. The author of this work was a follower of the Rnying ma Smin grol ling tradition.³⁷ In the section dedicated to ritual chant (*dbyang*s *kyi sa bcad*), he explains three kinds of chant: (1) those of the preliminary part of a ritual (*sngon 'gro*), (2) those of the main part (*dngos gzhi'i dbyang*s), and (3) those of the final part (*rjes kyi dbyang*s). Describing different styles of performing the chants of the main part of a ritual, Bkra shis rgya mtsho gives the following examples (*dpe*):

When performing the three kinds of *samādhi*, your voice should be like the King of birds who is overcoming mountain ridges; when singing gradually layered elements, you should pile them up like constructing a wall of a stronghold; in the “inestimable mansion” your voice should sound like two oceans—mother and son—mingling together. [...] While worshipping the deity, your voice should resemble that of a wolf fallen in a snare; when performing a chant of offering, you should sing by the voice of a small bird during outer offerings, and by the sound of

³⁵ *dbus pa rnams skad gdangs ldir zhing 'gyur ba ngang pa dang bung ba'i skad 'dra ba shas che la/ gtsang pa rnams kyi skad gdangs gsal zhing mtsher ba khyim bya'am rta skad 'dra ba shas che ba yin zhing / de bzhin du btsir zhing 'dur ba stod mnga' ris pa'i dang / khams pa rnams kyi sbom cing mi khugs pas brjid cing gyong ba bong bu'i skad 'dra ba 'byung la/ (A mes zhabs 1969: 66).*

³⁶ Canzio 1978: 141–145; Ellingson 1979a: 239–241; Egyed 2000: 60–63.

³⁷ Bkra shis rgya mtsho 1996: 170.

a bee during inner offerings. [...] When making an offering of *amṛta* medicine, your voice should be like the waves of the ocean; when singing the chant of *rakta*³⁸ it should be like an ocean storm; when making *gtor ma* offering, you should perform “mother [*dbyangs*]” in the manner of a lion posing with a majestic air, and “son [*dbyangs*]” like a roar of a tigress; the peaceful chant of praise [should be sung] in the voice of cuckoo; the wrathful chant of praise [should be sung] in the voice of the raven that saw the food; the chant of praise to lamas is like a big flag swaying in the wind; the chant of praise to the *yi dam* is like beating the “law drum” of the king.³⁹

As one can see from this quote, the author gives various examples of the mode of voice production, explaining how one should sing different chants (*dbyangs*) according to the part of the ritual in which they appear. In this text, not only animal noises and visual characteristics of natural phenomena serve as patterns for singing, but also the sounds of musical instruments. The section about three types of chants is rather extensive and other examples are mentioned as well, including the turquoise dragon, fox, jackal, black bear, and wild yak. There is also a number of references to some real-life situations and mythical creatures.

Similar statements concerning the *glu* songs can be found in the encyclopedia of Don dam smra ba'i seng ge:

There are six modes of singing:

A song of the Great Garuda,

Which is sung before the eyes of the king, the owner of land;

A song of the great lion standing on snow,

Which is sung in the place where men, boys and elders are gathered;

A song of the lake Manosarowar with its waters swirling,

Which is sung among rejoicing mothers and aunts;

A song of pouring into *tagunaḍ*,⁴⁰

Which is sung in the place where father's debts are arranged in lines
[like] ribs;

A song of a goose going around the lake,

³⁸ Skt. *rakta* “blood.” It is unclear, what is the meaning of the “*rakta* chant” (*rakta'i dbyangs*) in this passage.

³⁹ *ting 'dzin rnam gsum la bya rgyal ri rtsibs gcod pa lta bu/ 'byung ba rim brtsigs la gyad mkhar brtsigs pa lta bu/ gzhäl yas khang la rgya mtsho ma bu 'dres pa lta bu/ [...] phyang 'tshal la spyang gal gyis zin pa lta bu/ mchod pa'i dbyangs la'ang phyi mchod co ka'i 'gyur skad lta bu/ nang mchod bung ba'i tshang skad lta bu/ [...] bdud rtsi sman mchod rgya mtsho'i rba rlabs lta bu/ rakta'i dbyangs rgya mtsho dkrug pa lta bu/ gtor ma'i mchod pa la ma seng ges 'gying ba la/ bu stag mon gar ba lta bu/ zhi ba'i bstod dbyangs khu byug gi skad lta bu/ khro bo bstod bstod dbyangs pho rog gzan mthong ba'i skad lta bu/ bla ma'i bstod bstod dbyangs dar po che rlung gis bskyod pa lta bu/ yi dam bstod dbyangs rgyal po'i khrims rnga brdung ba lta bu/ (Bkra shis rgya mtsho 1996: 163).*

⁴⁰ The meaning of the word *tagunaḍ* is not clear.

Which is sung among young men and women;
 A song of a fox searching for food in the midnight,
 Which is sung between mothers, aunts and daughters-in-law.⁴¹

In Chapter 10, the author gives a list of the four animal voices used to create a melody:

In the chants of spiritual activities, four models of animal voices [are needed]: the overpowering [voice] of the lion, the roar of the tiger, the catching cry of the hawk, and the grunting of the hog.⁴²

In the *Don dam smra ba'i seng ge's* encyclopedia, as well as in the treatise by *Bkra shis rgya mtsho*, the sounds of voice are always compared with different sounds of surrounding natural phenomena (e.g., wind, thunder, waterfall, etc.), with various animal voices (e.g., tiger, birds, wolf, fox, pig, etc.), and musical-instrument sounds (e.g., flute, drum, trumpet, etc.). In most cases, prescriptions concerning the performance of special vocal genres use examples of sounds or situations that the reader can easily recall in his mind.

Such examples can also be found in earlier texts describing Bon priests' worshipping practices in the Tibetan Empire (7th–9th centuries) and the texts praising *Padmasambhava's* vocal skills.⁴³ The tradition of comparing sounds of music with different natural sounds, imagined situations, or voices of mythical creatures is rooted in ancient Tibetan history. After the dissemination of Buddhism, this tradition gradually changed and lost its predominant position in the theoretic thought.

3. Conclusion

As one can see from the written Tibetan sources, there were two main ways of perceiving music sounds in Tibet. While the first one is connected to the sounds of speech, the second one is similar to the sounds of the surrounding world or mythical phenomena. The first way was influenced by the predominant role of Sanskrit grammar and phonology studies in the traditional Tibetan curriculum during the

⁴¹ *glu la blangs pa'i thabs drug yod/ khyung chen nam mkha' lding pa'i glu/ sa bdag rgyal po'i spyan mngar blangs/ seng chen gangs la 'ging pa'i glu/ pha bu rgan rim tshogs sar blang / mtsho mo ma phang khyil ba'i glu/ ma srung skyid pa'i seb tu blang / ta gu nad la phyo ba'i glu/ pha bun rtsib ma gshig sar blang / ngar bur mtsho mtha' bskor ba'i glu/ pho gzhon mo gzhon tshogs sar blangs/ mtshan gung wa mo zas tshon glu/ ma sru rna ma'i seb du blangs/ (Don dam 1969: 525–526).*

⁴² *'phrin las dbyangs la dud 'gro'i skad kyi dpe bzhi ni/ seng ge'i zil non dgos/ stag gi nga ro dgos/ khra'i gzung skad dgos/ phag pa'i ngur sgra/ (Don dam 1969: 484).*

⁴³ For more information see Ellingson 1979a: 101–103; Egyed 2000: 49–55.

“later [stage of] dissemination” (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism in Tibet. The second way seems to be rooted in the ancient pre-Buddhist tradition dating back to the period of the Tibetan Empire.⁴⁴ As some researchers point out, the religious Tibetan chant as a distinctive style of singing was created on the basis of previous Bon practices and Indian Buddhist vocal genres borrowed during the dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet.⁴⁵ Therefore, the perception of music, the “ideal sound,” vocal techniques and their theoretical explanation of these two ways were also intermingled. Further study of written sources is required to determine the exact relationship between these two ways of interpreting and perceiving vocal music in Tibet.

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⁴⁴ Jackson 1987: 165 and Gold 2007: 14–16.

⁴⁵ Ellingson 1979a: 219–220 and Egyed 2000: 68–80.

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Tantric Constraints in the Tibetan Medical Tradition: Theocratic Dynamics in Medical Practice

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he practice of medicine saves lives. Nonetheless, if a medical practice is poorly performed, lives will be in jeopardy. In the Tibetan medical tradition, certain deterrents are established within the tradition so that to prevent non-professional practice which leads to devastating results for patients and to ensure that medical knowledge is transmitted properly. Since the institutionalization of Tibetan medicine in the 17th century, the practice of medicine has been considered part of the tantric Buddhist practice. Retribution, in the spiritual sense, results from unauthorized malpractice in the context of tantric practice. On the one hand, this ensures that medicine is exercised in a proper way with high standards and safety measures, since the tantric means are involved. On the other hand, it means that medicine is kept as an elite knowledge restricted to tantric adepts. This paper examines the constraints embedded within the medical texts written at the time of the 5th Dalai Lama. These constraints, which are typical of those associated with tantric teachings, represented a vital component in the ability of the authorities of the Lcags po ri Medical School to control the medical practice under the 5th Dalai Lama's theocratic regime.

1. Tantric Coloring of Medical Practice Imposed by the Dga' ldan pho brang

The 5th Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682), effectively established both political and spiritual power over Tibet during his reign. Benefitting sentient beings in both spiritual and material senses was the primary agenda of his government, the Dga' ldan pho brang. The control over the practice of medicine soon became one of his foremost preoccupations. The renowned institution of medicine and astrology known as the “Iron Mountain Monastic Institution for the Benefit of Sentient Beings” (Lcags po ri rig byed 'gro phan gling), named after the Iron Mountain (Lcags po ri), situated near

the Potala Palace in Lhasa,¹ was established to promote this agenda. With such an institutional arrangement in place, the Tibetan medical tradition came to be systematized and institutionalized,² and the Lcags po ri School endured as the authority for medical education from the late 17th century until the 1950s.³ Within the scholastic circle of the Lcags po ri, not only new therapeutics but also the morality of medical practice were promulgated. A set of ideals was revived and improved for medical practitioners to be followed strictly. These ideals were based heavily on tantric Buddhist practice, as the 5th Dalai Lama based his sovereignty on a tantric Buddhist worldview.⁴

In earlier sources, from the *King of the Moon* (*Sman dpyad zla ba'i rgyal po*), the earliest known treatise on Tibetan medicine, to the *Four Tantras* (*Rgyud bzhi*), the discussions of medical morality, as well as tantric frameworks, were kept to a minimum or otherwise not noted at all. Nonetheless, at the time of the 5th Dalai Lama, an emphasis on medical professionalism imputed to medical works became a notable feature of the medical classics that were revised, and the corresponding commentaries were composed during that period: e.g., an excellent physician is not only competent because of the skillful prescription of drugs but also because of his morality and spirituality. This ideal can be observed in important Tibetan medical works that remain influential today: the *Blue Beryl* (*Baiḍūrya sngon po*), the *Extended Commentary* (*Man ngag lhan thabs*), and the *Mirror of Beryl* (*Baiḍūrya me long*) written by Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705), the regent of the 5th Dalai Lama, who raised Tibetan medicine, and specifically Lcags po ri medicine, to new standards of scholarly, spiritual, and even tantric characteristics.

The *Blue Beryl* is one of the most renowned works in the Tibetan medical tradition and has maintained its authority up to the present day. The *Blue Beryl* is a commentary on the legendary Tibetan foundation text the *Four Tantras*, the authorship of which is ascribed to G.yu thog yon tan dgon po the Younger (1126–1202).⁵ Particular discussions regarding the physician's morality and spirituality are present in this commentary. Chapter 27 of the *Subsequent Tantra to the Four Tantras* in the *Blue Beryl*, entitled "Entrustment of the Tantras" (*Rgyud yongs su gtad pa*),⁶ discusses the significance of a legitimate

¹ Gyatso 2015: 115.

² Schaeffer 2003: 622.

³ Meyer 2003: 117.

⁴ Gyatso 2015: 4.

⁵ G.yu thog the Younger was a great medical practitioner and a spiritual master. The *Four Tantras* represents a compilation of the exoteric medical knowledge aspect of the tradition of his ancestor G.yu thog the Elder (708–833).

⁶ Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 2005a: 1816–1833.

medical lineage and the appropriate virtues of a physician. This chapter notes metaphorically that knowledge of the *Four Tantras* is like the pure nectar from the ocean depths. This nectar should be kept in a proper and sacred vessel, *viz.* a brilliant practitioner, instead of a defiled container, which is an inept practitioner. Further, it explains:

Since giving these teachings to an unworthy recipient is like keeping lion's milk in a container of poor quality which would crack and spill its contents, the teaching should not be given to those who keep secret the identity of their master and instead promote their own greatness, or to those who steal the medical instructions or speak deviously by whatever means. Nor, indeed, should it be given to those who lack gratitude and extort wealth, or to those who are bound by pride and arrogance, devoid of compassion, clinging with attachment to this life, and employing soft words and seductive techniques. The teaching should be withheld from such persons, just as a gemstone is held fast in the throat of a sea-monster.⁷

Here, the *Blue Beryl* clearly states that both lineage and the quality of the physician are far more important than simply the skill of prescribing treatments, as a non-virtuous person can ruin the entire medical tradition. Similar opinions were voiced in the introduction to the *Extended Commentary* by Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho.⁸

One element that distinguishes these commentaries from earlier medical texts is the notion of the embodiment of the bodhisattva ideal in physicians. It is believed that through compassion, a bodhisattva can benefit all sentient beings. Healing is seen as a mutual relationship between the medical practitioner and the patient: while the patient is healed, the practitioner gains spiritual attainment by serving the sick. Medicine itself is considered a form of Buddhist practice inspired by the Mahāyāna idea of compassion, and the medical practitioner is to be considered an emanation of the Medicine Buddha. Thus, the healer-patient relationship plays a crucial role in constructing, modulating, and fortifying a healing system based on the Buddhist concepts which suggest that the healer holds the divine healing power of the Medicine Buddha. In this way, the 5th Dalai Lama's interest in benefiting sentient beings both physically and spiritually can be accomplished.

In order to consolidate the Buddhist ideals via medical practice, the scholastic works—the commentaries on the *Four Tantras* especially—

⁷ The translation is taken from Parfionovitch *et al.* 1992: 169. These discussions were also written down on the medical paintings promoted by Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, an important pedagogical tool in Tibetan medical education used until nowadays.

⁸ The *Extended Commentary* (Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 2005b) is a supplement to the *Instructional Tantra to the Four Tantras*, where magico-religious therapeutics are recorded.

condemn “inferior” practitioners and promote the Lcags po ri ideals, which are aligned with the 5th Dalai lama’s vision. In the introduction to the *Extended Commentary*, it was highlighted that the work of G.yu thog yon tan dgon po,⁹ that is his knowledge contained in the *Four Tantras*,

is precious like saffron, [while] the commentaries written by foolish practitioners are like tainting his works with black ink. They are also like meat contaminated by a dog’s bite. These are the works of short-lived and foolish practitioners.¹⁰

Here, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho insinuates that there may be many other commentaries on the *Four Tantras*, but this *Extended Commentary* is to be considered the most orthodox one. Furthermore, regarding the lineage, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho expresses specific preferences in his *Blue Beryl*:

The unsurpassed superior practitioners are Byang rnam rgyal grags bzang, Zur mnyam nyid rdo rje, Gong sman dkon cog phan dar, and Mtsho smad mkhan chen. Like the Sage Agastya, they were the greatest scholars who transformed medical knowledge into life-saving nectar, clarified confusing theory, and composed an easily portable medical compendium.¹¹

In his *Mirror of Beryl*, in conjunction with a comprehensive account of the history of Tibetan medicine, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho further explained what was meant by “spiritually competent”, thus setting out the standard approach to learning and practicing medicine. Kurtis Schaeffer noted¹² that both the *Blue Beryl* and the *Mirror of Beryl* stressed the importance of medical scholarship and the Mahāyāna ideal of being a virtuous medical practitioner. In these two major medical works, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho enforced medical professionalism upon Tibetan medical practitioners and prescribed for every competent practitioner to uphold moral and behavioral values. These values are tied to tantric practice, or even regarded as the tantric practice itself.

⁹ In his writing, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho did not distinguish between G.yu thog the Elder and the Younger.

¹⁰ *smad pa'i cha dang bsdus pa'i gzugs can bsres pa yon tan mgon po'i dgongs don kung ku ma// blun pos snag tsha bsres pa'i nyams bcos kyi// lag len yig cha nor srung bsad pa'i sha// tshe zad blun rgan tshogs kyi spyod yul yin//* (Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 2005a: 3).

¹¹ *mi mnyam pa'i gzugs can byang rnam rgyal grags bzang zur mnyam nyid rdo rje gong sman dkon cog phan dar mtsho smad mkhan chen sogs// sngon byon mkhas pa drang srong a gastyas// tshe rig bdud rtsir bsgyur kyang rtogs dka' ba'i// rnyogs rnam bgrungs pa'i go sla 'khyer bde 'di//* (Ibid).

¹² Schaeffer 2003.

2. *Tantric Commitments as Part of the Oath of Medical Practitioners*

During the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama, the tantric notion of the human body was enlarged and integrated into the practice of healing. The tantric practice has therefore been incorporated into physical medicinal practices, while medical practice was not only made to fit into Buddhist teachings but also specifically into tantric teachings. In order to justify this scheme, it is noted that the 5th Dalai Lama categorized the *Four Tantras* as a tantric text (*rgyud*).¹³ From the healing power of the Medicine Buddha up to the karmic causes of illness, tantric Buddhist elements play an important role not only in the Tibetan concept of health but also for the power and authority involved in healing. Tantric Buddhism and medicine interplay synergistically, reinforcing each other and consolidating the 5th Dalai Lama's campaign. As noted by Janet Gyatso:

Buddhist ideology and tantric truths were as basic to the medical writers' worldviews, as was their interest in saving patients from death. We can even note cases where the dynamic went in the other direction, whereby something like tantric thinking could also serve to legitimize the medical. As one example, tantric theorizations of subtle matter sometimes helped medical theory to talk about imperceptible functions in the body.¹⁴

The tantric worldview reached its heyday during the time of the 5th Dalai Lama. To further mix medicine with tantric practice, many concepts in the medical tradition were drawn from tantric texts such as the *Profound Inner Principles* (*Zab mo nang don*) by the 3rd Karmapa Rang 'byung rdo rje (1284–1339),¹⁵ which is the standard text describing sophisticated tantric mechanisms. Thus, medical practice during this period was portrayed as a form of tantric Buddhist practice interwoven with magico-religious elements. As a result, diagnosis and healing also involved tantric methods, to such an extent that the tantric method became an indispensable element in the medical tradition. This included the transmission within lineage, initiation, vows and pledges, secrecy, dharma protectors, and tantric punishment if commitments were broken by medical practitioners. This has also much shaped the practice of Tibetan medicine to this day, since the new authority on Tibetan medicine, the Sman rtsis khang, also known as the Tibetan College of Medicine and Astrology, traces its lineage

¹³ Van Vleet 2016: 269. It is noted that the *Four Tantras* were not regarded as a tantric text before the 5th Dalai Lama. The *Four Tantras* itself do not mention any tantric practice.

¹⁴ Gyatso 2015: 379.

¹⁵ Ibid: 214–215.

directly to Lcags po ri medical practice, and it, in turn, shapes modern understandings of Tibetan medicine.

As noted by Pierce Salguero, the whole Tibetan medical tradition is a healing system both religious and magical in nature; healing deities are actually involved in healing through supernatural powers.¹⁶ These supernatural powers can be traced back to the Lcags po ri College lineage. One example of this approach is the teaching that medicinal substances do not reach their full potency unless they are properly empowered, which was mentioned in the *Heart Essence of Yuthok (G.yu thog snying thig)*, by G.yu thog yon tan dgon po the Younger, who, as it was mentioned, edited the present version of the *Four Tantras*. His *Heart Essence of Yuthok* contains the esoteric and tantric aspects of the practice of medicine, providing information on what is absent in the *Four Tantras*. This text was highly valued and was integrated into the Lcags po ri curriculum from the time of the 5th Dalai Lama onwards. This empowerment of medicine of tantric nature can be traced to the Rnying ma tradition via tantric practice of the *Eight Means of Accomplishment (Bdud rtsi sman grub)*.¹⁷ Regarding its role in medical practice, as opined by Sienna Craig, this “empowering” ritual is:

[a]n extremely powerful type of Buddhist practice aiming at, by turns, empowering medicines and medicinal ingredients, accomplishing yogic and contemplative exercises, bestowing a multitude of benefits on ritual practitioners, and imparting blessings on laypeople.¹⁸

Also, as noted by Francis Garrett, through this tantric ritual, not only did the medicine achieve full potency but also the whole healing process was involved:

[T]he transmutation of the practitioner is alchemical on various levels: the coarse material objects of ritual practice are transformed into purified elixirs (and so the medicinal pills are “empowered”), and also the coarse physical body of the ritual practitioner is similarly purified, and his or her coarse technical abilities are also transformed into supernormal powers. In this “medicine sādhana (*sman sgrub*)”, the doctor practitioner accomplishes all of these aims, him- or herself becoming medicine itself, capable of transmitting the Medicine Buddha’s healing power directly into patients’ bodies.¹⁹

Thus, even in modern times, the healing process is a tantric one, involving the invocation of the Medicine Buddha that plays the main

¹⁶ Salguero 2014: 87.

¹⁷ Garrett 2009: 214–215.

¹⁸ Craig 2011: 217.

¹⁹ Garrett 2009: 224.

role in the healing process. Together with the “alchemical” process working on “material” medicine, the tantric and ritual components play an important part in the process of healing. According to a modern Tibetan medicine practitioner Yeshe Dönden, “medicine” employs three levels of potency: the physical medical ingredients, the power of mantra, and the power of meditative stabilization. In order to achieve full potency, physical medicines are usually empowered by rituals involving recitation of mantras and meditation is performed by physicians or lamas.²⁰ In other words, only medicine blessed in a “legitimate” ritual will carry its full potency. Thus, competent practitioners of medicine were not only experts at drug prescription but were also tantric adepts.

In this worldview, with tantric Buddhism in mind, a strict practice has been followed by medical practitioners. This knowledge should be reserved and guarded against unwholesome practitioners for the benefit of sentient beings. In order to convey the most accurate medical knowledge, which is regarded as tantric, proprietary medical teachings have to be carried out privately and secretly in the tantric fashion.²¹ Important commitments taken at moments of initiation and empowerment, such as vows and pledges, are part of the *samaya* (*dam tshig*), or the obligation formed between the teachers and their disciples, which have to be followed strictly when practicing medicine, as the tantric practice is a vital part of healing. Violation of the commitments or breaking the *samaya*, will result in tantric retribution.

3. The Tantric Punishment

So, if medical knowledge exists for the sake of all sentient beings, why would it not be transmitted openly but only restricted to competent practitioners of the same lineage, as discussed above?

First, medical practice conducted as a tantric practice could be damaging or harmful to both the healer and the patient if performed by incompetent hands. Secondly, it is done to prevent medical knowledge from being contaminated: unqualified teachers may cause the misinterpretation of tantric teachings, leading to deviations in the knowledge. Without precise transmission of this precious knowledge, a cumulative error can arise as a result of the unreliability of human recollection. Thirdly, introducing a note of modern skepticism, it was done to subsume medicine into the 5th Dalai Lama’s theocratic regime, and punishment can be seen as one of the tactics of intimidation of

²⁰ Dönden and Hopkins 1986: 215.

²¹ Secrecy in the form of “Secret medicine” (*gsang sman*) has been discussed in Chui 2019a.

individuals outside the lineage. Punishment also has to be applied to deter non-virtuous outsiders from practicing and transmitting this knowledge with flawed intentions.²²

Retribution is often noted in the 17th-century medical works, but it seldom appears in the earlier texts such as the *King of the Moon Treatise* or the *Four Tantras*. Again, in Chapter 27 of the *Subsequent Tantra to the Four Tantras* in the *Blue Beryl*, it is mentioned that knowledge should not be transmitted to non-virtuous individuals:

This medical science should not be given in exchange to those who engage in ritual murder, who invoke the protectors who bring hailstones, who practice exorcism, who compound poisons, who teach the doctrines of political enemies such as the Drukpa, and who are female prophets and so forth, practicing the Bon doctrines of Shenrap. Similarly, it should not be given to those who solely perform alchemical transmutation into gold, who engage in mundane disputations, and who engage in conventional sophistry.²³

Otherwise:

By propagating these medical teachings among such unworthy recipients, the commitments will themselves degenerate, so that they and others who follow them will fall into evil existences in their subsequent lives.²⁴

In contrast, if the medical knowledge is transmitted and practiced by a competent physician, and the person will,

in due course, become powerful in speech and accumulate wealth and property. They will be respected by living beings, obtaining glory and high reputation. Eventually, they will be surrounded by gods and goddesses holding parasols and silken banners, and their own physical bodies will dissolve into the light body, whereby in a subsequent life, they will accomplish the level of enlightenment and attain Buddhahood in the buddha field of Bhaiṣajyaguru.²⁵

From the above examples, we can see that punishment and reward are

²² A point to note in this paper is that I am not going to discuss the physical penalty such as that mentioned by Van Vleet (2016: 217), for example, students should "speak openly and purely, without wandering or idle chatter, which is distracting. If this happens, one hundred prostrations should be imposed." I am discussing here a wider retribution, mostly in the form of unfavorable karmic consequences, which will make sense only for a Buddhist for whom specific Buddhist acculturation has taken place.

²³ Translation taken from Parfionovitch *et al.* 1992: 169.

²⁴ Parfionovitch *et al.* 1992: 169.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

framed more in a spiritual sense deeply rooted in the Tibetan culture under Buddhist tantric influence, especially regarding the accomplishment of the light body, which is a desideratum of tantric adepts.

Further severe forms of retribution can be found elsewhere in texts related to Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's "secret medicine" (*gsang sman*). The so-called "secret" medicine can be found across the writings of the Tibetan medical tradition, especially in Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's *Extended Commentary*, and it has flourished in medical works composed since the time of the 5th Dalai Lama. Often, encoded terms were used to represent special tantric medicinal substances, which should be taught secretly within the lineage. This marked an important era when tantric substances were key components of medical formulae, an interface where tantric practice interacts with ordinary medical substances. These substances are also the exclusive possession of authorized dispensers within the same medical lineage.

Solutions to these secrets are recorded by practitioners related to Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. According to Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's student Ngag dbang sangs rgyas dpal bzang,²⁶ in his *Single Lineage of Secret Medicine*,²⁷ the knowledge of secret medicine is considered a precious skill. In the introduction to his text, Ngag dbang sangs rgyas dpal bzang emphasizes the importance of receiving direct oral transmission of the esoteric aspects of the medical tradition, from a teacher to whom the student pays due homage. Without this, access to these esoteric elements cannot be granted. In accordance with the ideals in the *Blue Beryl*, he also warns that since these secret medicines are pivotal in the treatment, practitioners should receive the authentic teachings and blessings from their teacher before prescribing them.

The practice of the transmission of secret medicine within the *Extended Commentary* is linked to tantric practice and reserved for elite practitioners. In his *Single Lineage of Secret Medicine*, Ngag dbang sangs rgyas dpal bzang emphasizes that this secret knowledge should be held within the lineage. The following excerpt presents his position regarding secret medicine and tantric consequences of infringement:

Homage to the *ḍākinī* Dpal Idan phreng ba, the Medicine Buddha, bodhisattvas, lamas, *yidam*, dharma protectors and *gter ma* protectors!
I now expound the knowledge of secret medicine, the precious text of instruction, which is entrusted by the *ḍākinī* Dpal Idan phreng ba. In

²⁶ According to Meyer (2003: 111), Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho appointed Ngag dbang sangs rgyas dpal bzang as one of his students in charge of medical teaching at the Lcags po ri.

²⁷ Full title is *Single Lineage of Secret Medicine: The Golden Key for Decoding the Knot of the Extended Commentary on the Instructional Tantra* (*Gsang sman chig brgyud/ Lhan thabs kyi rgya mdud bkrol ba'i rin chen gser gyi lde mig*).

order to disclose and receive this secret, one should first be committed to Dharma practice.

To begin with, the teaching of this secret knowledge must be requested by the student who wishes to learn from a qualified teacher. Although the *ḍākinī* does not need offerings, this knowledge cannot be taught without offerings being made. This was the instruction of the *ḍākinī*: if no offerings are made but the knowledge is taught, both our present and next life will not be fortunate.

Although the teacher of this secret knowledge has no concern about profiting from teaching, he cannot teach this knowledge to the one who does not offer him five golden coins. If he disobeys this command, he will be punished by the dharma protectors.

Although the deities are not in need of mandala offerings, the smoke-offering ritual to Zhang blon should be performed. If the ritual has not been done, the teacher will be punished by internal bleeding.

Although there are many forms of syllable-letters [mantra], the *ḍākinī*'s secret mantra should not be taught in public. If someone preaches it openly, he will be punished.

Although many people want to obtain the secret teachings, they will be taught only to those who will keep the secrets and not disclose them, since this is the command of the *ḍākinī*. It should not be shown to others, even if they have good intentions.

If the person does not have extraordinary compassion and merely seeks fortune and fame, the entrustment will be broken. This knowledge cannot be transmitted.

If someone is sharp and intelligent, even if he is a qualified teacher, arrogance and a lack of compassion can ruin the practice. Even if all the best and most powerful substances are available, the essence of secret medicine will lose its power and will not be effective.

Thus, if this instruction is observed, the teacher will be happy, and blessings will be received. If teachers are satisfied, the secret may be transmitted. If the *ḍākinī* is pleased, the absolute knowledge of the truth will be revealed. If the protectors are satisfied, all obstacles will be eliminated.

If this knowledge is taught with permission and commitment, it will benefit sentient beings and will be good for all future generations.²⁸

²⁸ *mkha' 'gro'i gtso mo dpal ldan phreng ba la phyag 'tshal lo// sman bla byang sems brgyud bcas pa'i// bla ma yi dam mkha' 'gro dang// chos skyong gter srung bka' rgya'i bdag// ma lus kun la phyag byas nas// man ngag yon tan nor bu yil// rgyud kyi lhan thabs gsang ba'i bka'// rgya las bkrol dang sdom pa'i tshul// mkha' 'gro'i gtad rgya'i gsang yig 'dri// dang po gdams pa chig brgyud rgya// 'di la dgos pa'i chos dam tshig// sngon bar mtha' ma'i rim pa yang// mtshan ldan slob dpon 'di shes la// snod ldan slob mas man ngag zhu// mkha'i 'gro tshogs kyis mi dbul yang// tshogs 'khor mchod pas mi zhu na// mi 'chad mkha' 'gro'i bka' rgya yod// 'das na 'di phyi gnyis kar 'phung// slob dpon yon la mi blta yang// gser zho lnga yi phyag rten gyis// mandala mi 'bul nyan 'dod la// bka' rgya bkrol na bka' chad 'byung// chos srung gtor mas mi 'phong yang// bsangs dang gsol khas zhang blon sde// bskangs nas 'chad nyan mi byed na// khong khrag 'byin par bka' gtad yod// yi ge'i rnam grangs mtha'i yas kyang// mkha' 'gro'i gsang tshig ma lags pa'i// kun grags dkyus su 'di 'dri na// byin yal bka'i 'gal bar chad yong// man ngag 'dod pa mang na yang// dam tshig*

In these introductory paragraphs, Ngag dbang sangs rgyas dpal bzang stresses the importance of keeping secrets in various ways. First, from a religious perspective, secret medicine is viewed as a tantric practice where knowledge ought not to be discussed or taught openly in public. The knowledge of secret medicine is the property of the *ḍākinī* Dpal ldan phreng ba and is well protected by dharma protectors. Dpal ldan phreng ba is also known as the wisdom *ḍākinī*. She is believed to be the teacher of G.yu thog yon tan dgon po and the source of medical teachings, including secret medicinal knowledge in the tantric fashion. This conceptualization of a deity, rather than a human, as the source of the medical knowledge could have been envisioned by the 5th Dalai Lama to give a Buddhist origin to Tibetan medical practice.²⁹ The mundane medical knowledge of G.yu thog yon tan dgon po was superseded by celestial revelation, shifting medical practice from empiricism to theology.

In rendering medicine with a tantric feature, secret medicinal knowledge is conveyed as if it was a tantric practice that requires preliminary dharma practice and initiation. A point to note is that, in addition to the notion of proprietary knowledge, traditionally, tantric substances used in rituals are assumed to exhibit full potency when applied only in a quiet and hidden manner. This view is not restricted to the past but is still continued today. As suggested by recent Tibetan Buddhist master Jigme Phuntsok ('Jigs med phun tshogs, 1933–2004), the practice of Vajrayāna had to be concealed for its effects to take place. According to him, this notion of secrecy extends to the practice of Tibetan medicine; some medicinal substances need to be kept secret for the sake of their potency:

In the past, Desi Sangye Gyatso was a well-known medical expert throughout Tibet. He recorded a superb collection of “secret medicines” in one medical text and used secret codes to represent the uses of some types of Tibetan medicine.³⁰

thub nges nyung shas las// kun la mi ston mkha' 'gro'i rgya// bstan na bka' srung gsang tshig 'chor// gzhan don byed pa mang mod kyang// lhag bsam sems bskyed mi ldan na// grags snyan lto phyir rnyed 'tshol la// gtad na nyams pa can du gyur// shes rig bkra ba mang mchis rung// tshad ldan slob dpon mi bsten par// pho tshod rang bzo'i nyams len gyis// rang gar byas na 'khrul bar gol// nus ldan sman mchog kun tshogs kyang// sbyor sde de yi snying po'i gtsol// gsang sman chad na ro nus 'chor// nus pa dman pas phan mi 'gyur// de phyir bshad tshul ldan gyur na// bla ma mnyes pas byin rlabs 'jug/ slob dpon dgyes pas man ngag lon// mkha' 'gro mnyes nas dngos grub thob// chos srung mgu bas bar chad srung// bka' rgya khrol bas 'gro don ran// dam tshig kun tshang gzhan phan 'grub// bshad bzhin mdzod cig phyi rabs kun// (Ngag dbang sangs rgyas dpal bzang 2005: 460–461).

²⁹ Van Vleet 2016: 279–282.

³⁰ Jigme Phuntsok 2015: 90–91.

Although further research has to be done to confirm which text Jigme Phuntsok was referring to, it is probably the *Extended Commentary* that is being discussed here. This is because Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho detailed mentioning of secret medicine can be mostly found in the *Extended Commentary*.

Reinforcing the practice of medicine in the tantric view, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho dedicated a whole section in the *Mirror of Beryl* to the “tantrification” of medical practice. There he equates medicine with tantric practice:

Therefore, the value of the science of medicine is that it accomplishes the welfare of self and others. Therefore, whether they wish to become doctors and practice the science of healing or practitioners of the sacred Dharma of sutra and tantra, the essential inner science, students, and practitioners of all sciences should seek out both a teacher and a master.³¹

After that, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho further elaborates on how medicine should be a form of tantric practice. Devotion to the master is the key to practice, and different forms of vows and pledges should be taken by the practitioner. Drawing attention to the severity of this act, in his *Mirror of Beryl* Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho includes the following excerpt on broken pledges from the *Tantra of the Self-Appearing Mind* (*Rig pa rang shar gyi rgyud*) and describes the resulting punishment as:

experiencing various misfortunes, plagues, and other infectious diseases, being murdered by demons and spirits and sent to hell, going blind, becoming deaf, never succeeding in whatever is attempted, your skin erupts in sores and leprosy, being punished by the king and robbed by bandits, getting infectious illness not caught by others, and seeing your wife and children die. Everyone becomes an enemy; all efforts are for naught.³²

Despite the fact that secret medicine is closely tied to tantric practice, not only is this knowledge precious in the religious sense but also in a worldly sense: he compares it to the five golden coins which were considered a very substantial amount of wealth at the time. One possible explanation is that the *Extended Commentary* was used as exclusive knowledge owned by the Lcags po ri School and as a strategy to dominate medical education.³³

Medical knowledge was portrayed as both spiritual and material treasure, which Lcags po ri holds, and access to this secret knowledge

³¹ Desi Sangye Gyatso 2010: 353. Translated by Gavin Kilty.

³² Ibid: 415–416.

³³ Chui 2019b: 15.

was restricted to the monastics-related practitioners. It was knowledge only for the elite class. In the colophon of the *Extended Commentary*, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho further warns that the knowledge within the commentary is not for those of low social status and that it is protected by another dharma protector which is an essential deity in all tantric practices:

People of low social status, without training in the sutra and practical experience who read this book, will be punished by the dharma protector. Zhang blon and his retinue of eight protectors will take their heart blood.³⁴

Meanwhile, dharma protectors are taken seriously in the tantric tradition. It is believed that although dharma protectors protect Buddhists and the dharma faithfully, extreme care should be taken not to offend them, otherwise misfortune will result. Under the medical lineage protector Zhang blon, the practice of medicine is restricted to selected practitioners. Zhang blon occupies a prominent position in the Tibetan medical tradition, especially in the lineage of Lcags po ri medicine. This tradition has been fully integrated into the medical system taught at Lcags po ri from the time of the 5th Dalai Lama until today. Zhang blon and his retinue protect every medical practitioner from worldly and spiritual obstacles. According to René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Zhang blon is also called Rdo rje bdud 'dul.³⁵ He is worshipped as a "god of medicine" (*sman gyi lha*) and is closely related to the Medicine Buddha. According to mythology, Zhang blon is the "chief of the nine attendants of the Medicine Buddha" (*bka' sdod srung ma zhang blon dam can sde dgu*), and is described in the following way:

He is dark-blue and has one three-eyed face. His hair stands on end, a diadem of five skulls adorns his head, he bares his teeth, and a garland of human heads hangs around his neck. With the right hand, he brandishes a chopper decorated with a gem, his left hand lifts a skull-cup full of hearts. A cloak of black silk is his dress, a club made of sandalwood is stuck into his girdle, and his mount is a black horse with white heels, which stands amidst a vehemently burning fire.³⁶

The protection practice of Zhang blon is often exclusive to the practitioner of Lcags po ri medicine, and "low status" practitioners are warned off from utilizing it. Thus, the knowledge of secret medicine, according to Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and Ngag dbang sangs rgyas

³⁴ 'di'i rigs chad chung la yang lung dang lag len med par longs spyad nas zhang blon sogs sde dgus snying khrag rol zhes kha shas mchis pal/ (Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 2005a: 428).

³⁵ Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 79.

³⁶ Ibid.

dpal bzang, is only for monastics and related practitioners with their lineage of initiation and blessing. Ordinary people are excluded from practicing the *Extended Commentary* because the result of preparing the tantric medicinal recipes is devastating both to the unauthorized practitioner and the patient.

4. *A Contemporary Note on Medicine in Theocracy*

An important objective of the present article is to examine how this deterrent system of tantric retribution takes effect, since this social conformity on the practice of Tibetan medicine is not just a historical artifact but it is still active today. Theoretical perspectives on the deterrence effect of religion in discouraging deviance and delinquency have been observed in many cultural systems. One of the best-known models is the hellfire hypothesis put forward by Travis Hirschi and Rodney Stark (1969). This hypothesis assesses the role of religiosity as a deterrent in criminology and penology. Basically, their hypothesis posits that religious beliefs deter individuals from wrongdoing by means of supernatural sanctions, while worthy behaviors earn supernatural rewards. This hellfire hypothesis seems to contain contradictions and inconsistencies,³⁷ however, as it was later proposed by Stark, it is especially workable in cultures with a strong and uniform belief.³⁸

In our case, Buddhism in the Tibetan medical context creates a strong moral community deeply underpinned by religiosity. Stark notes that religion is “a group property” instead of “an individual trait.”³⁹ Thus, according to him, in order for religion to offer a successful deterrent to crime and deviance, religiosity has to be practiced at the communal level, where it is strong enough to produce social conformity. This is what the 5th Dalai Lama strove to establish during his reign, and it was upheld effectively until the 1950s by the Tibetan government Dga' ldan pho brang.

While the role that the religious doctrine has played for the control of Tibetan medical practice is yet to be explored in-depth, preliminary observations may be established via the application of modern

³⁷ The empirical support of this theory is still in debate, where Groves *et al.* 1987, Heaton 2006, and ironically Hirschi and Stark 1969 cannot draw any definitive conclusion as to whether religiosity is related to crime and deviance. Nonetheless, studies by Benda 2002, Cochran and Akers 1989, Johnson 1987, Johnson *et al.* 2000, Johnson and Jang 2011, Marsiglia *et al.* 2005, and Olson 1990, have shown that religiosity is related to reduced levels of crime and social deviance.

³⁸ Stark 1996 and Stark *et al.* 1982.

³⁹ Stark 1996: 164.

sociological perspectives, including functionalist and conflict theories. In the functionalist perspective, during the time of the 5th Dalai Lama, social order is upheld through devotion to collectively shared Buddhist values and beliefs. Compliance is ensured as individuals internalize these values as moral norms. Guilt, moral repugnance, and fear limit deviance. For conflict theorists such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, religion is a device encouraged by those in power to bolster their authority, and the 5th Dalai Lama's position could be viewed in this light. Further, the Buddhist teaching of merit operative in the present and future lives, as well as the fear of punishment for breaking the tantric *samaya*, may serve well to enforce and legitimize the power of Lcags po ri and its authority over the physical and spiritual welfare of the Tibetans.

In any case, all suggestions given above are just some initial explanatory models based on the materialist assumptions. Further research has to be done on the spiritual aspect of this tantric constraints from the Tibetan point of view.

5. Concluding Remarks

Although some accounts are suggesting that Buddhism existed in Tibet before the 7th century CE, it is believed to have been formally introduced to the Tibetan Plateau from the 7th to 9th centuries CE during the period of the Tibetan Empire. Nonetheless, the infusion of medical practice with tantric Buddhist ideals did not become prominent until the time of the 5th Dalai Lama in the 17th century. The strengthening of the tantric worldview was successfully established at the time of the 5th Dalai Lama and has continued up to the present day. This is best exemplified by the medical paintings presented in the *Blue Beryl* commissioned by Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. This set of 79 medical paintings has been uninterruptedly used as a pedagogical tool in Tibetan medical education since that time. Such heavy Buddhist influences have ensured that the Tibetan medical tradition has become a very particular Tibetan "Buddhist" medicine.

The 5th Dalai Lama's campaign to combine healing and tantric practice amplified the orthodoxy and authority of medical practice alongside Lcags po ri's establishment. Healing was thus a privileged and exclusive body of knowledge handed down in the Lcags po ri medical lineage. Although different medical lineages were based on the *Four Tantras*, the *Extended Commentary* is portrayed as containing the most accurate materials when compared to other commentaries on the *Four Tantras*. This endorsed not only the reputation of the Lcags po ri College but also that of their graduates since they were perceived as

competent practitioners.

Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho effectively asserted dominance not only over Tibet's medical knowledge but also over its religious and intellectual life in general.⁴⁰ Under his supervision, the school at Lcags po ri came to occupy a position as the single most influential institution in Tibetan medicine. The 5th Dalai Lama's agenda successfully standardized, homogenized, and dominated the practice of medicine. The blending of religious practice with medicinal preparations safeguarded the practice of medicine in the religious context. Since ritual practices are pivotal to the efficacy of medicinal substances, they should be performed according to the established monastic traditions. Moreover, the conceptualization of diseases and their treatment methods are much theorized via the Buddhist worldview, to the extent that rituals favored by the Lcags po ri tradition and medicinal materials exclusive to them became incorporated as a widespread medical practice. This system successfully promoted the Lcags po ri School as the leading and dominant medical school. This continues up until present time in the form of the Sman rtsis khang, which is the reestablishment of the Lcags po ri College in exile.

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⁴⁰ Schaeffer 2006: 187.

skrun khang.

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Releasing Lives on the Grasslands of Amdo: Entanglements of Human and Animal Vitality

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t the end of a long spring day, 26-year-old herder Tshe ring² came home after selling caterpillar fungus in the township seat. His wife Lha mo (28) had just arrived a few minutes earlier from herding the lactating female yaks and their calves back home.³ She handed him a cup of milk tea and went out to tether the animals for the night. After sipping his tea, Tshe ring took a set of five coloured silken ribbons, a thick needle and a piece of braided white wool out of a drawer and joined Lha mo. She skilfully approached a black, hornless female yak, whom she had already tethered, and bound its front legs with a rope in order to keep it quiet.⁴ Then Tshe ring braided a tuft of the animal's hump hair and sewed the ribbons to it, while speaking in a low voice to the animal:

A, fortunate one! From today onwards, your life is redeemed. Go roam freely in the mountains and eat the grass, go roam freely in the valleys and drink the water. I will not sell you for money, I will not slaughter you for meat.⁵

This ritual act was Tshe ring and Lha mo's contribution to the collective release of animal lives their pastoral community was engaged in at the moment. A few days before, a community leader had

¹ I am indebted to Puntsok Wangyal for his invaluable help with the transcription and discussion of audio recordings. I also wish to thank Katia Buffetrille, the two anonymous reviewers and the editor for their insightful and helpful comments.

² I use pseudonyms to protect the privacy of my interlocutors.

³ The general term for a female yak in Tibetan is 'bri, and the specific term for lactating ones is *bzhon ma*. For the ease of reading, I will refer to 'bri as "female yaks" and will use the expression "yak milk cow" when emphasizing their lactating condition.

⁴ When milking, women evaluate the tameness of their lactating female yaks and tie the front legs, as well as the rear ones occasionally, if the animal is prone to moving or kicking and destabilizing the milk pail or the milker.

⁵ *a g.yang la ma khyod de ring nas zung tshe blu yin/ khyod la yan nas song bas rtswa zol lung yan nas song bas chu thungs/ btsongs nas rin mi len/ bshas nas sha mi za.*

asked his fellow community members to release lives and chant *Sgrol ma*⁶ on behalf of an incarnate lama of the local monastery. Using a popular instant messaging application, he informed the community that the lama was sick and such ritual actions would be beneficial to his health. Representatives of each household responded by stating the number of *Sgrol ma* they would chant and the number and species of the animals to be released, and so Tshe ring did accordingly.

1. Introduction

Among the horses, yaks and sheep that graze on the alpine meadows of the Tibetan Plateau, some individuals such as Tshe ring and Lha mo's hornless black female yak enjoy a special status, owing to which their owners refrain from selling and slaughtering them. Often marked by coloured silken ribbons hanging from their ears or manes, these animals are excluded from both the market and exchanges among kin and neighbors. By protecting their lives and keeping them in the herds, pastoralists contribute to the wellbeing of the more-than-human communities in which they live.

This article is based on fieldwork conducted in Sog po,⁷ a pastoral area situated in the northeastern Tibetan region of Amdo, over a period of 13 months between July 2016 and December 2018. My research engages with the ways pastoralists relate to their herd animals and to other, non-human, agents inhabiting their environment. More specifically, this article focuses on one particular dimension of the human-animal encounter, that is, the freeing of animal lives by Sog po pastoralists. For this purpose, I spent most of my time in two of the county's pastoral communities, where I was able to observe both daily interactions between herders and their animals and the more occasional performance of life liberation rituals. In addition, I carried out interviews with herders on their animal release practice.

⁶ Chanting *Sgrol ma* refers to the practice of reciting the mantra associated with the feminine bodhisattva figure, *Sgrol ma* (Skt. *Tārā*), whose name means the "Saviour" or the "Liberator." Among other things, this bodhisattva is associated with longevity and compassion.

⁷ Sog po (Chin. Henan 河南) is a Mongolian polity established at the beginning of the 18th century by the descendants of the Khoshut rulers of the Kokonor, the far northeastern stretch of the Tibetan Plateau. After its incorporation into the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1952, it was subsequently transformed into a Mongol autonomous county belonging to the Rma lho (Chin. Huangnan 黄南) prefecture of the Mtsho sngon (Chin. Qinghai) province. The unique Tibetan-Mongolian identity of the people of Sog po is discussed in Dhondhup and Diemberger 2002, Diemberger 2007, Shinjilt 2007, Roche 2016, and Wallenböck 2016.

In Tibetan, the freeing of animal lives is known by the term *tshe thar*, a composite word combining the noun “life” (*tshe*) with the verb “to be liberated” or “to be set free” (*thar*). *Tshe thar* is used both as a verb referring to the releasing action and as a noun designating the object of this action, which, besides animals, may also include plants.⁸ Hereafter, I refer to *tshe thar* by using interchangeably the verbs “to release,” “to liberate,” “to free” or “to spare.” *Tshe thar*, however, is only a general category encompassing different types of animal release rituals. In this article, I would like to discuss one specific type of life release practice termed as *srog blu* (i.e., “life redeeming”)⁹ and to shed some light on three aspects of this practice that previous scholarship on life liberation had addressed only succinctly.

First of all, I suggest that the redeeming of animal lives, as practised by pastoralists in Sog po, is not just a virtuous act generating merit, but it is also a practice of longevity, often prescribed for restoring health. This connection between life liberation and human longevity and health goes beyond normative Buddhist understandings and incentives for the practice, such as compassion towards animals or the aforementioned merit accumulation.

Secondly, I argue that beyond concerns for one’s present and future lives, the freeing of animal lives also stands as an expression of the particular relationship that herders develop with individual animals of their herds. That is why life liberation practices in Sog po can not be fully accessed without taking into consideration the careful attention herders pay to the individuality of their animals and the intimate relationships that emerge in the course of herding work. Such attention to animal individuality is an interesting juxtaposition to the universal notion of compassion that justifies, at least from a Buddhist doctrinal point of view, the release of animal lives.

Thirdly, I maintain that, in contrast to discourses advocating for animal release as an alternative to participation in an increasingly marketized herding economy, for pastoralists in the Sog po area, the practice of releasing animal lives is compatible with engagement in the livestock market.

In order to substantiate these three points, I will begin with an introduction of the Tibetan tradition of life liberation and will sketch

⁸ In Sog po, pastoralists also liberate trees. In the neighboring Rtse khog (Chin. Zeku 泽库) county of the Qinghai province, the practice was also witnessed by Shiho Ebihara (personal communication, April 24, 2017). According to my interlocutors, places where, beyond the official regulations, bans on hunting and logging trees exist are also known as *tshe thar*. For a study on the practice of “sealing” of protected areas, see Huber 2004.

⁹ A more detailed discussion of this term and its translation can be found in the next section of the article.

out the different types of animal release practices identified in Sog po. I will then briefly present the rise of the animal release movement in eastern Tibet and look at normative Buddhist understandings of the practice advocated by the religious leaders standing at the head of this movement. From there I will build on the complex relationship that Sog po pastoralists nurture with their livestock animals through the action of redeeming lives. I will focus on how the act of protecting the lives of certain herd animals is thought to contribute to the longevity and vitality of humans and will consider the temporal dimensions of this connection between human and non-human members of the household. Finally, I will look at the selection of the to-be-released animals, for it brings to the fore the keen attention herders pay to animal individuality and their use of *srog blu* rituals as a way for expressing intimate human-animal bonds.

2. *Animals Set Aside*

Far from being restricted to the Tibetan highlands, saving animals from captivity or death is a widespread practice throughout Asia, from the Pacific shores to the Ural Mountains and the Arctic tundra. In Buddhist communities of East and Southeast Asia, animals held in captivity are purchased and ceremonially released into their natural habitat as a means of cultivating compassion and obtaining merit.¹⁰ In pastoral regions of North and Central Asia, some with little or no Buddhist influence, herd animals are spared domestic labor, sale, and slaughter and are consecrated to deities and spirits in order to enhance the fortune of the domestic group.¹¹ The Tibetan cultural world seems to be a particularly fertile ground for the development of animal release rituals: it is a place where both the North and the East Asian traditions meet and give rise to a set of diverse practices and associated meanings.

The history of life liberation in Tibet is many centuries long: David Holler found the first incidence of *tshe thar* in the hagiography of the 11th-century translator Rwa lo tsa ba Rdo rje grags pa, authored by Rwa Ye shes seng ge in the 13th century or later.¹² Since that time and up to this day, references to animal release as an exemplary virtuous action have recurrently appeared in biographical (*rnam thar*) literature, as well as in *das log* stories, that is, accounts of people who have returned

¹⁰ See Law 1994, Shiu and Stokes 2008, Smith 1999 or Yang 2015.

¹¹ See Charlier 2012, Chiodo 1992, Fijn 2011: 230–234, Lavrillier 2005: 290–300, Marchina 2015: 97–102, Stépanoff 2011, and Vitebsky 2005: 278–281.

¹² Holler 2002: 210–211.

from death.¹³ Besides being documented through time, the practice of releasing animals is also acknowledged across space: research conducted in different Tibetan areas within the People's Republic of China (PRC) as well as in some areas of Nepal and northern India testifies to that.¹⁴

Ethnographic approaches to life liberation have developed in recent years from passing mentions of animal release rituals to contributions specifically dealing with several aspects of these practices. Researchers highlight the increasing popularity of animal release in Tibetan areas of the PRC, particularly in pastoral areas of eastern Tibet, where a number of charismatic religious leaders have launched an animal release movement encouraging local herders to restrain from sale and slaughter of the livestock.¹⁵

Scholars also point to the fact that *tshe thar* is only a general category encompassing different practices or subcategories of life release, each with its own proper name. In order to reveal the diversity found within the *tshe thar* umbrella term, David Holler proposed a typology of release practices that was subsequently taken up by Gillian Tan and later Yusuke Bessho, who refined the previous classifications with their ethnographical insights.¹⁶ These contributions are illustrative of the regional variation that characterizes animal release and the rich terminology that goes along with it.

Sog po pastoralists release the lives of bovines (yaks, cattle or yak-cattle hybrids), sheep, goats, and horses.¹⁷ These are the animals that, in the current pastoral economy of Sog po, have use value.¹⁸ Despite

¹³ Besides these traditional literary genres, Holler also refers to Tibetan texts specifically dealing with the origins and benefits of life liberation as well as written guides with instructions on how to perform the *tshe thar* ritual (Holler 2002: 211–212). For contemporary textual and audiovisual compositions on life liberation, see Gayley 2013.

¹⁴ For animal release practices in Tibetan areas of the PRC, see Bessho 2019, Chos bstan rgyal 2014: 168–180, Da Col 2012, Gaerrang 2012 & 2017, Holler 2002, Levine 2019, Tan 2016, and Thargyal 2007: 75. For animal release in India, refer to Rösing 2006: 96–98 and Gerke 2012: 169–176. For life release practices in Nepal, see Childs 2004: 122.

¹⁵ See Gaerrang 2012 & 2017 and Gayley 2013 for accounts of this movement.

¹⁶ See Holler 2002: 218–219, Tan 2016: 4–5, and Bessho 2019.

¹⁷ However, goats are rarely bred in Sog po.

¹⁸ Even though horses are marginal animals in terms of pastoral labour and horse meat is not consumed in the area, renouncing the possibility of exchanging or selling them comes to a high cost to pastoralists, for horses are the most lucrative species of all those herded on the plateau. Pastoralists also keep dogs as guardians of their household property and livestock. Holler mentions dogs of protector deities (*mgon khyi*) in his enumeration of the different kinds of liberated animals (Holler 2002: 208). But, in Sog po, I did not encounter any *tshe thar* dog, and pastoralists I interviewed did not think of these animals as the object of any release action.

what the semantic field of freeing, releasing, and liberating may suggest, these animals continue to be part of the herd after acquiring their special status.¹⁹ Their use value is only partially abolished, since they are still producers of dairy and reproducers: females are milked and their offspring does not inherit the *tshe thar* status. The liberated animals account for a proportion that oscillates, in the pastoral households I am familiar with, between 7 to 10% of the household stock.²⁰ Herders distinguish three different practices of setting aside and protecting the life of an animal. The processes through which these animals acquire their particular status and the goals of the releasing action vary. However, what the three practices all share in common is that the animals are spared slaughter and alienation from the household through donation or exchange.

The first type of life liberation is the redeeming of lives (*srog blu* or *tshe blu*²¹), which refers to the practice of setting free captive animals or, in a husbandry context such as that of Sog po pastoralists, renouncing to take the life of a livestock animal or to sell it. In the latter case, herders commit to lifting what binds the animal's lifespan—that is, the possibility of slaughter carried out by the owners themselves or mediated through sale. The practice also excludes donation and exchange of animals, for both these forms of alienation could eventually result in slaughter. The ritual formula uttered by Tshe ring in the beginning of the article precisely expresses the herder's promise

¹⁹ An exception to this is Childs' description of the offering of a yak to a mountain deity in the Nub ri valley of Nepal as a result of which the animal was released into the wild (Childs 2004: 122). Similarly, Huber mentions the existence of *tshe thar* yaks in the upper pilgrimage routes of the mount Tsa ri in Southern Tibet (Huber 1999: 229). The author describes these yaks as feral and states that during summer, they were tended by the pilgrimage resthouse keepers (Huber 1999: 242n39).

²⁰ This figure is similar to the one reported by Holler (Holler 2002: 222), but lower than Tan's 15% (Tan 2016: 5) and Levine's over 20% for other areas of eastern Tibet (Levine 2019: 11). The latter figure is probably exaggerated (personal communication with Nancy Levine, July 9, 2019). According to Chos bstan rgyal, "pastoralists typically keep around ten head of livestock as *tshe thar*" (Chos bstan rgyal 2014: 172).

²¹ *Tshe* and *srog* both mean "life" in Tibetan, but in *srog* the emphasis is on vitality, while *tshe* refers to the duration of life. *Tshe blu* is the word used by pastoralists in the western part of Sog po district, while in the eastern part, they employ the term *srog blu*. The second syllable of *srog blu* has several spellings, and, therefore, can be translated in different ways. *Blu* is the humilific form of the verb "to buy" or "to redeem," and I prefer this spelling because it reflects the local pronunciation and it is found in local publications about the practice. *Bslu* and *slu*, as Holler (Holler 2002) and Tucci (Tucci 1980: 176) respectively spell it, mean "ransom" or "redeem." So does *glud*, the form used by Tan (Tan 2016: 4) and Nebesky-Wojkowitz (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 507). In the following pages, I will use the English term "to redeem" to refer to the practice of *srog/tshe blu*.

to protect his female yak's life. For herders, redeeming lives is an enactment of the Buddhist paramount virtue of compassion (*snying rje*) and, therefore, it is a way to accumulate merit (*bsod nams*) as well as a means to enhance human longevity.²² Along with the aforementioned, herders may have additional motivations and hopes that I will discuss further in the article.

The consecration and offering of herd animals to the spiritual beings that are part of the social world of pastoralists is another type of life liberation practice in which animals are also exempted from consumption and circulation in the livestock market. They become, instead, people's gifts to household protector deities (*srung ma*) or spiritual beings inhabiting the environment, such as mountain deities (*gzhi bdag*) or spirits of water bodies and the underground (*klu*).²³ In Sog po, herders refer to these animals as "*tshe thar*" or call them with different names that are specific to the species and sex of the animal or to the type of deity to whom they are dedicated: consecrated yak milk cows, for example, are known as *zhol mo*. These animals correspond to Holler's category of "god-animals" (*lha zog*) and to the term "god-yaks" (*lha g.yag*) documented by Tan.²⁴ Their owners are no longer the herders, but the deities themselves. By gifting these spiritual beings a mount or a yak milk cow, herders seek to please them and expect, in return, the enhancement of the fortune that will ensure the successful multiplication of their herds and the protection from diseases or predators' attacks. Contrary to *srog blu*, *lha zog* animals have to be replaced after death by new individuals who undergo the ritual and acquire the predecessors' status.

The third type of release practice consists in singling out certain animals from the herd for their connection to fortune (*g.yang*). Fortune animals (or *g.yang* animals) are individuals with singular traits—most often physical deviances—which herders read as signs of a particularly high concentration of fortune. In order to prevent it from leaving the household, a circumstance that would compromise the prosperity not only of the livestock but also the human members of the domestic group, fortune animals stay within the herd and are not slaughtered or exchanged. Contrary to *srog blu* and *lha zog* animals, however, no ritual is performed on *g.yang* animals, nor are they marked with silken ribbons. The singularity of these animals is not produced through ritual work, but it is rather a matter of their owner's

²² Alternatively, the effects of this action may be transferred to a third person on whose behalf the ritual is performed.

²³ The offering of animals to deities is yet another example of the extension of the domain of sociality to non-human agents, in this case divine beings, characteristic of Tibetan pastoral societies.

²⁴ Holler 2002: 208 and Tan 2016: 4.

careful attention to inter-individual variation within a species. Deviant traits of an individual animal are interpreted as signs of the presence of fortune, a practice that bears witness to pastoralists' elaborate treatment of atypical individuals within the herd.

As different as the release actions described above may be, one must be cautious before setting discrete boundaries between them, for this might not accurately reflect the reality of pastoralists' practice. Different types of release often overlap in such a way that the boundaries between them become blurred. What they all share in common is a concern for the protection of the life of individual members of the herd. They also establish a connection between the protection of animals' lives and the strengthening of the vitality of other living beings—other animals of the household herd, territorial divine beings or human members of the household. Given that the limited space here does not allow for all forms of life release to be addressed, the following pages are devoted to the discussion of only a few aspects of the practice of redeeming animal lives. However, one should keep in mind that this particular form of life release does not exist in isolation but is part of a wider array of animal release practices.

3. Cultivating Compassion

In the first years of the new millennium, as the People's Republic of China launched an ambitious campaign to bring development to its Western regions, voices were raised in eastern Tibet challenging the ways in which this development should be achieved.²⁵ China's development project was based on the premise that participation in the market economy was crucial for the backward Western regions in order to catch up with the modernized Eastern provinces. In pastoral areas of the Tibetan Plateau, this campaign was translated into state-backed efforts to integrate livestock herding into the market economy. The turn from a system of extensive pastoralism into an intensive one was not new, as rangeland policies had taken this direction since the 1980s reforms. The new development programs intensified the process, which resulted in herders selling ever-growing numbers of herd animals to the meat market. Concerned by such increase in livestock slaughter, the charismatic founder of the Serta Larung Buddhist Academy of the Five Sciences (Gser thang bla rung dgon rig lnga'i nang bstan slob grwa, commonly known as Bla rung sgar)

²⁵ The campaign, known as "Open Up the West" (Chin. Xibudakaifa 西部大开发), started in the year 2000 and its definition of the "West" includes all Tibetan areas within the PRC.

Mkhan po²⁶ 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1933–2004) launched an animal release movement encouraging herders to liberate the lives of their animals.²⁷ Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs and the disciples who succeeded him at the head of the movement, particularly Mkhan po Tshul khriṃs blo gros (b. 1962), have focused their teachings on the negative consequences of killing and the importance of compassion towards all sentient beings, including the animals that make up pastoralists' herds.²⁸ They have used their enormous influence on the lay pastoral communities of eastern Tibet to encourage herders to forgo selling livestock for slaughter.²⁹

The compassionate treatment of animals, for which the Bla rung sgar religious leaders advocate, rises from a long-standing Buddhist concern for animal ethics.³⁰ As beings endowed with sentience, animals experience suffering and seek to escape from it. They are not ontologically distinct from humans (or other sentient beings) but instead are placed in a continuum hierarchically divided into six realms. The law of cause and effect subjects all beings in these six realms to a cycle of rebirth (Skt. *saṃsāra*) characterized by suffering. Movement within this potentially endless wheel of existences is determined by the karmic force, or moral value, of past deeds. In other words, beings circulate in the potentially infinite time frame of the *saṃsāra* and may morph into different types of existence depending on the morality or immorality of their actions. Due to the mutability of forms that a being may adopt across lifetimes and the virtually infinite time frame of the *saṃsāra*, all sentient beings have the potential to be each other's parents in past and future lifetimes. This is the idea encapsulated in the Tibetan

²⁶ *Mkhan po* is the Tibetan Buddhist academic title obtained after completing a rigorous course of philosophical study. It is the highest degree of studies awarded in the Rnying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism.

²⁷ Although the genesis of Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs' life release advocacy had begun as early as in the 1990s, in 2000, the same year as the "Open Up the West" campaign started, he gave an important speech requesting pastoralists to forgo the sale of livestock for slaughter (Gayley 2013: 255–258).

²⁸ See Gayley 2013 & 2017, Barstow 2017, and Hardie 2019 for Bla rung sgar's animal welfare movement. See Robin 2009 for a depiction of *tshé thar* in contemporary Tibetan cinema as a demonstration for the external, non-Tibetan (i.e., mainly Chinese and Western) audiences of a quintessentially compassionate action that is associated with being Tibetan. Her analysis on the ethnic character of compassion resonates with the works of Gaerrang 2012 and Gayley 2013.

²⁹ The impacts of the animal release movement on pastoralists of eastern Tibet are well documented by Gaerrang (Gaerrang 2012 & 2017) and Gillian Tan (Tan 2016). Their works discuss how herders negotiate two competing understandings of herd animals—the market logic that sees them as a commodity on the one hand and the Buddhist view of animals as sentient beings worth of human compassion on the other—by looking at their decisions regarding livestock sales and life release.

³⁰ For the doctrinal foundations of Tibetan Buddhist masters' advocacy for animal welfare, see Barstow 2019a and Gayley 2017.

expression “all beings have been our mothers in the past” (*mar gyur sems can thams cad*), which is frequently invoked in religious teachings on animal liberation, as well as in life redeeming prayers.³¹

Besides bringing animals closer to humans through a reference to past kinship bonds, advocates for sparing animal lives also put a special emphasis on the animals’ ability to experience pain. Their teachings often describe in great detail the suffering and fear that livestock animals feel during the process of sale and slaughter. Through visualisations and examples, these Buddhist teachers ask their followers to identify with the animal’s feelings, thus bridging the distance between human and animal forms of sentience.³² Focusing on filial relationships connecting present humans and animals in past lives, as well as identifying with animals’ experience of fear and pain are two ways of triggering human compassion towards animals.

Tibetan advocates for animal welfare—from the 18th-century Rnying ma master ‘Jigs med gling pa to today’s Mkhan po Tshul khrim blo gros—repeatedly focused in their teachings on the compassionate treatment of animals. So did the 19th-century Amdo yogin Zhabs dkar,³³ whose life is a paradigmatic example of dedication to the freeing of animal lives. This wandering hermit practiced multiple forms of life release: he used the donations received from his patrons to purchase fish from fishermen and sheep from herders and patiently protected fledglings from a predator eagle while staying on retreat at the Blue Lake’s Mtsho snying Island.³⁴ Zhabs dkar also gave teachings on the faults of taking animal lives and persuaded his followers to take vows to refrain from slaughtering.³⁵ In the end of his autobiography, Zhabs dkar counts the number of animals he saved from death in hundreds of thousands.³⁶

As an enactment of the Buddhist paramount principle of compassion, life liberation not only benefits the released animals but also has a positive impact on the life of the performer of the action. From the perspective of the Buddhist economy of spiritual merit, such moral actions allow their performers to accumulate merit and thus to

³¹ The idea of filial bonds linking humans and animals in past lives can be found in scriptural sources dealing with the compassionate treatment of animals such as the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. Both sutras have been extensively used by Tibetan Buddhist advocates of animal welfare (Barstow 2019b).

³² See Gayley 2017 and Hardie 2019.

³³ Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol (1781–1851).

³⁴ For Zhabs dkar’s use of donations to purchase animal and set them free, see Shabkar 1994: 116, 223. For the story of his saving of the fledglings, refer to Shabkar 1994: 139. The Blue Lake is known in Tibetan language as Mtsho sngon po. Mtsho snying, the island in the middle of its waters, stands for the “lake’s heart.”

³⁵ Shabkar 1994: 327–328, 352, 447, 517, 524.

³⁶ Shabkar 1994: 542.

influence their trajectory in the cycle of rebirths. Freeing lives is one of the ritual actions available to Buddhists for progressing in their spiritual path.

The cultivation of compassion and the accompanying accumulation of merit alone, however, do not fully explain the redeeming of animal lives, since the *srog blu* type of practice is most often performed to address specific concerns for human's health and longevity.³⁷ If taking lives, as advocates of animal release warn, is a serious sin resulting in a shortened human lifetime and a rebirth in the lower realms of existence, freeing animals has opposite karmic consequences. Barbara Gerke's study on conceptions and practices of longevity among Tibetans in the Darjeeling hills stresses how the lifespan is "a negotiable entity that people have and can manipulate."³⁸ Alongside with other ritual practices such as long-life empowerment ceremonies (*tshe dbang*) and longevity attainment practices (*tshe sgrub*), animal release is considered to be particularly effective for prolongating one's lifespan (*tshe*).³⁹

For pastoralists in Sog po, increasing longevity and restoring health lie at the center of their *srog blu* practice. Performing such a ritual is, first and foremost, a therapeutic action that enhances the vitality of a person whose life is perceived to be in danger. Caring for the health and longevity of a certain human calls for the involvement of an animal, with whom a reciprocal relation is established: extending its life affects that of the person who performs the action or, alternatively, that on whose behalf the ritual is conducted. Life redeeming, thus, brings to the fore the important role herd animals play for the health and longevity of their owners.

4. *Extending Animal Lives, Enhancing Vitality*

Three-year old Shes rab had been receiving treatment at the local district hospital for one week, but fever and cough did not recede. He was also losing appetite: the boy refused to eat and even to be nursed. Worried about their son's suffering and his lack of response to medical treatment, Shes rab's family consulted an incarnated lama of the local monastery. The young lama advised them to take the child to the provincial capital and prescribed the release of 13 livestock animals. While the toddler had his pulmonary infection treated in a hospital in

³⁷ The place of human interests in the compassionate treatment of animals is a central issue of animal ethics and the discussion of whether Buddhism can be considered speciesist, see Stewart 2014.

³⁸ Gerke 2012: 9.

³⁹ Gerke 2012: 8.

Xining, his father Nyi ma (28), who had stayed home in the winter pasture, redeemed the lives of eight sheep of the household's flock. Three other households, all kin and neighbors of Shes rab, also redeemed the lives of two female yaks and three sheep, adding up to the total number of 13 animals. As Nyi ma later recounted, he chose the sheep by throwing a sash over the flock several times. The animals upon whom the sash fell were given the *srog blu* status by uttering a simple formula "from today onwards, you are Shes rab's redeemed life."⁴⁰ A week after the release of the sheep and yaks, Shes rab's health was restored.

When I met the family for the first time, Shes rab was a healthy five-year-old boy. I first learned about his disease and recovery one evening when, as I helped Nyi ma's aunt Mtsho mo (32) tether the yak milk cows, she pointed to one of them, a horned animal with a black coat and a light grey muzzle, and told me it was Shes rab's "redeemed life" (*srog blu*). The boy's parents referred to the sheep whose lives they had redeemed for their son in the same way. The individual animals strengthening Shes rab's vitality in a critical moment of his life remain in the herds as embodiments of past acts of care and will be linked to the boy, whose life they support, until they die. In the accounts of the child's disease and healing, Shes rab's parents and grandparents stressed, again and again, how his recovery only started after, as advised by the lama, he was taken to Xining and the animals were released on his behalf.

The connection between redeeming lives and healing emphasized by Shes rab's family is central to the release practice of pastoralists in Sog po. Although preventive *srog blu* rituals for enhancing longevity may be performed at different stages of a person's life cycle, for example at birth or when people reach an advanced age, committing to protect an animal's life is, most often, a therapeutic action for restoring health. When the life of a person is perceived to be threatened by illness or accident, household members consult a religious specialist. After performing a divination (*mo*), this specialist may prescribe the redeeming of animals' lives alongside with other actions—ritual or not—for the removal of obstacles threatening the life of the concerned individual. These religious specialists prescribe the exact number of animals to be released and may as well indicate the species, the sex or the color of the animals' fur. The animals are chosen among those that comprise the household's stock. However, in exceptional occasions when the number of animals to be liberated is very high, religious specialists may prescribe the freeing of other

⁴⁰ *khyod de ring gi nas bstan 'dzin gnam mkha'i srog blu yin*. Nyi ma said he did not tie any ribbons to the *srog blu* animals.

animals such as fish of small size, the cost of which is not as burdensome to the household as livestock. In this case, pastoralists buy captive fish from the market and release them into ponds, streams or lakes.

As seen in She rab's example, the restoring of somebody's health and the lengthening of his or her lifespan may involve other households besides the concerned individual's one. Often, the recipient of the benefits of the *srog blu* practice is not the person who owns the animal and performs the ritual but another one on whose behalf the action is performed. This person can be a relative or a person from the same community. Or, as in the first example opening this article, it can be a religious master of senior age for whom herders redeem animal lives as a way of showing devotion.

Looking at the *srog blu* animals of the herd, household members tell the stories of illness and healing of their kin, community members and religious leaders. The presence of such animals is a living medical history of the family and those they care about. Each *srog blu* animal stands for a social relation and embodies a part of the constellation of past acts of care towards the people a household is linked to through kinship, community or devotional bonds. Social relations are thus reproduced in the *srog blu* practice of herders and are recorded on their herds through the setting aside and marking of individual animals.

On the grasslands of Sog po, the act of redeeming an animal's life is performed by the herders themselves, often without any assistance of a monastic or ritual specialist. The redeeming action is carried out in diverse ways: as a simple agreement between household members to refrain from slaughtering and selling a particular animal or, inversely, an actual ritual performance involving an object (e.g., the silken ribbons held together by a braided piece of white wool), an action performed upon the body of the animal (i.e., attaching the ribbons to its ears or mane) and an act of speech. The latter consists, in its minimal form, of an announcement made to the animal that it holds a new status as a support of the life of a particular person: e.g., "from today onwards, you are She rab's *srog blu*," said the boy's father to the sheep.

More elaborate forms of the *srog blu* prayer usually include a promise to refrain from slaughtering the animal for meat or selling it for money and an encouragement to freely (*yan*) graze the mountain slopes and drink from the valley's stream. The prayer may as well include wishes for all sentient beings to be freed from suffering and for the *srog blu* animal itself to attain spiritual realization. For example,

my interlocutor *a ba*⁴¹ Mgon po skyabs (70) shared a redeeming prayer, which opens with the following verses:

May the teachings of the Buddha spread! May sentient beings enjoy happiness and well-being! May all sentient beings who have been our mothers, from the limit of the sky to the ground, be liberated from the suffering of the lower realms! For you to attain the status of liberation and omniscience! From today onwards, I will not slaughter you for meat [...].⁴²

The prayer then continues with the same ritual formula that Tshe ring uttered while redeeming the life of the black female yak in the first example opening the article.

Speaking to animals is very uncommon for my interlocutors in Sog po.⁴³ This is not to say that herders do not communicate verbally with their animals in the course of daily herding activities. However, they mostly do it through vocalisations, whistles and melodies and they rarely use words with a semantic meaning. During the *srog blu* ritual, herders directly address the animal in Tibetan, using the second person pronoun (*khyod*) and forms in the imperative mode. A herders' message to the *srog blu* animal places it in a particular position, distinct from other, non-redeemed individuals of the herd. The life redemption vow taken by the human establishes a reciprocal relationship with the animal, owing to which extending the latter's lifespan is repaid with an improvement of the former's health and an extension of his or her longevity. After eliminating the possibility of sale and slaughter that would certainly shorten the animal's life, its retained vitality turns into a support of the human's life force.

As much as the redeeming of animal lives connects individual animals and humans in the present existence, this relationship may as well extend beyond the frame of a human's current lifetime. When discussing the benefits of redeeming lives, a significant number of my interlocutors referred to the animals' ability for guiding humans in the

⁴¹ A *ba* is one of the terms used to address fathers in Amdo Tibetan, but it is also employed to refer to elder men of the community.

⁴² *sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa dar spyad/ sems can la bde skyid ldan spyad/ mar gyur gnam mkha'i mtha' dang mnyam pa'i sems can thams cad ngan song dang ngan 'gro gi sdug bsgal las thar spyad/ thar ba dang thams cad mkhyen pa'i go 'phang thob bya'i rgyu'i gis/ de ring nas zung khyod bshas nas sha mi za [...].* A *ba* Mgon po skyab's release prayer is very similar to those documented by Chos bstan rgyal (Chos bstan rgyal 2014: 173–174).

⁴³ One instance when this does happen is during slaughtering, in the moments preceding suffocation when herders express their gratitude to the animal.

afterlife from one state of existence to the other.⁴⁴ After the person who performed the releasing action or on whose behalf the action was performed dies, the *srog blu* animal assumes a psychopomp function: it appears in the intermediate Buddhist state (*bar do*) and assists that person in his or her difficult passage to the next life. Skäl bzang, a 48-year-old herder, described this encounter as follows:

After you die, you have to cross a big, big river—the Fordless River of the Dead, it is called. You must cross it, but there is no bridge. As you keep running up and down hopeless because there is no way to cross the river, the yaks, sheep and horses that you have released in this lifetime arrive at the *bar do*, and they carry you to the other side of the river. [Also], you have to travel [through] Yama's Grey Plain of the Dead. It is a huge, huge plain and you have to walk through it. If you have *srog blu* horses, yaks or sheep, they will carry you. This is what nomads say.⁴⁵

This psychopomp function attributed to *srog blu* animals is not shared by everyone though. While most of my interlocutors were familiar with it, the importance they attributed to the role of *srog blu* animals as guides in the intermediate *bar do* state differed significantly from one person to another.⁴⁶

Monastics I discussed the issue with also seemed to have differing, contradictory views on the psychopomp function of *srog blu* animals, some even dismissed it altogether. An incarnate lama from Gtsang Monastery⁴⁷ referred to those who shared such views as “[people] without knowledge of the [Buddhist] doctrine,”⁴⁸ and underlined the lengthening of present and future lives as the main effect of the life

⁴⁴ Chos bstan rgyal and Levine also refer to the liberated animal's role in ensuring a safe passage through the intermediate state and to the next rebirth (Chos bstan rgyal 2014: 174; Levine 2019: 10).

⁴⁵ *shi song nas khyod chu che/ che zhig la brgal dgos ni red/ gshin chu khams pa rab med zer go do go/ yin da min da chu la brgal dgos gal zam pa med la/ khyod chu la brgal thabs med par bkod pa med la yar mar rgyug nas bsdad yod dus da bar khyos zog ra lug ra rta de tsho tshe blu byed yod na 'chi khar thon 'jog rgyu red ya/ yong nas khyod khur nas chu'i phar gar bskyal 'jog ni red/ gshin rje'i gshin thang skya mor bskyod dgos ni red/ thang che che che zhig la rkang thang nas 'gro dgos rgyu red/ de dus yang khyos rta ra zog ra lug ra de tsho [...]* *srog blu yod na khyer nas 'gro rgyu red/ de mo bshad rgyu red 'brog pa gis.*

⁴⁶ Yong 'dzin skyid, a 24-year-old herder, said she was not familiar with *srog blu* animals guiding the deceased through their journey in the *bar do*, but that guardian dogs did. She knew this from elders in her community.

⁴⁷ Gtsang Monastery (Gtsang sgar don grub rab brtan gling) was founded in 1765 on the territory of the Gtsang A rig, one of the six *tsho ba* (i.e., tribes) of Sog po. In 1931, the monastery became part of the 'Ba' (Chin. Tongde 同德) district, which in the current administrative division belongs to the Mtsho lho (Chin. Hainan 海南) prefecture of the Qinghai province (Wallenböck 2017: 203).

⁴⁸ *chos lugs mi shes ni red.*

redeeming action. The lama juxtaposed this effect to the consequences of killing, which are considered to reduce the chances of a human rebirth and shorten the span of both present and future lives.

However, the idea that domestic animals may assist humans in their transitions across lifetimes has a long story in Tibet. It is documented in Old Tibetan funeral texts dating largely to the 9th and 10th centuries.⁴⁹ Contrary to the psychopomp animals sacrificed in early funerary rituals, present day *srog blu* animals are not killed but, instead, have their lifespans extended. Refraining from taking an animal's life is reciprocated on the part of the latter by its assistance in the human's afterlife. The practice of life redeeming, as understood by herders who recognize in their *srog blu* animals the ability for guiding them across lifetimes, brings the relationship between humans and their animals to temporal and spatial dimensions that go beyond those of the present existence. The connection that is established at the moment of the life redeeming action does not cease after the death of the involved beings but instead continues into the intermediate state and until the human consciousness reaches the next rebirth, in this way suggesting multiple temporalities of the life redeeming encounter.

The *srog blu* practice of pastoralists in Sog po and the ways people reflect on their connection to the liberated animals are diverse. Not all pastoralists perform the ritual alike nor do they imagine their relation to the animal whose life they have redeemed in the same way.⁵⁰ However, a concern for the health and longevity of humans and the idea that animals have a capacity to act upon them remain at the center of the *srog blu* encounter. Therefore, the vitality of humans is not viewed as a matter of humans alone, but as one that involves non-human members of the domestic group, i.e., the animals making up their herds. In the *srog blu* ritual, the removal of the obstacles binding the life of a herd animal, namely the power to take its life, lifts the obstructions to the human's lifespan. The vitality of the animal is not traded but instead multiplied: extending the life of the animal lengthens, in its turn, the lifespan of the human.

5. Attending to Animal Individuality

Sog po's mobile pastoralists live, work, and move across seasonal pastures with their yaks, sheep, and horses. The animals released by pastoralists are, with few exceptions, individuals belonging to the

⁴⁹ See Dotson 2018, Stein 1971, and Lalou 1952.

⁵⁰ Some herders do not conduct any ritual gesture upon the animal whose life is about to be redeemed.

herds they raise. Far from seeing them as “an undifferentiated mass of food on the hoof,” herders perceive their herds as “a social unit made up of individualities united by relations of descent, friendship, and hierarchy.”⁵¹ The intricate knowledge pastoralists have of the individuals that compose their herds and the relations between these animals is at the basis of their herding work and their livestock management decisions. The comprehensive naming system used to refer to yaks, sheep, and horses is indicative of how pastoralists’ senses become finely attuned to the morphological diversity characteristic of their herds. This naming system distinguishes animals according to age, sex, color and pattern of the coat, color of the muzzle, presence or absence of horns, shape of the horns and even strength or reproductive status.⁵² The particular treatment of the uncommon fortune animals (*g.yang*) mentioned earlier is yet another indication of the keen attention herders pay to animal singularity.

Released animals are individuals whose morphological and psychological traits, biographies and relations with other individuals within the herd are well known to human members of the household. It is precisely these particular characteristics of individual animals and the relations they develop with humans that herders look at in the process of selecting the animals to be released. Nyi ma selected the eight sheep whose lives he redeemed for his son by throwing a sash upon the flock, a method that is also mentioned in Holler’s study on animal release rituals,⁵³ but that I did not come across at any other time during my research in Sog po.

The choice of the animals to be released is constrained by the instructions given by a ritual specialist prescribing the release, as well as by the family’s economic situation. Herders seek to balance the burden that refraining from selling and slaughtering animals puts on their husbandry activity in different ways. As in the case of Shes rab’s illness, several households may contribute *srog blu* animals from their herds. Herders also privilege those animals the release of which has a smaller cost, such as female over male yaks. Besides being producers of milk, the former are important for the continuity of the herd for they bring offspring, while males are bred mainly for meat.⁵⁴ Beyond these constraints, however, there is room for choice, and herders often

⁵¹ Stépanoff *et al.* 2017: 66.

⁵² Chos bstan rgyal 2014: 117–120, 131–133, 143–145.

⁵³ The author reports that animals can be selected for release by throwing a bootlace upon the herd (Holler 2002: 216).

⁵⁴ Sulek (2019: 196) quotes a monk from Mgo log saying *tshe thar* should be performed with male animals rather than females, but the author observes that the pastoralists’ practice diverges from this rationale, for female and male animals are released evenly.

favour individuals with whom they have developed personal, affective bonds. Animals with particular morphological or psychological characteristics or a high reproductive capacity are also preferred.

Herders appreciate the morphological diversity of their yak herds which, in Sog po, are made up of a majority of black-colored animals. Individuals with white, grey, red or patterned coats are often the object of herders' life redeeming practice. Besides physical singularities, herders also pay keen attention to the reproductive health of their animals: exceptionally fertile individuals such as female yaks calving at a young age, as well as those who calve every year instead of the regular once every two years, are also the object of the life redeeming practice of pastoralists. Keeping them in the herd has the instrumental purpose of potentially increasing the herd's size. Finally, animals bearing a promise or a potential for fertility, such as female yak twins, are also given the *srog blu* status. Here, the practice of redeeming lives meets that of setting aside atypical animals who are seen by pastoralists as repositories of fortune (*g.yang*).

For herders, the practice of redeeming animal lives is often a way to express appreciation for particular animals with whom they develop personal bonds of affection. These bonds are created through the sustained and physically intimate contact that emerges from taking care of vulnerable animals as well as performing certain herding tasks. An example of the former are nursed sheep (*gso lug*): these lambs, after becoming orphans or being rejected by their mothers at birth, are raised simultaneously by the humans, who bottle-feed them lukewarm female yak milk diluted in water, and the sheep with whom they graze. The special circumstances of these lambs' upbringing change their behaviour in such a way that, instead of avoiding contact with humans as other sheep do, *gso lug* actively seek it by approaching humans and their domestic space where other herd animals seldom go. Herders—often women or children—who nurse these lambs equally develop a particular attachment to them. They pet them and may as well adorn them with bells or let them into the house or tent. Most of the times, nursed lambs are also bestowed with the status of *srog blu* animal and thus remain in the flock until they die of old age.

Some herding tasks, such as milking female yaks⁵⁵ or riding yaks and horses, require a close cooperation between humans and animals. In these joint actions, humans and animals reciprocally adapt to each other in the pursuit of a common goal.⁵⁶ These continued, physically intimate activities also create the conditions for the development of

⁵⁵ Milking is an exclusively female activity that involves women, female yaks, and their calves. Ewes' and mares' dairy products are not consumed in Tibet.

⁵⁶ Stépanoff *et al.* 2017: 66.

personal bonds between herders and individual animals, which often result in the practice of life redeeming. Women tend to select the tamest female yaks and those with a high milk yield. After Nyi ma's aunt Mtsho mo mentioned the connection of her yak milk cow to Shes rab, I asked her why this particular animal was chosen. She said its long teats made milking easier, and that it produced milk in abundance. Mtsho mo also appreciated its docile (*g.yung mo*) nature, as the animal did not kick while being milked and thus its front legs did not need to be tied. By stressing the animal's elevated milk yield, Mtsho mo's choice highlights the attention herders devote to signs of prosperity in their herds. Mtsho mo based her decision on the experience and knowledge of her yak milk cows, built through a regular and physically intimate practice of milking.⁵⁷ Mtsho mo's choice, therefore, recognizes the particular relationship she has developed with the animal over the course of this daily activity.

6. Conclusion

In Tibetan pastoral areas of the PRC, the freeing of animal lives has been promoted in recent times as a way of countering the faults of pastoralists' increased participation in the livestock herding market.⁵⁸ Worried about the high toll that the economic development has taken on the lives of herd animals, a number of charismatic Tibetan Buddhist leaders have encouraged pastoralists to refrain from selling and slaughtering their yaks and sheep. Releasing the lives of livestock animals is presented as the perfect opposite of sale and slaughter: it is a practice of compassion, a virtuous action that accrues merit and thus allows those who engage in it to influence their trajectory in the *samsāra*. The lamas and *mkhan pos* have themselves led massive release rituals, involving both Tibetan and Han Chinese followers, in which high numbers of animals have been freed as an enactment of compassion. The Buddhist notion of compassion, which is of universal character rather than being directed toward particular species or individual animals, has prompted such spectacular life liberation ceremonies. This is an important counterpoint to the more specific, local, and small-scale release activity discussed in the present article.

The animal release practice of Sog po pastoralists brings to light the attention herders pay to animal individuality and the particular

⁵⁷ For a description of women-female yak interactions during milking, see Tan 2016: 3–4.

⁵⁸ For an analysis of the ambiguities and contradictions of Tibetans' market participation, or lack thereof, in the current context of state-led economic development, see Yeh 2013.

relationships they cultivate with herd animals. This adds depth to the rather uniform view of livestock animals voiced by the religious masters at the head of the *tshe thar* movement at Bla rung sgar. In their calls for animal release, these Buddhist leaders focus on what is shared between animals and humans—namely the ability to experience fear and suffering—and filial bonds in past and potentially future lifetimes. By placing the value of life at the center, their discourses not only flatten out the differences between various animal species and individuals, but also those between humans and animals. Pastoralists, in contrast, search for particular morphological traits or productive capacity in their herd animals and favour individuals with whom they nurture personal bonds, often developed over the course of close interactions.

In the grasslands of Sog po, where the echoes of the *tshe thar* movement launched at Bla rung sgar are only tenuous, pastoralists acknowledge the positive karmic dimensions of freeing animal lives and refer to its opposites, i.e., the slaughtering and selling of livestock, in very negative terms. However, herders in Sog po do take part in these activities: they remain actively engaged with the livestock market and have not given up selling animals for slaughter, neither temporarily nor permanently. Ending and extending the lives of animals coexist, and the number of animals whose lives are protected is actually higher in prosperous households with large herds.⁵⁹

For pastoralists in Sog po, sparing a herd animal sale and slaughter is much more than just a meritorious act: it is a therapeutic and longevity practice, a way of securing a safer passage through the afterlife, and an expression of personal bonds a herder develops with particular individuals of the household herd. In the *srog blu* act, the extension of animal lives affects, in its turn, the vitality or life force of humans. Similarly, the offering of livestock to deities and the setting aside of fortune animals contribute to the strengthening of the vitality of divine beings and other members of the herds. All these practices illustrate how the vitality of herd animals is entangled with that of humans and divine beings that are part of the pastoralists' social world.

⁵⁹ It is difficult to imagine how pastoralists could completely abstain from selling animals while keeping husbandry as their main economic activity. Gaerrang's dissertation shows how pastoralists in his research site did not renew their vows of refraining from selling animals after a period of three years (Gaerrang 2012). In Sog po, herders employ different strategies to limit or reduce their participation in the livestock market, without refraining completely from engaging in it.

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A Yak, Na rak and Potalaka: Folios of the So-Called “Gyalpo Kachem” in US Museum Collections

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his article presents the results of an investigation into manuscript exemplars of some important early Tibetan literary traditions, among others the famous *Maṇi bka' 'bum*. This multi-volume treasure (*gter ma*) work includes the biography of Emperor Khri srong brtsan (d. 649), also known as Srong btsan sgam po.¹ In addition, the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* contains rituals and advice devised by the ruler, and so it is traditionally split into three parts, the *sūtra* (*mdo skor*), *sāadhanā* (*sgrub skor*), and advice sections (*zhal gdams*). The advice section, attributed to the revelation of Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192), includes instructions for Avalokiteśvara-based practices taught by that deity's worldly emanation (*sprul pa*), Srong btsan sgam po himself.² Nyang ral plays a role later on in our article and had a special devotion to Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion who was increasingly seen as the patron deity of Tibet.³ As a whole,

¹ On traditional Tibetan Buddhist histories and their depictions of Srong btsan sgam po, see most importantly the magisterial Sørensen 1994. Per Sørensen uses the Delhi two-volume edition the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* (1975), reproduced from a print of the no longer extant Spungs thang (Punakha) blocks. In this article, I have also incorporated the Sde dge xylograph edition (2000) into my analysis. However, many more exemplars of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* could be incorporated into this comparative exercise in the future—for example those captured in the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project microfilms and especially the so-called “Royal Print,” on which see Ehrhard 2013.

² Matthew T. Kapstein's chapter on this *gter ma* master work offers an excellent introduction to its relation to Nyang ral (Kapstein 2000: 141–162). See Ehrhard 2000: 207 on the role that Grub thob Dngos grub played in the treasure-text revelation, according to later tradition. Bradford L. Phillips (2004) analyses the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, and later *Maṇi bka' 'bum chen mo* by Gu ru Chos dbang, in relation to the *om maṇi padme hūṃ* chant's move from apotropaic *dhāraṇī* through tantric mantra to “post-tantric” prayer. His work is especially useful for linking the biography of Nyang ral himself with themes in the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* and other works attributed to him (on which see Doney 2014: 8–22 and Hirshberg 2016).

³ Phillips (2004: 196) claims that Nyang ral “prizes a simplified deity cult over even the most refined of esoteric contemplative techniques,” because “the links between the prophetic authority of the king, dissemination of the Dharma, the will of the

the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* was able to ride the crest of a growing wave of devotion to Avalokiteśvara,⁴ and in turn, cemented Tibet's unique relationship with this bodhisattva and his mantra *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ* in the person of Srong btsan sgam po.

The life story and teachings of Srong btsan sgam po eventually became hugely popular in Tibet, including within the flourishing genre of historiography. As is well known, passages corresponding to parts of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* can be found in the *Bka' chems ka khol ma* attributed to the revelation of Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna (982–1054), in the *Me tog snying po* and *Mes dbon gsum gyi rnam thar* (henceforth *MTN* and *MBNT*), both religious histories attributed to Nyang ral, the *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (henceforth *GLR*) attributed to Bla ma dam pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan (1312–1375), and the *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (henceforth *KGT*) attributed to Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba (1504–1566), among other works.⁵

Manuscript folios held in museums in Brooklyn, Newark, and Los Angeles also contain text corresponding to *inter alia* parts of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*. They were kindly donated by the Zimmerman family at some point during the late 20th century.⁶ These have not been closely

deity, and the divinely ordained dominion are clearly established" in the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* (Phillips 2004: 204)

⁴ Sam van Schaik (2006) has shown that Avalokiteśvara practice was well under way in the 10th century, at least at the fringes of Tibetan cultural hegemony, and so "the composition of Avalokiteśvara material in the 11th and 12th centuries occurred in a culture in which Avalokiteśvara was already a significant presence at the popular level of Buddhist practice and devotion" (Ibid: 69).

⁵ See Davidson 2003 and Warner 2011 on the *Bka' chems ka khol ma*, which largely corresponds to the biographical portion of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*. For reasons that will become clear below, the *Bka' chems ka khol ma* does not play any part in this article. The *magnum opus* religious history titled the *Me tog snying po* (*MTN*) narrates the history of the Dharma, from the teachings of the historical Buddha right up to Nyang ral's own times, including a long section on Srong btsan sgam po. I rely primarily on the manuscript published in 1985 by R.O. Meisezahl. The biographical anthology, *MBNT*, consists of three biographies devoted to Tibet's imperial Dharma-kings, Srong btsan sgam po, Khri srong lde btsan, and Khri gtsug lde btsan (Ral pa can; d. 841), and is only extant in one *dbu med* manuscript exemplar at present, published in 1980. The *GLR* is the history of which Sørensen (1994) made a study and translation. I use the 18th-century Sde dge xylograph edition, as he does (Sørensen 1994: 36–37). The *KGT* is also a monumental history of a similar size to the *MTN* but greater in scope, since it was composed in the 16th century and includes accounts of the major Tibetan Buddhist traditions up until that point in history. I shall draw data from section *ja*, published in 1962 by Lokesh Chandra as *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, Part 4.

⁶ Perhaps they were donated in the early 1980s, given the *sigla* "1984 84," "M.84" and "84" that begin the reference for each Newark, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), and Brooklyn folio respectively (see below), and the fact that the LACMA folios were only included in the second edition of Pratapaditya Pal's catalog (Pal 1990), but not his first, which was published in 1983 (Pal 1983).

compared with the literary tradition on Srong btsan sgam po before, but have acquired the tentative title of “*Gyalpo Kachem*” folios (see below), suggesting that they were believed to form part of the treasure testament (*bka’ chems*) of this king (*rgyal po*). In this article, I shall problematize this ascription by identifying the text in those folios to which I have access with its closest correspondence among the Tibetan works mentioned above. I shall thereby show that one folio contains text from another tradition, that of the *Na rak dong sprugs* (“Churner of the Depths of Hell”), which does not have any obvious link with the *Maṇi bka’ ’bum* or a single “*Gyalpo Kachem*.” In conclusion, I shall indicate some intriguing links between the content of these folios and Nyang ral. These connections suggest that the folios were once part of an anthology of teachings, prayers, and narratives, much but not all of which is loosely focused on Avalokiteśvara and Srong btsan sgam po, but linked through traditional attribution of the original works in the anthology to this 12th-century treasure revealer.

1. *The Folios*

The beautifully illustrated folios that form the basis for this article were donated by Jack and Muriel Zimmerman to the Brooklyn and Newark Museums (figures 1 and 2) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA).⁷ These pages share striking similarities that suggest that they all come from the same manuscript, or at least were all created by the same group of scribes, artists and editors. Every folio is stained blue-black,⁸ and each page contains seven lines of text written on it in a gold-colored script, flanked by two illustrations. A label below each illustration identifies the figure, and above, a mantra; unfortunately, both are always only partially legible.⁹ The same holds true for the folio numbers usually visible but not wholly intelligible on the left-hand side of each *recto* page (for an example, see Fig. 2).

⁷ See the catalogs of Reynolds *et al.* (1986: 150n2) and Pal (1990: 268–270).

⁸ Probably using a mixture of animal brains, yak-hide glue, and soot, which is then burnished (see Canary 2014 on this technique).

⁹ The buddhas on the visible side of the Brooklyn Museum folio (Fig. 1) appear to be Vajraprabhā (Rdo rje’[i] ’o[d]) on the left and “gc(ag?) gi dkyil ’(o)d” on the right. The visible side of the pictured Newark Museum folio (Fig. 2) corresponds to what Reynolds *et al.* (1986: 149) call the “reverse” of folio 1984 84.396 B. The inscription beneath the buddha on the left seems to read: “...kyi...mtsho...” The Buddha Prabhāṣī (“Od ky[i] dpal) is identifiable on the right.

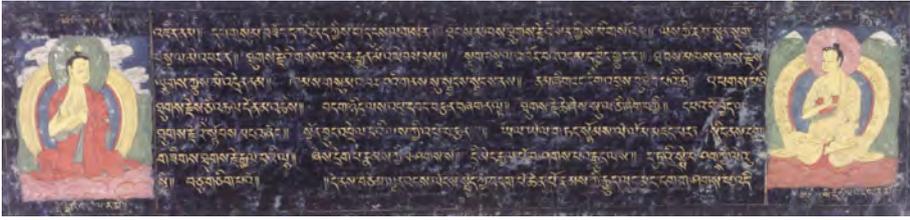


Fig. 1 — Folio from the so-called “Gyalpo Kachem”; Tibet; ink, color and gold on paper, h. 6 7/8 x 22 1/8 in. (17.5 x 55.6 cm); Brooklyn Museum, 84.207.1 verso; Gift of Jack and Muriel Zimmerman

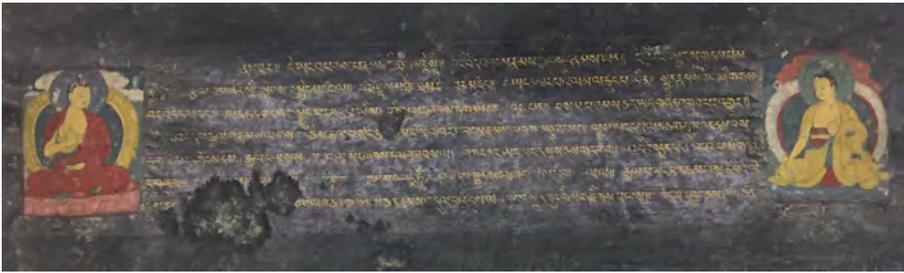


Fig. 2 — Folio from the so-called “Gyalpo Kachem”; ink, color and gold on paper, h. 6 7/8 x 22 1/8 in. (17.5 x 55.6 cm); Newark Museum, 1984 84.396 B recto; Gift of Jack and Muriel Zimmerman

The illustrations on the Newark and Brooklyn folios depict seated buddhas with golden skin and black hair, wearing red, gold, or yellow robes and surrounded by variously colored halos and nimbuses as well as stylized landscapes.¹⁰ It remains unclear which particular set of buddhas, if any, is represented here.¹¹ The figures on the LACMA folios include both these somewhat somber buddhas and more varied and animated *mahāsiddhas* (*grub thob chen po*) or “great accomplished ones,” including monks and ascetics depicted in lively poses against similar minimalistic landscapes to the buddhas above.¹² Pratapaditya Pal states that two of the labels clearly refer to *mahāsiddhas* Bha ga na and Sgra mkhan zhabs, but that their iconographic features are extremely simplified.¹³

¹⁰ See the Newark Museum catalog (Reynolds *et al.* 1986: 148–150) for more details.

¹¹ Valrae Reynolds, Amy Heller, and Janet Gyatso suggest that the buddhas may represent the Thirty-Five Buddhas of Confession or the Thousand Buddhas of the Good Aeon (Reynolds *et al.* 1986: 150n3). However, Heller has more recently stated that this cannot be established firmly without a complete set of illustrations and accompanying inscriptions (Heller, private communication, June 19, 2017).

¹² The LACMA catalog also notes difference in the colors used to depict the buddhas and *mahāsiddhas* respectively: “The Buddhas are given green or blue aureoles with white or yellow flame borders. The aureoles of the mahasiddhas are uniformly red. [...] All Buddhas have yellow complexions, but the mahasiddhas are given skins of pink or brown” (Pal 1990: 268).

¹³ Pal 1990: 268.

All of the exemplars are now ascribed dates between the 15th and 17th centuries and referred to as “*Gyalpo Kachem*” folios in print and online. This date and title were apparently introduced in the Newark Museum catalog and followed in the LACMA catalog and online on the websites of the Brooklyn, Newark, and LACMA collections. Pal dates this manuscript very early, to *circa* 1500, and states that the folios form part of “a manuscript that has been tentatively identified as *Gyalpo Kachem* (Will and testament of the king),” further implying that he means by this the *Bka’ chems ka khol ma* when he says that it was buried by Srong btsan sgam po and recovered by Atiśa.¹⁴ Although he does not mention the Brooklyn folios, Pal is aware of the Newark folios and refers readers to Reynolds *et al.* for more information. The Newark catalog entry dates the manuscript to the 15th century, so also very early,¹⁵ and this catalog is actually a little contradictory or at least unclear in its identification of the folio with a particular work. It first tentatively suggests that this is the *Rgyal po bka’ chems* revealed by Atiśa in the 11th century, which is the judgement paraphrased in Pal.¹⁶ However, it then goes on to say: “The *Gyalpo Kachem* may be one of the many sections of the large series of texts called the *Mani k’abum*.”¹⁷ The Brooklyn Museum web pages for these folios date them to the 16th–17th century but follow the Newark catalog in describing them as containing confessional buddhas and the “*Gyalpo Kachem*.”¹⁸

Some of the folios are partially reproduced in the catalogs of the Newark Museum and LACMA, and /or online, but often only one side of each folio and not in a high enough resolution to be able to read the text properly. However, it has been possible through the kindness of Joan Cummins (Brooklyn), Bindu Gude (LACMA), and Elena Pakhoutova (Rubin Museum of Art) to acquire photographs of both

¹⁴ Pal 1990: 268.

¹⁵ Reynolds *et al.* 1986: 148. Amy Heller has more recently suggested dating the manuscript to the late 15th or early 16th century, following Pal (Heller, private conversation, June 19, 2017). The website of the Himalayan Art Resources dates these folios to between 1500–1599 CE (<https://www.himalayanart.org/items/86937>. Accessed May 26, 2020), but I will make no further conclusions on the dating of these folios in this article.

¹⁶ Pal 1990: 268. The Newark catalog states: “A preliminary investigation leads to the tentative identification of the manuscript as the *Gyalpo Kachem* (‘Will and Testament of the King’), a *terma* text which, according to tradition, was written by Songtsen Gampo in the seventh century and found by Atisha in the eleventh century” (Reynolds *et al.* 1986: 148).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 150n2.

¹⁸ See, for example, the page displaying Brooklyn Folio 84.207.1 (<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/112012>. Accessed May 26, 2020).

sides of some of these folios. This has allowed me to transliterate the texts for the first time (see the Appendices).¹⁹

No translation has been attempted here, due to space constraints and the greater importance of an accurate transliteration and comparison of the text at present. None of the folios contains a colophon, and their source texts are ultimately various works. However, the above similarities in style suggest that they all form part of one manuscript, and their content is not so different that it rules out a single anthology of different Rnying ma Buddhist works.

In this article, where possible an identification has been made with corresponding text in published editions of the works reflected on the pages of these precious folios. As will be seen, the *Bka' chems ka khol ma* biography of Srong btsan sgam po as Avalokiteśvara plays no role in what follows. This is because the folios below mostly cover teachings and ritual practices rather than narrative and, where they do recount the life story of the bodhisattva-king, they do not resemble the corresponding text of the *Bka' chems ka khol ma* as closely as they resemble other witnesses from different sources. In contrast, the advice (*zhal gdams*) section of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* has proved useful. I have compared the folios with the Delhi (1975) and Sde dge xylograph (2000) editions of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, and marginally favor the latter as the closest parallel to the folios' text among the exemplars available to me. Where a text is not found in those editions, I have used the closest correlate among other works at my disposal. These include not only parts of the *MBNT* biographical work and the *MTN*, *KGT*, and *GLR* histories related to the life of Srong btsan sgam po but also, surprisingly, the main *tantra* of the *Na rak dong sprugs* cycle, known as the *Dri med bshags rgyud*. By drawing attention to these correspondences, I do not mean to suggest that the folios contain copies of these exemplars, or even necessarily the works of which the exemplars are themselves copies. After describing the content and affiliations of each folio in turn, in the *Discussion* section I assess what kind of manuscript(s) or work(s) these folios could partially represent.

¹⁹ Where my transliteration of Tibetan does not follow the standard modified Wylie system, it accords with the more rigorous codicological system adopted by editors of the Old Tibetan Documents Online portal (see under "Editorial Policy" at <https://otdo.aa-ken.jp/>. Accessed May 26, 2020). Where a substantial portion of text is obscured by dirt or wear, etc., I indicate the extent of this obscuration on each line with the note "[± x syllables (obscured)]." I have not been so thorough in noting the many codicological aspects of the comparative material since these are secondary to the use to which I am putting these materials, namely finding the folios' main affiliations in wider Tibetan literature.

2. The Newark Folios

The Newark Museum holds two so-called “Gyalpo Kachem” folios. They are distinguished from each other as Folio 1984 84.396 A and Folio 1984 84.396 B (here, Folio A and Folio B for short).²⁰

Folio A consists of almost the whole of an aspirational prayer (*smon lam*) to be reborn on Mount Potalaka, the celestial home of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Folio A is missing the beginning and end of the prayer (see its transliteration in Appendix 1), which were presumably found on the preceding and following folios of the original manuscript. This prayer is found complete in the Sde dge (2000) and Delhi (1975) xylograph editions of the *Maṇi bka’ ’bum*, and these two editions are virtually identical to each other here.²¹ They also both stand very close to the readings in Newark Folio A, with the Sde dge edition bearing slightly more resemblance to it in minor orthographic choices (again, see Appendix 1). However, Folio A omits some iterations of the *oṃ ma ṇi padme hūṃ* mantra given in both the Sde dge and Delhi editions. Also, Folio A (*recto* l. 2) gives “gzugs snang bye brag ji snyed kun” where the Sde dge and Delhi editions both read: “gzugs kyi bye brag ji snyed pa.” More importantly, the Sde dge (2000) and Delhi (1975) editions include nine *rkang pa* (lines of poetry) that are missing on the *verso* of Folio A.²² Such a divergence, if it were to be identified as an indicative error, could help to further narrow down the list of possible sources for this text in future.

Folio B contains two distinct passages: first the end of a set of teachings by Srong btsan sgam po also covered in two of the LACMA folios (below), and second a narrative found in some historiographical sources in the chapter relating his birth, but tellingly not in the biography section (*lo rgyus chen mo*) of the *Maṇi bka’ ’bum*. The Newark catalog states that “folio B includes a narrative on the death of

²⁰ The *versos* of A and B (B on top of A) are visible on the Newark Museum Collection website (<http://gallery.newarkmuseum.org/media/view/Objects/3174432/308570?t:state:flow=c2e13d45-4227-4824-ada9-6c5ea7e3e1af>). Accessed May 26, 2020) but seemingly there exists no stable URL for an entry on these folios.

²¹ Based on this comparison, I found the Delhi edition either identical to the Sde dge edition or to resemble the so-called “Gyalpo Kachem” folios slightly less closely than the Sde dge edition, so I have favored the latter here and placed it in a column next to Newark Folio A. The prayer also exists in a stand-alone edition, *Ri po ta lar skye ba’i smon lam* (1970), a xylographic print from blocks preserved at Dgon steng bshad sgrub chos gling Monastery in Solu, eastern Nepal (Phillips 2004: 273n77).

²² Sde dge (2000 vol. 2: 72.3–4; *wan* 36b3–4) and Delhi (1975 vol. 2: 99.4–5; *wan* part I, 50a4–5) give exactly the same reading of this added section: “*sphyan ras gzigs kyi zhabs drung du // skye shi med pa’i sku brnyes nas // chos kyi bdud rtsi ’thung bar shog // oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ | bdag gis smon lam ’di btab pas // ’gro ba rigs drug sems can rnams // so so’i sdig sgrub kun byang nas // sdug bsngal ma lus zhi gyur te // byang chub lam la rab zhugs nas //*.”

Songtsen Gampo and his merging with Avalokiteshvara."²³ In fact, it begins with one of his speeches that is found at that point in only *some* versions of his life story. In Appendix 2, I have not given a version of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* in the column to the right of Folio B *recto* because the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* is not the closest available correlate.²⁴ The *GLR* stands closer to Folio B *recto*, to judge from the 18th-century Sde dge xylograph edition.²⁵ Yet, this history agrees in a number of places with the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* against Folio B, whereas the *KGT* history resembles Folio B *recto* even closer, though not entirely. Of especial note is the fact that the *KGT* and Folio B both omit mention until later of the prince, to whom the speech is addressed in the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* and *GLR*. In Folio B, this speech is addressed to the attendant subjects (*'khor 'bangs*). Thus, I have included the *KGT* in the column to the right of Folio B in Appendix 2, for comparison, but it will be clear that it is not a perfect match.

The narrative on Folio B then switches (at *recto* l. 6) to relate the birth of Srong btsan sgam po, emanated from Avalokiteśvara in order to tame the beings of Tibet, and goes on to describe his father (one assumes Gnam ri slon mtshan, but no name is given) traveling north in order to hunt yak. (See the transliteration in Appendix 2, together with comparative material from other sources that correspond to the text.) Here, Folio B only partially and roughly resembles the beginning of chapter nine of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* account of his life, which differs especially in describing four light rays emanating from Avalokiteśvara and traveling to Nepal, China and two places in Tibet, whereas Folio B only recounts his emanation based on the three types of awareness that beings on different spiritual levels had of the event. The *Maṇi bka' 'bum* and other allied accounts also lack the description of his father's fateful yak hunting trip.²⁶ The *MTN* history attributed to Nyang ral contains both of these elements, and so stands closer to the narrative of Folio B, but for two small and one very large section of extra text included in the *MTN* narrative.²⁷ The closest resemblance is found

²³ Reynolds *et al.* 1986: 150n3.

²⁴ The Delhi (1975) and Sde dge (2000) editions of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, which are once again almost identical to each other, show the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* to differ in orthography from Folio B *recto* and omit some text found in the latter. However, I have provided both of these witnesses in Appendix 2 after the more closely corresponding witnesses.

²⁵ *GLR* (Sde dge 76b6–77a3); translated in Sørensen 1994: 329–330.

²⁶ See, for example, the Delhi edition (1975 vol. 1: 201.2–3; ^e part I, 101a2–3.) and the other sources compared in footnotes to Sørensen 1994: 159–161.

²⁷ The *MTN* (177a2–180a2) account is transliterated in Appendix 2. The first section of extra text (177a2–180a2) describes how the miraculous bodily signs, actions and speech of the newly born Srong btsan sgam po show him to be an emanation destined to be the lord of the black-headed men—a fact which his father recognizes. The second major inclusion, marked with ellipses in Appendix 2, runs

with the *MBNT*, which lacks the larger of the two sections of extra text in the *MTN*, so this witness has been placed in the right-hand column directly next to Folio B in Appendix 2. However, even this does not perfectly correspond to Folio B.²⁸ See the *Discussion* section of this article for more detail on this important folio.

3. The Brooklyn Folios

The Brooklyn folios are numbered 84.207.1 and 84.207.2 but have received no published catalog entry yet (I shall here refer to them as Folios 1 and 2). Folio 1,²⁹ the *verso* of which is reproduced on the Himalayan Art Resources (HAR) website,³⁰ does not correspond to any works concerning Srong btsan sgam po. However, it strongly resembles part of a work of the *Na rak dong sprugs* genre contained in the Gting skyes *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* and *Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, which is known as the *Dri med bshags rgyud*.³¹ As can be seen from the side-by-side transliteration in Appendix 3, Folio 1 closely corresponds

from 178a5 to 179a5 and continues the narrative of the young Srong btsan sgam po, after which it recounts the events covered in Folio B. Jampa L. Panglung, who first identified and insightfully compared the hunt narrative in the *MTN* and *MBNT*, gives a good precis of the long extra text: “Srong-btsan sgam-po [...] soon after his birth had gone into retreat for twelve years and then remembers the promise he had given to the Bodhisattva to tame the black-headed Tibetans. Therefore, he asks his parents to be installed on the throne. On the occasion of his accession to the throne rays of light emanate from his body” (Panglung 1992: 666).

²⁸ *MBNT* (53.6–55.4; 27a6–28a4) sometimes confuses reference to the prince (*rgyal bu*) with the king (*rgyal po*), which Folio B does not. In this and other ways, Folio B has “better readings,” i.e., less apparent mistakes, as can be seen when the hunt section is compared with the *MBNT* and exemplars of the *MTN* in Panglung’s (1992: 666–667) diplomatic edition of the manuscript published in 1985. However, this of course does not mean that Folio B retains older readings than those witnesses since fewer “mistakes” could be evidence of hypercorrection. Lastly, *MBNT* (54.3–4; 27b3–4) includes a little extra detail concerning Srong btsan sgam po’s magical appearance as a child, also found in the *MTN* (177a2–180a2) among its longer additions, but not included in Folio B at the end of *verso* l. 2 or beginning of l. 3.

²⁹ *Buddhas of Confession: Folio from a Gyalpo Kachem Manuscript*, 16th–17th century. Ink, color, and gold on paper, 6 7/8 x 22 1/8 in (17.5 x 55.6 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Muriel and Jack Zimmerman, [accession no.] 84.207.1 (<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/112012>. Accessed May 26, 2020).

³⁰ Manuscript Pages: Illuminated Pages (item no. 86937). Tibet, 1500–1599, 17.46 x 55.88 cm (6.88 x 22 in), paper, Brooklyn Museum of Art, acc. #BMA 84.207.1, gift of Muriel and Jack Zimmerman. <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/86937>. Accessed May 26, 2020.

³¹ The full title is *Dam tshig thams cad kyi nyams chag skong ba'i lung lnga bshags pa thams cad kyi rgyud dri ma med pa'i rgyal po*. This work, the main *tantra* of the *Na rak dong sprugs* cycle, is discussed in Kapstein 2010; Kapstein 2016: 201–218. My thanks go to Matthew T. Kapstein for alerting me to these discussions.

to the end of chapter eleven of the *Dri med bshags rgyud* as found in the Gting skyes *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* (vol. *dza*, 251a1–251b5) but also, at some points, to orthography of the *Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa* (vol. *pa*, 51b2–52b2) witness. The main difference, which precludes me using the latter as the closest comparable exemplar, is a single *rkang pa* (line of poetry) added to the *Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa* (vol. *pa*, 51b5) but not found in either of the other two witnesses: “*sdig pa'i las rnams byams mgon khyed la bshags //*.” Generally, though, their readings all stand very close to each other. Brooklyn Folio 1 and Newark Folio B, introduced above, are the most important witnesses for problematizing the ascription of these folios to a single “*Gyalpo Kachem*” (see the following *Discussion* section).

Brooklyn Folio 2,³² the *recto* of which is reproduced on the Himalayan Art Resources (HAR) website,³³ returns us to the same context as the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*. It accords with the “profound oral instructions” occurring within the “small cycle of oral instructions of profound points” that Srong btsan sgam po delivers to his family (including his queens by marriage) in the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, but at an earlier point in the teachings than those covered in Newark Folio B above and some of the LACMA folios below. The transliteration of Folio 2 in Appendix 4 is set in comparison with the corresponding part of the Sde dge (2000) edition of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, to which it most closely corresponds. Here, Srong btsan sgam po speaks to two of his queens, ladies from Zhang zhung and Ru yong respectively, who are missing in the Delhi (1975) xylograph edition of this speech.³⁴ This discrepancy may be explained once further exemplars of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* can be compared, but suggests a parting of the ways at some point in the transmission of these teachings that could help establish recensional differences in the future.

³² *Buddhas of Confession: Folio from a Gyalpo Kachem Manuscript*, 16th–17th century. Ink, color, and gold on paper, 6 7/8 x 22 1/8 in (17.5 x 55.6 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Muriel and Jack Zimmerman, 84.207.2. (<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/112013>. Accessed May 26, 2020).

³³ Manuscript Pages: Illuminated Pages (item no. 86938). Tibet, 1500–1599, 17.46 x 55.88 cm (6.88 x 22 in), paper, Brooklyn Museum of Art, acc. #BMA 84.207.2, gift of Muriel and Jack Zimmerman. <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/86938>. Accessed May 26, 2020.

³⁴ Folio 2a.3 ends the king's advice to Queen (*jo mo*) Zhang zhung za 'Chi ba, which should follow the advice that he gives to his father, mother and Nepalese and Chinese queens as it does in the Sde dge edition. In contrast, the Delhi edition passes from Srong btsan sgam po's advice to his Chinese queen to his advice to his son, Prince Gung srong gung btsan. Compare the Sde dge (2000: 397.2–398.4; *wam* 199a2–199b4) and Delhi (1975 vol. 2: 11.2; *wam* part I, 6a2) editions.

4. The LACMA Folios

The LACMA folios are referred to online as M.84.171.5, M.84.171.6, M.84.171.7, M.84.272.3, and M.84.272.4.³⁵ The text of Folio M.84.272.3 is too faint and obscured to transcribe reliably at this stage,³⁶ and close-up images of both sides of folio M.84.272.4 have not yet become available.³⁷ Thus, they will be left out of this article, and the others will be referred to as Folios 5, 6, and 7.

Folio 5 recounts a speech of Srong btsan sgam po that, in the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, is given in response to the request of his son, Gung srong gung btsan. It is found in a number of other sources, including the *GLR* and *KGT* histories, whose witnesses are provided in Appendix 5. The *recto* has a large area of dirt/discoloration on the page, making a number of characters illegible.

Per Sørensen identifies this text in the *GLR* with the *Gab pa mngon phyung*, “Revelation of the Hidden,” which probably circulated as an independent early Tibetan Buddhist teaching before being incorporated into the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* and attributed to Srong btsan sgam po.³⁸ However, the text in Folio 5 stands closer to the *GLR* account than to the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, or the *KGT* (in which it is also found). The folio text lacks a number of the *rkang pa* (lines of poetry) given in corresponding passages of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, *GLR*, and *KGT* but at one point the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* omits one *rkang pa* found in Folio 5, *GLR*, and *KGT*: “*gsal sgrib gnyis su ngas ma mthong //*” (and variants).³⁹ Of the two latter witnesses, *GLR* agrees with Folio 5 more often in orthography and other minor details, so I have placed *GLR* next to Folio 5 in Appendix 5.

³⁵ Central Tibet, circa 1500; Manuscripts; Opaque watercolor and gold on paper. Image: 3 1/4 x 3 in. (8.26 x 7.62 cm); Sheet: 7 x 22 in. (17.78 x 55.88 cm); Anonymous gift. See Pal 1990: 268–270 (<http://collections.lacma.org/search/site/gyalpo%2520kachem>. Accessed May 26, 2020).

³⁶ An image of the *recto* is provided online (<http://collections.lacma.org/node/170486>. Accessed May 26, 2020) and, from what is legible, it appears to comprise teachings on *dharmaṭā* and *sūnyatā* beyond the 84,000 *kleśas* (*nyon mongs pa brgyad khri bzhi stong*) rather than narrative. The *verso* contains the mantra *om maṇi padme hūṃ* and so is probably situated within the same context as the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*.

³⁷ An image of the *recto* of folio M.84.272.4 is online (<http://collections.lacma.org/node/170462>. Accessed May 26, 2020) and seems to contain teachings concerning *bodhicitta*, the guru’s advice (*bla ma'i gdams ngag*) and the six limbs of the Great Compassionate One’s (Avalokiteśvara) means of teaching (*thugs rje chen po bshad thabs yan lag drug go /*), once again fitting into the same genre as the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*.

³⁸ See Sørensen 1994: 315n961; 316n966; 585–586.

³⁹ Compare LACMA Folio 5, *recto* l. 5 with *GLR* (Sde dge edition, 74a2), *KGT* (*ja* 50b3), and the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* (1975 vol. 2: 644.6; *wam* part II, 13b6).

Folio 6 continues the same advice after a break. It ends the *Gab pa mngon phyung* speech proper, although *verso* l. 7 ends “*ces rgyal pos dgongs pa*” and so lacks the full identification of the teaching as the *Rgyal po dgongs pa mngon phyung*, a secondary title of the *Gab pa mngon phyung*.⁴⁰ The text found in the *Mañi bka' 'bum* corresponding to the missing text between LACMA Folios 5 and 6 consists of about one folio's worth. Whether this missing folio is still extant, or was discarded since it was not illuminated, is a matter for further research or speculation. Newark Folio B *recto* contains the end of the wider set of *Gab pa mngon phyung*-related teachings and is separated from Folio 6 by about two folios' worth of text, which is also now missing. The *Mañi bka' 'bum* stands closer to Folio 6 than the *GLR* or *KGT*, in contrast to the situation in Folio 5, so I have chosen to place the former in the column next to Folio 6 in Appendix 6.⁴¹

Finally, in Folio 7, the Nang blon Sna chen po asks for and receives advice from Srong btsan sgam po (*recto* l. 4–5). This resembles an earlier part of the advice section of the *Mañi bka' 'bum* to that just discussed, taking place only ten folios after the advice given in Brooklyn Folio B (approximating based on the Sde dge edition). See the transliteration in Appendix 7.

At first glance, these folios could all conceivably quote from the advice section of the *Mañi bka' 'bum*. However, the crucial witness of Newark Folio B indicates that they are not simply partial copies of either the *Mañi bka' 'bum* or another single “*Gyalpo Kachem*” work already known to scholars. As such, these folios may offer variant readings for the underlying *Gab pa mngon phyung* teachings and/or advice attributed to Srong btsan sgam po, on which the *Mañi bka' 'bum*, *GLR*, and *KGT* are based. Moreover, some of these divergences could still help to ascertain which recension or work their text most closely corresponds to, if they are identified as indicative errors in the future. From what can be seen online of folios M.84.272.3 and M.84.272.4, they also appear to contain religious advice focused on Avalokiteśvara, but their exact affiliations remain to be identified.

5. Discussion

In this section, I shall not deal with the folios in the same order as above but rather explicate their relations with each other and how they

⁴⁰ See Sørensen 1994: 585, 586n6 on the various titles of this teaching and parts of the *Gab pa mngon phyung*-related speeches in *GLR* and other sources.

⁴¹ The differences are only slight here, but the *GLR* and to a lesser extent *KGT* add some words not found in Folio 6 or the *Mañi bka' 'bum*. The latter agrees with the folio in some of its choices of words too.

may have looked as part of a single manuscript.

None of the text in any of the folios extant at present could be said to constitute part of a complete biography of Srong btsan sgam po akin to the *Bka' chems ka khol ma* or the *Lo rgyus chen mo* section of *Maṅi bka' 'bum*. The narrative in Newark Folio B (discussed in more detail below) does recount his birth and could conceivably have carried on to provide his complete life story, but its placement *after* the teachings of Srong btsan sgam po make this unlikely.

Thus, we begin with the second volume of the *Maṅi bka' 'bum* and especially the advice section. Newark Folio A comprises almost the whole of a prayer to be reborn on Avalokiteśvara's Mount Potalaka, which most resembles the Sde dge (2000) xylograph edition of the *Maṅi bka' 'bum*. The latter work places this prayer early on in its second volume, but it is unclear where it is placed in the hypothetical Zimmerman manuscript—if such a single entity ever existed. Interestingly, the *Maṅi bka' 'bum* attributes this prayer to the revelation of Nyang ral, but Folio A *verso* l. 7 ends just before this point in the corresponding text.⁴²

Brooklyn Folio 2 consists of part of a speech by Srong btsan sgam po, also occurring in the advice section of the *Maṅi bka' 'bum*. However, Folio 2 lacks the more explicit markers of being incorporated into a *Maṅi bka' 'bum*, such as the Avalokiteśvara mantra and praise: “*Oṃ ma ṅi padme hūṃ | thugs rje chen po la phyags 'tshal lo ||*.”⁴³ Also note that none of the folios contain *gter shads*, the symbols resembling the division sign obelus, ÷, replacing regular vertical *shad* at the end of each *rkang pa* (line of poetry or prose) in works designated as treasure-texts. While these *gter shads* are not always used in such cases, their absence here may indicate that the work being copied onto these folios was not considered a treasure-text such as the term “*Gyalpo Kachem*” would suggest.

LACMA Folio 7 takes up the teachings of Srong btsan sgam po only ten folios after the advice given in Brooklyn Folio B (as measured by the corresponding text in the Sde dge edition). Here, the Nang blon Sna chen po asks for and receives advice from the king (*recto* l. 4f.). In the *Maṅi bka' 'bum*, this advice precedes the more popular *Gab pa mngon phyung* section by 42 folios in the Sde dge edition, and if all of the advice in between were covered in this hypothetical “*Gyalpo Kachem*” work (not to mention the 335 folios between the prayer to be reborn on Mount Potalaka and LACMA Folio 7), it would be a substantial undertaking. Such a work would cost a great deal in both

⁴² It is identified as Nyang ral's treasure-text discovery in the *Maṅi bka' 'bum* editions published at Sde dge (2000 vol. 2: 72.5; *wam* 36b5) and Delhi (1975 vol. 2: 99.6; *wam* part I, 50a6): “*mnga' bdag myang gi gter ma'o l'*”.

⁴³ See, for example, the *Maṅi bka' 'bum* (2000: 397.4; *wam* 199a4).

materials and manpower, even if the artisans were only illustrating every other folio. Such an undertaking is not impossible, but more likely the folios I have discussed above come from towards the end of a hypothetical Zimmerman manuscript. This would then make it even less likely that a complete life story of Srong btsan sgam po followed the teachings after Newark Folio B.

LACMA Folio 5 recounts the advice of Srong btsan sgam po that ultimately comes from that *Gab pa mngon phyung*. LACMA Folio 6 continues the same teachings after a one folio break of probably now missing text. As I mentioned above, the same speech in the *GLR* is identified by Sørensen with the *Gab pa mngon phyung*, which may have circulated independently and then become associated with the advice of Srong btsan sgam po. Sørensen states:

[t]his very lengthy versified exposé offered by the king and couched in a religious-philosophical diction of indubitable rDzogs-chen provenience is found almost uniformly transmitted in the other versions [of the Srong btsan sgam po *vita*]. The locus classicus is MNKB WAM (G) 12a6–14a6.⁴⁴

The mention of “the king’s thought/intent” (*rgyal po dgongs pa*) at the end of Folio 6, *verso* l. 7, shows that the teaching is identified in this manuscript by its secondary title, *Rgyal po dgongs pa mngon phyung*, though not necessarily by that title alone, and that the teaching is also attributed to King Srong btsan sgam po rather than described as a free-floating work. In the latter aspect, Folio 6 corroborates the evidence of Newark Folio B, whose *recto* attributes a later speech continuing the same the set of teachings to the king.

Newark Folio B begins with a speech by Srong btsan sgam po that is related to the *Gab pa mngon phyung*, is usually found together with it, and perhaps stems from the same milieu.⁴⁵ The gap between the two speeches, in other words, the text missing between LACMA Folio 6 and Folio B, amounts to around two folios’ worth. Like the *Gab pa mngon phyung*, this teaching was once probably an independently circulating work that was incorporated into the advice (*zhal gdams*) section of the *Mani bka’ ’bum* and biography of Srong btsan sgam po in the *GLR* and *KGT*. The fortunate inclusion of the end of the speech, which names the speaker as Srong btsan sgam po before recounting his and/or his son’s burial of treasure (*gter*) in Lhasa, allows us to identify this text as an adaptation of the original work, now ascribed to Srong btsan sgam po, rather than the independently circulating teaching itself.

⁴⁴ Sørensen 1994: 316n966.

⁴⁵ See Sørensen 1994: 327n1023, 587–588.

In Appendix 2, I have not given a version of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* in the column to the right of Folio B *recto*, and it is unlikely that the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* is the source of this text. The 14th-century *KGT* resembles Folio B *recto* most closely, though not entirely. Yet, of especial note is the fact that the *KGT* and Folio B both omit mention until later of the prince, to whom the speech is addressed in the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* (and *GLR* history). In the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, the *Gab pa mngon phyung* and following related advice is given in response to the request of his son, Gung srong gung btsan. In Folio B, this speech is addressed to the attendant subjects (*'khor 'bangs*). Perhaps Folio B is copied from the independently circulating early teaching that Sørensen hypothesizes, but in a version that has adapted the teaching in a slightly different context than the early sources that likewise attributed it to Srong btsan sgam po.

The *recto* of Folio B then moves quite suddenly from teaching to narrative. This shift is marked by the Avalokiteśvara mantra and praise (*recto* l. 6: "om maṇi padme hūṃ // 'gon pa spyan ras gzigs la phyag (tsha)l lo //"), but not a chapter title. The text then goes on to name its source in a general way as the "history of King Srong rtsan rgam po, the great being" (*recto* ll. 6–7: "rgyal po srong rtsan rgam po sku che ba'i lo (7) r(g)yus na //"). In the narrative portion, Folio B most resembles the *MBNT* and slightly less closely the *MTN*, both of which have been attributed to Nyang ral (though the latter holds more claim to be connected with him).⁴⁶ However, the shift from this teaching, which occurs at one of Srong btsan sgam po's last moments on earth, to the moment of his emanational birth is quite surprising. Such a non-chronological ordering of the text suggests that the hypothetical manuscript from which these folios come constituted more of an anthology of important advice, events, and prayers related to Srong btsan sgam po as Avalokiteśvara, instead of a single "Gyalpo Kachem."

Putting this speculation aside, the hunting narrative itself is of some antiquity but lacks a definite source, like the teaching that precedes it on Folio B. Jampa L. Panglung has already drawn scholarly attention to the similarity of corresponding narratives in the *MTN* and *MBNT* and noted that the sources differ not only in the extent of the extra text before the hunt vignette in the former but also in the placement of their narratives. He states that in the *MBNT*:

the interpolation is found in a slightly earlier position when Srong-btsan sgam-po is in retreat. After the interpolation of the narrative, the account continues with Song-btsan sgam-po who remembers his promise [to tame the black-headed Tibetans] and feels that now his

⁴⁶ On the probable misattribution of at least the latter parts of the *MTN* and all of *MBNT* to Nyang ral, see Doney 2013 and Hirshberg 2016: 141–201.

father is dead, it would be the right time to be enthroned etc. The story continues like in the Chos-'byung [MTN].⁴⁷

The presence of the same ordering of the episodes in both Folio B and the MBNT, but with no indication that this is a copy of the MBNT (even the counter-evidence that the folio shifts to this episode after quoting the *Gab pa mngon phyung*-related teaching), indicates that either the compiler of this anthology had MBNT or its source to hand, and/or the compiler of the MTN or its source changed the order of these episodes.

Brooklyn Folio 1 comprises part of the *Dri med bshags rgyud*, a popular Rnying ma confessional text also found in the Gting skyes *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* and *Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*. Uniquely among our folios, Folio 1 retains the chapter breaks, chapter numbering and short title of its source (*verso* ll. 6–7 reads: “*dri med rgyal po bshags pa'i rgyud las // ru tra'i sme bshags kyi le'u s(t)e // bcu gcig pa'o //*”). However, this chapter title gives no sense that this work is being incorporated into a larger manuscript (information which I assume is found in a later folio, not available to me). The other folios do not even give any indication of being broken up into separate chapters. To briefly review the evidence in this regard, the prayer to be reborn on Mount Potalaka in Newark Folio A unfortunately comes to the end of the *verso* just before the corresponding work in other exemplars ends, so we do not now know whether it marked the end of the manuscript, or if it carried on quoting another work or with an addendum or continuation to the extant *Ri po ta lar skye ba'i smon lam*. LACMA Folio 6 contains the final part of the *Gab pa mngon phyung* proper and ends with a tantalizing first half of the secondary title—so the missing next folio may have contained a chapter break. However, Newark Folio B shifts from quoting Srong btsan sgam po's teachings (given in other sources at the end of his life) to recounting his birth, without showing concern for the chronological order of these events and without providing a chapter number or short title of the work as a whole. Nonetheless, it does vaguely identify the source of the next vignette, “the history of King Srong btsan sgam po, the great being.”⁴⁸

Returning to the *Dri med bshags rgyud*, how does it relate to the *Mani bka' 'bum*? The only connector that stands out is Nyang ral. He revealed part of the latter work and is also said to have produced a commentary to the *Dri med bshags rgyud*, extant in a couple of exemplars.⁴⁹ Such a

⁴⁷ Panglung 1992: 666.

⁴⁸ Newark Folio B, *recto* ll. 6–7.

⁴⁹ This commentary is titled the *Dri med rgyal po bshags pa'i rgyud kyi 'grel pa don gsal sgron me*. It is included in the *Bka' brgyad bder gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor* xylograph edition published in Gangtok (1978 vol. 4: 645–677), and also exists in an undated

link remains to be investigated. If the connection proves accurate, it would suggest that this hypothetical Zimmerman manuscript (if it is singular) does not merely reproduce a "Gyalpo Kachem." Instead, it may be a collection of some works attributed to Nyang ral, focusing only in part on Avalokiteśvara and his emanation, Srong btsan sgam po.

6. Conclusion

The *Maṇi bka' 'bum* fills out our picture of some Tibetan Buddhists' relationship with the imperial period in the early centuries of the second millennium C.E. Behind this work, though, is a complex web of historiographical and devotional descriptions of the royal acts, divine nature and religious rituals and teachings of Srong btsan sgam po. Some of the exquisitely illustrated folios discussed above may reflect this nexus of texts, and so to some extent deserve the title "Gyalpo Kachem" that was first given to the Newark exemplars.

Yet, the text of the LACMA exemplars could be based on a number of sources that recount the advice of Srong btsan sgam po, and Newark Folio B only loosely follows the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* in describing the emanation-birth of this bodhisattva-king. More of a mystery is the inclusion in this so-called "Gyalpo Kachem" of the main *tantra* of the *Na rak dong sprugs* cycle, the *Dri med bshags rgyud*. This work is not part of any single "Gyalpo Kachem" or published *Maṇi bka' 'bum* of which I am aware. Yet, it is a popular Rnying ma rite that is connected to *inter alia* Nyang ral through his attributed compilation of a commentary on it.

If Nyang ral is the common denominator here, the "advice" (*zhal gdams*) section of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* may still have formed an important part of this collection, since it has been traditionally ascribed to his discovery as a treasure-text. The *Gab pa mngon phyung* teaching, as ascribed to the speech of Srong btsan sgam po, is actually traditionally held to have been revealed by Nyang ral's disciple, but there were strong links between the two.⁵⁰ The prayer to be reborn on

dbu med manuscript held by the Buddhist Digital Resource Center under the resource ID W4CZ302357 (my thanks to Benjamin Bogin for pointing out this manuscript). Another work attributed to Nyang ral with a similar title to the *Dri med bshags rgyud* is the *Zhi khro na rak don sprugs mal 'byor gyi spyi khrus 'gyod tshangs kyi cho ga dri med bshags rgyud* (see Phillips 2004: 126n70). These sources have yet to be properly explored.

⁵⁰ Sørensen (1994: 17n39) notes that early sources, including the *KGT* (*ja* 148b6–149a1), recount the transmission of the *Gab pa mngon phyung* through Zhiq po Bdud rtsi (Sørensen gives his dates as 1149–1199), "a famous pupil of Nyang-ral Nyi-ma 'od-zer and a colleague of IHa-rje dGe-ba-'bum, himself a prominent MNKB [*Maṇi bka' 'bum*] text-transmitter, and a key figure in the dissemination of rDzogs-chen

Mount Potalaka contained in Newark Folio A would especially warrant inclusion in such a collection, since it is found directly referred to as the *gter ma* of Nyang ral in the *Mani bka' 'bum* itself. The tale of Srong btsan sgam po's birth and the yak hunt of his father are now found in two historiographical works traditionally attributed to Nyang ral. However, this is a weak basis for concluding that the vignette was included *because* it was ascribed to Nyang ral, since the fact that it concerns Srong btsan sgam po is a more immediate ground for its inclusion after the teachings of that king (though we could ask why *this* particular version was chosen, and why it follows rather than precedes his advice).

Nonetheless, I conclude that these folios may be fragments of an anthology of teachings, prayers and narratives linked through traditional attribution of the original works to Nyang ral, either his composition or discovery as treasure-text. This conclusion is meant not so much to identify these folios with part of a newly revealed work by Nyang ral, as it is to place it (as Sørensen says of the *Gab pa mngon phyung*) within a Rnying ma literary milieu, though with a general emphasis on devotion to Avalokiteśvara.

These folios (and those at LACMA awaiting close-up photography) need to be investigated in further detail. However, it is hoped that the transliteration of the text on these folios, and my assessment of their affiliations, will aid future researchers to incorporate their witness into the rich matrix of the literary tradition on Srong btsan sgam po and the Tibetan imperial period.

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precepts in Tibet." See Ehrhard (2000: 207–208) for the same attribution in the "catalogue" (*dkar chags*) in a Mang yul xylograph edition of the *Mani bka' 'bum*. See Hirshberg (2016: 165–167; 207–208) for more on Zhig po Bdud rtsi, his mention in the *MTN* history and his status as heir to Nyang ral's Avalokiteśvara-based treasure-texts.

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Appendix 1. Newark Folio A

Newark folio 1984 84.396
A recto:

(1) \$\$ / (space) / sk(y)abs
su (?ch(i) / (b)de ba can
gy(i) gnas mchog na //
sp(y)an ras gzigs kyi zhing
khams der / phyi nang
med par (g)zhal yas khang
// (2) 'jig rten (khang) [± 4
syllables obscured] / ri bo
ta lar skye bar shog /
gzugs snang bye brag ji
snyed kun // spyān ras
gzigs kyi skur snang bas
// phu(ng)
(3) po sha khrag ming yang
med / ri bo ta la(r s)ky(e)
[± 1 syllable] shog / sgra ru
grags pa (j)i snyed kun / yi
ge drug pa rdo rje'i sgra //
khro tshig nga ro'i ming
yang med // ri bo ta
(4) lar skyes bar shog /
sems kyi dran rtogs ji
sny(ed) (pa?) // (r)ang rig
ye shes 'od gsal ba // dug
lnga rnam rtog ming yang
med / ri bo ta lar skye bar
shog /
(5) 'od snang bye brag ji
snyed pa // chos kyi nyi
ma rgyun (chad?) (m)ed
// nyin dang mtshan mo'i
m(o'i?) *perhaps rubbed out*
ming yang med / ri bo ta
lar skye bar shog / 'byung
ba'i bye brag ji snye(d) pa
/
(6) ye shes lnga'i 'od zer las
// 'byung ba lnga'i ming
yang med // ri bo ta lar
skyes bar shog / s(k)y(e)
shi'i bye brag ji snyed pa
// pad ma'i nang nas
rdzus skyes pas //
(7) skye ba rnam bzhi'i
ming yang med // ri bo ta
lar skye bar shog / (z)as
kyi b(ye) brag ji snyed kun
// 'chi med bdud rtsi'i
(z)as za bas // phung po
kha zas ming yang med
//.

Mañi bka' 'bum (2000: vol. 2,
71.1-5; wañi 36r1-5):

spyān ras gzigs la skabs su
mchi // bde ba can gyi
gnas mchog tu // spyān
ras gzigs (2) kyi zhing
khams su / phyi nang med
pa'i gzhal yas khang // 'jig
rten khang khyim ming
dang med / ri po ta lar
skye bar shog / ^oM ma
Ni pad+me h'uM /gzugs
kyi bye brag ji snyed pa //
spyān ras gzigs gyi skur
snang med // phung po
sha khrag ming yang med
// ri po ta lar skye bar
shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / (3) sgra ru
grag pa ji snyed pa // yi ge
drug pa rdo rje'i sgra //
khro tshig nga ro'i ming
yang med // ri po ta lar
skye bar shog / ^oM ma
Ni pad+me h'uM / sems
kyi dran rtog ji snyed pa
// rang rig ye shes 'od gsal
bas // dug lnga rnam rtog
ming yang med // ri po ta
lar skye bar shog / ^oM
ma Ni pad+me h'uM / 'od
kyi snang ba ji snyed (4) pa
// chos kyi snang ba
rgyun mi 'chad // nyin
dang mtshan mo'i ming
yang med // ri po ta lar
skye bar shog / ^oM ma
Ni pad+me h'uM / 'byung
ba'i bye brag ji snyed pa //
ye shes lnga yi 'od zer las
// 'byung ba lnga yi ming
yang med // ri po ta lar
skye bar shog / ^oM ma
Ni pad+me h'uM / skye
shi'i bye brag ji snyed pa
// pad+ma'i steng (5) du
rdzus skyes pas // skye ba
rnam bzhi'i ming yang
med // ri po ta lar skye bar
shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / zas kyi
bye brag ji snyed pa // 'chi
med bdud rtsi'i zas za bas
// phung po kham zas
ming yang med //.

Mañi bka' 'bum (1975: vol. 2,
97.3-98.3; wañi part I, 49r3-
49v3):

spyān (4) ras gzigs la skabs
su mchi // bde ba can gyi
gnas mchog tu // spyān
ras gzigs kyi zhing khams
su / phyi nang med pa'i
gzhal yas khang // 'jig
rten khang khyim ming
yang med / ri po ta la (5)
ru skye bar shog / ^oM ma
Ni pad+me h'uM / gzugs
kyi bye brag ji snyed pa //
spyān ras gzigs kyi skur
snang bas // phung po sha
khrag ming yang med //
ri po ta la ru skye bar shog
/ ^oM ma Ni pad+me
h'uM / sgra ru brag (6) pa
ji snyed pa // yi ge drug
pa rdo rje'i sgra // khro
tshig nga ro'i ming yang
med // ri po ta la ru skye
bar shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / sems kyi
dran rtog ji snyed pa //
rang rig ye shes 'od gsal
bas // dug lnga rnam
(49v1) rtog ming yang med
// ri po ta la ru skye bar
shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / 'od kyi
snang ba ji snyed pa //
chos kyi snang ba rgyun
mi 'chad // nyin dang?
mtshan mo'i ming yang
med // ri po ta la ru skye
bar shog / ^oM ma Ni (2)
pad+me h'uM / 'byung
ba'i bye brag ji snyed pa //
ye shes lnga yi 'od zer las
// 'byung ba lnga yi ming
yang med // ri po ta la ru
skye bar shog / ^oM ma
Ni pad+me h'uM / skye
shi'i bye brag ji snyed pa
// pad+ma'i steng du
rdzus skyes (3) pas // skye
ba rnam bzhi'i ming yang
med // ri po ta la ru skye
bar shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / zas kyi
bye brag ji snyed pa // 'chi
med bdud rtsi'i zas za bas
// phung po kham zas
ming yang med //.

Newark folio 1984 84.396 A
verso:

(1) ri bo ta lar shog / skom gyi
bye brag ji snyed kun // bde
chen rgyun g/kyi chu
'(thung)s pas // 'jig rten
sko(m) gyi ming yang med
// ri bo ta lar skye bar shog /
gos kyi bye

(2) b(r)ag ji snyed kun //
mnyam pa ris med gos g(y)on
pas // 'jig rten go(s) kyi ming
yang med // ri bo ta lar ske
bar shog / zhon ba'i bye brag
ji snyed kun // brtson

(3) ('g(r)us myur ba'i rta
zhon pas // 'jig rten rta'i
ming yang med // ri bo ta lar
skye bar shog / grogs kyi
brag ji snyed pa // thabs
dang shes rab gnyis med
(pas

(4) skyes pa bud m(e)d yang
med // ri bo ta lar skye ba(r)
shog / 'khor gyi bye brag ji
snyed kun // rang rig rang
shar rang grol bas // rgyal po
blon po'i ming yang

(5) med // ri bo ta lar skye
bar shog / nor rdzas bye brag
ji snyed kun // ting 'dzin yon
by(e)d mdzad med pas // 'jig
rten nor gyi ming yang med
// ri bo ta lar

(6) skye bar shog / mgon po
sryan ras gzigs dbang
khy(o)d // dang po byang
chub mchog tu sems bsky(e)d
nas // lam l(nga) sa bcu
bs(gra)od byas nas // pha rol

(7) ph(yin) pa bcu rdzogs pa
// '(gro) ba'i don du bzh(u)gs
nas // bdag n(i) 'chi ba'i dus
kyi (tsh)e // ri bo ta lar skyes
(added below: na) kyang //
khams gsum 'khor ba stongs
par.

Mañi bka' 'bum (2000: vol. 2,
71.5–72.4; *wam* 36a5–36b4):

ri po ta lar skye bar shog /
^oM ma Ni pad+me h'uM /
skom gyi bye brag ji snyed pa
// bde chen rgyun gyi chu
'thungs (6) pas // 'jig rten
skom gyi ming yang med //
ri po ta lar skye bar shog /
^oM ma Ni pad+me h'uM /
gos kyi bye brag ji snyed pa
// mnyam pa ris med gos
gyon pas // 'jig rten gos kyi
ming yang med // ri po ta lar
skye bar shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / bzhon pa'i
bye brag ji snyed pa // brtson
'grus myur ba'i rta zhon pas
// (36v1) 'jig rten rta yi ming
yang med // ri po ta lar skye
bar shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / grogs kyi
bye brag ji snyed pa // thabs
dang shes rab gnyis med pas
// skyes pa bud med ming
yang med // ri po ta lar skye
bar shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / 'khor gyi bye
brag ji snyed pa // rang rig
rang shar rang grol bas //
rgyal po (2) blon po'i ming
yang med // ri po ta lar skye
bar shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / nor r(dz)as
bye brag ji snyed pa // ting
'dzin longs spyod 'dzad med
pas // 'jig rten 'dod yon ming
yang med // ri po ta lar skye
bar shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / mgon po
sryan ras gzigs dbang khyod
// dang po byang chub thugs
(3) bskyed nas // lam lnga sa
bcu bgrod byas shing // pha
rol phyin pa bcu rdzogs te //
'gro ba'i don du sku bzhugs
pa // bdag ni 'chi ba'i dus kyi
tshe // ri po ta lar skye bar
shog / ^oM ma Ni pad+me
h'uM / ri po ta lar skyes nas
kyang // sryan ras gzigs kyi
zhabs drung du // skye shi
med pa'i sku brnyes nas //
(4) chos kyi bdud rtsi 'thung
bar shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / bdag gis
smon lam 'di btab pas // 'gro
ba rigs drug sems can mams
// so so'i sdig sgrib kun
byang nas // sdug bsngal ma
lus zhi gyur te // byang chub
lam la rab zhugs nas //
khams gsum 'khor ba stong
par shog / .

Mañi bka' 'bum (1975: vol. 2,
98.3–99.5; *wam* part I, 49b3–
50a5):

ri po ta la ru skye bar (4) shog
/ ^oM ma Ni pad+me h'uM /
skom gyi bye brag ji snyed pa
// bde chen rgyun gyi chu
'thungs pas // 'jig rten skom
gyi ming yang med // ri po
ta la ru skye bar shog / ^oM
ma Ni pad+me h'uM / gos
kyi bye brag ji snyed pa // (5)
mnyam pa ri+s med gos gyon
pas // 'jig rten gos kyi ming
yang med // ri po ta la ru
skye bar shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / bzhon pa'i
bye brag ji snyed pa // brtson
'grus myur ba'i rta zhon pas
// 'jig rten rta yi (6) ming
yang med // ri po ta la ru
skye bar shog / ^oM ma Ni
pad+me h'uM / grogs kyi
bye brag ji snyed pa // thabs
dang shes rab gnyis med pas
// skyes pa bud med ming
yang med // ri po ta la ru
skye bar shog / (50r1) \$\$ /
(space) / ^oM ma Ni pad+me
h'uM / 'khor gyi bye brag ji
snyed pa // rang rig rang
shar rang grol bas // rgyal po
blon po'i ming yang med //
ri po ta la ru skye bar shog /
^oM ma Ni pad+me h'uM /
nor rdzas bye brag ji snyed (2)
pa // ting 'dzin longs spyod
'dzad med pas // 'jig rten
'dod yon ming yang med //
ri po ta la ru skye bar shog /
^oM ma Ni pad+me h'uM /
mgon po sryan ras gzigs
dbang khyod // dang po
byang chub thugs bskyed nas
// (3) lam lnga sa bcu bgrod
byas shing // pha rol phyin
pa bcu rdzogs te // 'gro ba'i
don du sku bzhugs pa //
bdag ni 'chi ba'i dus kyi tshe
// ri po ta la ru skye bar shog
/ ^oM ma Ni pad+me h'uM /
ri po ta la ru skyes nas kyang
// (4) sryan ras gzigs kyi
zhabs drung du // skye shi
med pa'i sku brnyes nas //
chos kyi bdud rtsi 'thung bar
shog / ^oM ma Ni pad+me
h'uM / bdag gis smon lam 'di
btab pas // 'gro ba rigs drug
sems can mams // (5) so so'i
sdig sgrib kun byang nas //
sdug bsngal ma lus zhi gyur
te // byang chub lam la rab
zhugs nas // khams gsum
'khor ba stongs par shog / .

Appendix 2. Newark Folio B

Newark folio 1984 84.396 B *recto*:

(1) \$\$ / (space) / nas thar // de yang 'phags pa rnam kyis thugs rje ste // (nga'i) bod '(bang)s rnam kyis bs(od) nam yin // de (ph)yir (nga'i?) skyabs gnas pho mo (2) [± 2 syllables obscured] rtsol (ba) ma zhan snying stobs bskyed mdzod la // nga'i lha sa mthong thos (re?) par mdzod // de yang mthar pa'i lam la tshung pa min // skyon rnam gang zhig gs(al?) (3) bar 'd(od) pa dang // yon tan gang zhig sgrub par bya(d?) pa yis / nga'i lha sar zhabs tog mos gu(s) byas pa na // bsam pa thams cad yid bzhin 'grub par 'gyur // (4) [± 2 syllables] 'dod pa rgyal ba rnam la zhus // ces rgyal po srong rts(an) (sg)am pos 'khor 'bangs rnam la bka' stsal pas // lha sa yang dus lan cig chus nyen nas bs(o) (5) dgos par dgongs nas // rgyal bu lha sras (k)yis kyang lha sar zhabs tog bya thams la / bkor nor yang mang du s(b)as nas gdag go // 'di'i sman dang / 'd(i?)i phy(i) mo g(te?)r (6) du bzhugs s(u?) g- [± 4 syllables] (^)i (th?)i // @ // ^oM ma Ni padm(e) h'uM // 'gon pa spyen ras gzigs la phyag (tsha)l lo // rgyal po srong rtsan rgam po sku che ba'i lo (7) r(g?)yus na // [± 5 syllables] (pa?) lo kha ba can gy(i) sems can rnam 'dul ba'i dus la bab par sp(yan) zur gyi gzigs pa las // 'od zer byung nas kha ba can.

KGT (ja 52b2-4):

'gro ba phal cher 'khor ba'i gnas las 'thar // de yang 'phags pa rnam kyis thugs rje ste // nga yi bod 'bangs rnam kyis bsod nam yin // de phyir nga yi skyabs gnas pho (3) mo rnam // rtsol ba ma zhan snying stobs skyed mdzod la // nga yi ra sa mthong thos reg par mdzod // de yang thar pa'i lam la 'tshud pa yin // skyon rnam sel zhing yon tan sgrub 'dod na // nga yi ra sar zhabs tog mos pa gyis // bsam pa thams cad yid bzhin 'grub par 'gyur // ji ltar 'dod pa rgyal ba rnam la (4) zhus // zhes bka' bstsal zhing / nga'i lha sa'i gnas 'di chus nyen nas gso dgos ba'i skabs cig 'ong bas de'i cha rkyen rnam gter du spos shig gsung ste lha sras kyis kyang zhabs tog bya thabs dang dkor nor mang po dus de nyid tu gter du spas ste.

MBNT 53.6-54.1 (27a6-27b1):

^arya pha lo kha ba can gyi sems can rnam 'dul ba'i dus (27v1) la bab par spyen zur gyis gzigs pa las / sku la 'od zer byung nas kha ba can.

GLR (Sde dge 76b6–77a3):

'gro ba phal cher 'khor ba'i gnas nas thar // de yang 'phags pa rnams kyi thugs rje ste // nga'i bod 'bangs (77r1) rnams kyi bsod nams yin // de phyir nga yi skyabs gnas pho mo rnams // rtsol ba ma zhed snying stobs bskyed mdzod la // nga yi lha sa mthong thos reg par mdzod // de yang thar ba'i lam la btsud ba yin // skyon rnams thams cad sel bar 'dod pa dang // yon tan gang zhig (2) bsgrub par 'dod pa yi // nga'i lha sa zhabs tog mos byas pas // bsam pa thams cad yid bzhin 'grub par 'gyur // ji ltar 'dod pa rgyal ba rnams la zhus // zhes yab rgyal po chen pos lha sras la bka' stsal pa / lha sras chen po pa / dus lan cig lha sa la chus nyen nas // gso (3) dgos pa yod par 'dug pas / de'i zhig gsos kyi thebs la / gser dngul la sogs dkor nor rnams gter du sbos shig gsungs pa dang //.

Maṅi bka' 'bum (2000: vol. 2, 491.5–92.1; *wam* 246a5–46b1):

'khor ba'i gnas las thar // de yang 'phags pa rnams kyi thugs rje ste // nga yi bod 'bangs rnams kyi bsod nams yin // de phyir nga yi gdul bya pho mo kun // rtsol ba ma zhan snying stobs bskyed mdzod la // nga yi ra sa mthong thos reg par mdzod // skyon (6) rnams gang zhig gsel bar 'dod pa dang // yon tan gang zhig bsgrub par 'dod pa yis // nga yi ra sa'i zhabs tog mos byas na // bsam pa thams cad yid bzhin 'grub par 'gyur // ji ltar 'dod pa rgyal ba rnams la zhus // zhes sras la bka' stsal pas / sras kyi kyang ra sa (246r1) dus lan cig chus nyen nas gso dgos par dgongs te zhabs tog bya thabs dang bkor nor yang mang du sbas so // 'di'i phyi mo rnams gter du bzhugs su gsol nas yod do // 'di'i skor rnams gnod sbyin na ga ku be ra'i brla g.yas pa nas /.

Maṅi bka' 'bum (1975: vol. 2, 650.5–51.2; *wam* part II, 16b5–17a2):

'khor ba'i gnas las thar // de yang 'phags pa rnams kyi thugs rje ste // nga yi bod 'bangs rnams kyi bsod nams yin // de phyir nga yi gdul bya pho mo kun // rtsol ba ma zhan snying stobs bskyed mdzod (6) la // nga yi ra sa mthong thos reg par mdzod // skyon rnams gang zhig gsel bar 'dod pa dang // yon tan gang zhig bsgrub par 'dod pa yis // nga yi ra sa'i zhabs tog mos byas na // bsam pa thams cad yid bzhin 'grub par (17r1) 'gyur // ji ltar 'dod pa rgyal ba rnams la zhus // zhes sras la bka' stsal pas / sras kyi kyang / ra sa dus lan cig chus nyen nas gso dgos par dgongs te zhabs tog bya thabs dang bkor nor yang mang du sbas (2) so // 'di'i phyi mo rnams gter du bzhugs su gsol nas yod do // 'di'i skor rnams gnod sbyin na ga ku bai ra'i brla g.yas pa nas /.

Newark folio 1984 84.396 B verso:

(1) (du?) song ngo // de la snang
 ba gsum byung te // sangs rgyas
 (r)nam(s) [± 6 syllables obscured]
 ba can du sems can 'dul du
 (bzh)u(d?) par gzigs // ba(r)
 snang gi g(n)od sbyin (r)nams (2)
 (gyi?)s 'od zer du ma m(th)ong /
 yab r(g)yal pos btsun (mo')i lhums
 su zhugs par gzigs so // de nas zla
 ba dgu nas rgyal bu bltam pa'i
 dbu' las ^a mi de ba bzh(u)gs pa
 (3) cag byung bas // 'jig rten pas
 rgyal bu 'go gnyis pas cig yod do
 zer ba(r) dgongs nas // ya(ng)
 (r)gyal pos ^a mi de ba dar le
 brgan cig gis skris so // (4) blo(n?)
 p(o?) ^a nu ra'i bu mi chung gis
 kyang ^a mi de ba'i padma
 mthong ngo // 'gar sr(o?)ng btsan
 yul bzung gis bzer ba bcu'i thod
 g(o)n pa mthong ngo // d(e) la
 grong khyer (b)as (5) rgyal bu mgo
 gnyis pa yod do // 'go bcu pa yod
 de zhes grags so // des rgyal (b)u
 'tshams cad nas pho brang gzhugs
 so // de nas yab rgyal po ngon pa
 la (6) dga' bas byang gangs la rong
 (d?)u pho brang b(ca?) te sngon
 bya ra byed pa dang // nang cig
 thad cig nas // (n)e gu sran ma
 tsam cig byung ba gzigs / nang pa
 gnyis pa la bya (7) rol (tsa)g /
 gsum pa la ra ma tsam / bzh(i) pa
 la 'b(r?)i po cig 'dug / lnga pa la
 bye 'u ?tsa(m) (c)ig skyes nas de la
 (kh)yi dang skye sbrel kyang
 khy(i?)s ma bsad do // d(e?)r cher
 skyes pa.

MBNT 54.1–55.4 (27b1–28a4):

du song ngo // de la snang ba
 gsum byung ste / sangs rgyas
 rnam kyis thugs (2) rje chen pos
 kha ba can gyi sems can 'dul du
 bzhugs par gzigs / bar snang gi
 gnod sbyin rnam kyis 'od zer du
 ma mthong / yab rgyal pos btsun
 (3) mo'i lhums su rgyal po bzhugs
 par mthong ngo // de nas zla ba
 dgu na rgyal bu bltam pas /
 phyags zhabs la 'khor lo'i mtshan
 mnga' ba / (4) dbu la ^a mi de ba
 bzhugs pa / mtshan dpe dang
 ldan pa cig bltams nas / mtshan
 yang khri lde srong btsan du btags
 so / 'jig rten pas rgyal bu (5) mgo
 gnyis pa cig yod do zer bar dogs
 nas // yab rgyal pos ^a mi ta ba
 dar le rgan cig gis bkris so // blon
 po ^a nu ra mi chung gos (6) ^a mi
 de ba'i pad ma mthong ngo / 'gar
 bsrong btsan yul gzung kyis
 mdzer pa bcu'i thod gon par
 mthong ngo // de la grong khyer
 ba rnam (28r1) rgyal bu mgo
 gnyis pa cig yod do // mgo bcu pa
 yod de zhes grags so // rgyal po
 mtshams bcad nas pho brang
 gzhugs so // de nas (2) yab rgyal
 po sngon la rga' bas byang gangs
 la rong du pho brang bcas te sngon
 bya ra byed pa dang // nang cig
 thang mtha' cig na na gu sran ma
 tsam cig byung ba gzigs (3) nang
 ma gnyis pa la bya rog tsam /
 gsum pa la ra tsam / bzhi pa la
 'bring mo tsam 'dug / lngas la
 be'u cig skyes nas / de la khyi
 dang skye sbrel kyang khyis (4)
 ma bsad do // der cher skyes pa
 dang na le bong zan du gyur te /.

MTN (177a2–180a2; Table 119.2.2–21.2):

de'i tshe ri bo spo ta la nas 'phags pa spyan spyan ras gzigs kyis kha ba (3) can gyi sems can 'dul ba'i dus la bab par mkhyen nas spyan zur gyis gzigs pa las 'od zer byung nas bod kha ba (4) can du song ngo / de la snang pa gsum du byung ste / sangs rgyas rnam kyis 'phags pa bzang po kha ba can gyi sems can 'dul du bzhud (5) par gzigs so / bar snang gi gnod sbyin rnam kyis 'od zer du mthong / yab rgyal pos btsun mo'i lhums su rgyal bu zhugs (6) par mthong / de yang yum gyi sku lus bde ba dang / yangs pa dang / mdogs dang / spyags dang ldan pa dang / byams pa dang / snying rje (177v1) dang / dga' ba dang / btang snyoms chen po skyes pa dang / thugs la rtog pa med pa dang ldan par gnas par gyur te / (2) de nas zla ba dgu ngo dang bcu nas / rgyal bu / me mo (glang *above the line*) zla ba gsum pa la na tsha med par sku bltams / phyags zhabs 'khor lo'i (3) mtshan ldan ba / dbu bkra 'thon 'thing g.yas su 'khyil ba / so dung so 'khor bar yod pa / skyes ma thag tu smra shes pa / (4) yab dang yum la phyags byed pa / dbu la ^a mi de ba'i dbu bzhugs pa / mtshan dang dpe byed dang ldan pa zhig gda' / mtshan (5) ma srog btsan sgam po bya bar btags so / sang nangs par nyi ma shar ba dang / rgyal bu de'i zhal nas / rje yab yum (6) lags / mgo nag kun gyi rje / sems can yongs kyi dpal / 'gro ba yongs kyi mgon rje chen po yab yum rgyal sa na thugs (178r1) bde bar bzhugs sam / rgyu bul zhes phyag mdzad do skad do / yab kyi kyang sprul pa yin par shes nas / de 'jig rten (2) khams pa rnam kyis rgyal bu mgo gnyis pa zer gyis dgos nas / yab gyis ^a mi de ba dar leb rgan gyis gris so / blon po (3) ^a nu mi chung gis gyang / ^a mi de ba'i bdan gyi padma mthong ngo / 'gar stong rtsa yongs bzungs gyis / mdzes pa'i zhal bcu'i (4) thod gon par mthong ngo / de la grong khyer ba yang rgyal bu mgo gnyis pa zhig yod do / 'ga' re na re / mgo bcu gcig yod do zhes zer ro / (5) de nas rgyal bu 'tshams bcad nas pho brang bzhugs so / de nas lo bcu gnyis lon pa dang / ... (*long inclusion until 179r5*) de nas yab rgyal po sngon la dgas pas / byang gangs la rong du pho brang bcas te / sngon gyi bya (6) ra byed pa nas nang cig thang mtha' cig na na gu sran ma tsam gcig byung pa gzigs / nang ma gnyis pa la bya rog (180r1) tsam / gsum pa dang bzhi pa la g.yak tsam / nub lnga pa la bue'u gcig skyes nas / de la khyi dang skye sbrel (2) gyin ma bsod do / der cher skyes nas 'brong na le bong zan du gyur nas /.

Appendix 3. Brooklyn Folio 1

Brooklyn folio 84.207.1
recto:

(1) na bsam 'das brjod mi lang // khams gsum bgrangs shing skye shi'i kha brgyud kyang // byas pa'i las rnams don m(ed?) chu(d) (2) re zos // skye ba grangs med ji snyed de tsam la // skye ba tshe cig kho na tsam gyis las // bla med byang chub don du rab s(p?)yad na // nga tsam byas pa'i las la (3) (?)n y(o?)d (p?)as // gang gi don gyi mya na(r?) 'das zin na // las kyi dbang brtsan nyon mongs stobs che bas // sha khrag dra ba'i lus blangs 'khor bar (4) 'khyams // sdug bsngal b(z)od dka' srid pa'i brtsan dar chud // mi zad drag po'i sd(u)g bsngal 'di lta bu // nyes byas thams cad ra(ng?) (?)las (5) (l)as byung // thugs rje chen pos las ngan rgyun gcad de // nyon mongs las kyi rlung 'd(i?)zlog t(u)gsol // ma rig log pa'i las kyi (d)bang (6) brtsan pas // mi shes mun pa'i nang du brtan 'khyams na // ye shes sgron ma'i zer gyis mi gtong ngam // nyes byas las kyi rnam smin mi bzod (7) na // (?)e (?)e(n?) (p)o'i (?)ph(?) las mi mdzad dam // phyin ci log gi g.yang sar lhung lags na // thugs r(j)es myur 'gyogs phyag gis mi.

Dri med bshags rgyud
(*Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum*
vol. *dza*, 251a1-7):

las 'phro bsags na bsam 'das brjod (2) mi lang // khams gsum bgrangs shing skye shi kha brgyud kyang // byas pa'i las rnams don med chud re zos // skye ba grangs med ji snyed de tsam la // skye ba gcig gcig kho na tsam gyi las // (3) bla med byang chub don du rab spyad na // de tsam byas pa'i las la don yod pas // don gyi yong ye mya ngan 'das zin na // las kyi dbang brtsan nyon mongs stobs che bas // sha khrag dra ba'i lus (4) blangs 'khor bar 'khyams // sdug bsngal bzod dka' srid pa'i brtsan rar chud // mi bzod drag pa'i sdug bsngal 'di lta bu // nyes byas thams cad rang gi las la byung // thugs (5) rje chen pos las kyi rgyun chad de // nyon mongs las kyi rlung ni ldog tu gsol // ma rig log pa'i las kyi dbang brtsan nas // mi shes mun pa'i nang du gtan 'khyams na // ye shes sgron (6) me'i zer gyis mi gtong ngam // nyes byas las kyi rnam smin mi bzod na // thugs rje chen po'i 'phrin las mi mdzad dam // phyin ci log gi g.yang sar lhung lags na // thugs rjes (7) myur 'gyogs phyag gis mi.

Dri med bshags rgyud
(*Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas*
pa vol. *pa*, 51b2-52a2):

las 'phro bsags na bsam 'das brjod mi lang // khams gsum bgrangs shing skye shi'i kha brgyud kyang // byas pa'i las rnams don med chud re zos // skye ba grangs (3) med ji snyed de tsam gyi // skye ba gcig gcig kho na tsam gyi las // bla med byang chub don du rab spyad na // de tsam byas pa'i las la don rab yod pas // don gyi yang ye mya (4) ngan 'das zin na // las kyi dbang brtsan nyon mongs stobs che bas // sha khrag 'dus pa'i lus blangs 'khor bar 'khyams // sdug bsngal bzod dka' srid pa'i btson (5) rar tshud // mi bzod drag po'i sdug bsngal 'di lta bu // nyes byas thams cad rang gi las las byung // sdig pa'i las rnams byams mgon khyed la bshags // (6) thugs rje chen pos las ngan rgyun bcad de // nyon mongs las kyi rlung 'di bzlog tu gsol // ma rig log pa'i las kyi dbang brtsan pas // mi shes mun pa'i nang du (52r1) gtan 'khyams na // ye shes sgron me'i zer gyis mi stongs sam // nyes byas las kyi rnam smin mi bzod na // thugs rje chen pos 'phrin las mi (2) mdzad dam // phyin ci log gi g.yang sar lhung lags na // thugs rje myur 'gyogs phyag gis mi.

Brooklyn folio 84.207.1
verso:

(1) 'dzin nam // dug gsum
bzod dka'i nad kyis
gdungs lags na // thabs
mkhas thugs rje'i (i) s(?)n
kyis mi gso 'a(m?) // las
kyi rnam smin sdug (2) bsngal
me 'bar na // thugs rje'i
gsil ba'i chu rgyun mi 'phebs
sam // sdug bsngal 'khor
ba'i 'dam du bying gyur na //
thabs mkhas thugs rjes (3) lcags
kyus mi 'dren nam // khams
gsum 'khor ba'i gnas su sbyangs
sbyangs nas // nam zhig rang
rig 'bras bu thob pa'i tshes //
'phags pa'i (4) thugs rjes ci
'tshal don ma 'ches // bdag
nyid las 'phro dbang brtsan
bzhag na lta // thugs rje che
zhes su la ci zhig bgyi // dpa'
bo (kh)yod (la) (5) thugs rje'i
stobs mnga' zhing // sngon
byung 'brel ba'i las kyi 'phro
brtsan (na?) // yal yol gtang
snyoms le lo ma m(dz)ad par //
snying nas dag (6) gzigs thugs
rje rgyal ba'i lha // zhes dregs
pa can rnams kyi (b)shags so //
dri med rgyal po bshags pa'i
rgyud las // ru tra'i sme bshag
+s kyi le'u (7) s(t)e // bcu gzig
pa'o // (space) // de nas bcom
ldan 'das longs spyod kyi bdag
po chen po rnams kyi // rgyud
lung man ngag gi bshags pa
'di.

Dri med bshags rgyud
(*Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum*
vol. dza, 251a7–251b5):

'dzin nam // dug gsum
bzod ka nad kyis gdungs lags
na // thabs mkhas thugs rje'i
sman gyi mi gso'am // las kyi
rnam smin sdug bsngal che
(251v1) 'bar na // thugs rje'i
gsil ba'i char rgyun mi 'bebs
bsam // sdug bsngal 'khor
ba'i 'dam du bying gyur na //
thabs mkhas thugs rje'i lcags
kyus mi 'dren nam // khams
gsum (2) 'khor ba'i gnas su
sbyangs byas nas // nam zhig
rang gis 'bras bu thob pa'i
tshes // 'phags pa'i thugs rje'i
ci 'tshal don ma mchis // bdag
nyid las 'phro dbang btsan
bzhag na (3) lta // thugs rje
che zhes su la ci zhig bgyi //
dpa' bo khyod la thugs rjes
stobs mnga' zhing // sngon
byung 'brel ba'i las kyi 'phro
btsan na // yal yol btang
snyoms le lo (4) ma mdzad
par // snying nas da gzigs
thugs rje rgyal ba'i lha // zhes
dregs pa can rnams kyi bshags
so // dri med rgyal po bshags
pa'i rgyud las // ru tra'i smre
bshags ste (5) le'u bcu gzig
pa'o // (space) // de nas bcom
ldan 'das longs spyod kyi bdag
po rnams kyi // rgyud lung
man ngag gi bshags pa 'di
gsungs so //.

Dri med bshags rgyud
(*Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas*
pa vol. pa, 52a2–52b2):

'dzin nam // dug gsum
bzod dka'i nad kyis gdungs
lags na // thabs (3) mkhas
thugs rje'i sman gyis mi gso'am
// las kyi rnam smin sdug
bsngal me 'bar na // thugs
rje'i gsil ba'i chu rgyun mi
'bebs sam // sdug bsngal
'khor ba'i 'dam du (4) byings
gyur na // thabs mkhas thugs
rje'i lcags kyus mi 'dren nam
// khams gsum 'khor ba'i gnas
su sbyangs sbyangs nas // nam
zhig rang gis 'bras bu thob
pa'i tshes // (5) 'phags pa'i
thugs rje'i ci 'tshal don ma
mchis // bdag nyid las 'phro'i
dbang btsan bzhag na lta //
thugs rje che zhes su la ci
zhig bgyi // dpa' bo khyod
la thugs rje'i (6) stobs mnga'
zhing // sngon byung 'brel
ba'i las kyi 'phro btsan na //
yal yol btang snyoms le lo ma
mdzad par // snying nas da
gzigs thugs rje rgyal ba'i lha //
zhes dregs (52v1) pa can
rnams kyis bshags so // dri
med rgyal po bshags pa'i
rgyud las // r'u tra'i smre
bshags ste le'u bcu cig pa'o //
(space) // de nas bcom ldan
'das longs spyod (2) kyi bdag
po chen po rnams kyi // rgyud
lung man ngag gi bshags pa
'di gsungs so //.

Appendix 4. Newark Folio 2

Brooklyn folio 84.207.2 recto:

(1) / sems nyid stong pa nyid skye ba med chos sku yin no // zhang zhung za sems la dngos po dang mtshan ma ma grub pas / 'chi ba'i dus su (2) rig (pa *below line*) rten med du thong la stong par yal du chug / thugs yal ba dang / rig pa dang stong pa chos skur sangs nas / 'byung ba'i lus la blang rgyu med / bar de/o (3) med par sangs rgyas so // ces gdams so // jo mo zhang zhung za 'chi ba la drod pa skong nas sangs rgyas so // 'da' (ka) 'chi drong kyi gdams pa // ^i+' th'i // (4) thugs rje chen po'i sprul pa rgyal po srong brtsan rgam po la / jo mo ru yong za rgyal brtsun gyi gser gyi rgyan bkrol nas man Dal byas / rdzas dang yo (byed?) (5) thams cad mchod ston du 'phul nas // phyag dang bskor ba byas te zhus pa / ^e ma ho / rje lags / 'jig rten gyi bya ba thams cad don med pa / sdug bsngal (6) gyi lo ma / ngan song du skye ba'i sa bon du bda' bas / bdag la thugs rje chen po'i gsang sngags kyi don tshig cig gis sangs rgya ba'i gdam ngag cig zhu 'tshal (7) ces zhus pas / sprul pa rgyal pos gdams pa / ru yong za nyon cig skye med chos kyi sku cig ma thob na / gzugs byad legs kyang ma sdod.

Mani bka' 'bum (2000: 397.2–6; *wam* 199a2–6):

sems nyid stong pa nyid skye ba med chos sku yin no // zhang zhung bza' sems la dngos po dang mtshan mar ma grub pas (3) 'chi ba'i dus su rig rten med du stong par yal du chug // dbugs yal ba dang rig pa stong pa chos kyi skur yal nas 'byung ba'i lus la blang rgyu med par med par sangs rgya'o zhes gdams pas // zhang zhung bza' 'chi ba la brod pa skyes nas sangs rgyas so // 'da' kha 'chi brong kyi gdams pa // ^i+thi // // (4) ^oM ma Ni pad+me h'uM / thugs rje chen po la phyags 'tshal lo // jo bo thugs rje chen po'i sprul pa rgyal po srong btsan sgam po la / jo mo ru yongs bza' rgyal btsun gyis rang gi gser rngul gyi rgyan bkrol nas man+Dal byas / yo byas thams cad mchod pa'i rten du phul te phyag dang bskor ba (5) byas te zhus pa / ^e ma ho / rje lha gcig lags / 'jig rten gyi bya ba thams cad byas pa don med pas sdug bsngal gyi lo ma ngan 'gror skye ba'i sa bon du bda' bas / bdag la thugs rje chen po'i sngags kyi don tshig cig gis sangs rgya ba cig zhu 'tshal zhes gsol (6) pas / sprul pa'i rgyal pos bka' stsal pa / ru yongs bza' nyon cig // skye med chos kyi sku cig ma thob na // gzugs byad legs kyang mi sdod.

Brooklyn folio 84.207.2 verso:

(1) (rga?)s nas ('ch?)i pa yin /
 mtshan dang dpe? 'byad ldan pa'i
 sku cig ma thob na / rin chen gser
 g.yus brgyan yang bral nas 'byor
 ba yin / dad pa skyes (2) nas
 gdams pa? zhus pa lag+s pas /
 nyon cig rgyal mo brtsun / lus
 skad cig gis thugs rje chen po'i
 skur bsgoms cig / lus la ched du
 mi 'dzin pa (3) th(u)gs rje chen po'i
 sku // ^oM ma Ni pad+me h'uM
 // ces pa rdo rje'i bzlas pa shub
 pur bzlos cig / ngag la ched du mi
 'dzin rgyal ba'i gsung / sems
 rnam(s?) (4) rt(o?)g gi rjes su mi
 'br(e?)ng bar rtog med kyi dang la
 ma nyam pa (?) zhog cig / sems mi
 ched du mi 'dzin rgyal ba'i thugs
 / 'dzin med gsum dang ldan pa (5)
 de snyen po yin / lus lhar gsal /
 (ng?)ag sngags su gsal ba / sems
 chos nyid du gsal ba / gsal ba
 gsum dang ldan pa de sgrub pa
 yin / (6) '(?) sems su (sh?)es /
 (ng?)ag r(l)ung du shes / s(e)ms
 stong par shes / shes pa gsum
 dang ldan pa d(e) sgrub pa chen
 po yin pas / lus lha dang mi
 '(bra?)l (7) ba de lha nyid rang
 nyid yin / rang nyid lha yin /
 ngag? sngags dang mi 'bral te /
 rlung nyid s(nga?)gs yin / sems
 chos nyid dang mi 'bral te / sems.

Mani bka' 'bum (2000: 397.6–398.4;
wam 199a6–199b4):

rgas nas 'gro // mtshan dang dpe
 byad ldan pa'i sku cig ma thob na
 // rin chen gser g.yus brgyan
 yang bral nas 'bor // dad (199v1)
 pa skyes nas gdams pa zhu ba legs
 pas nyon cig rgyal mo btsun / lus
 skad cig la thugs rje chen po'i skur
 sgoms shig / lus la ched du mi
 'dzin pa rgyal po'i sku / ngag
 ^oM ma Ni pad+me h'uM / rdo
 rje'i bzlas pa shub bur zlos shig /
 ngag la ched du mi 'dzin pa rgyal
 ba'i gsung (2) yid rtog pa'i rjes su
 mi 'brang bar rtog med kyi dang la
 ma mnyam par zhog cig / sems la
 ched du mi 'dzin pa rgyal ba'i
 thugs / 'dzin med gsum dang ldan
 pa de bsnyen pa yin / lus lhar gsal
 ba / ngag sngags su gsal ba / yid
 chos nyid du gsal ba gsal (3) ba
 gsum ldan pa de sgrub pa yin / lus
 lhar shes / ngag sngags dang
 rlung du shes / sems stong par
 shes / shes pa gsum ldan de sgrub
 pa chen po yin / lus lha dang mi
 'bral te lha nyid rang nyid rang yin
 rang nyid lha yin / ngag sngags
 dang mi 'bral te / rlung nyid
 sngags (4) yin sngags nyid rlung
 yin / sems chos nyid dang mi 'bral
 te chos nyid sems yin.

Appendix 5. Newark Folio 5

LACMA folio M.84.171.5 *recto*:

(1) ngan med pa'i rgyu la ltos //
 pho mo med pa'i yid la (*possibly
 something is rubbed out here*) ltos //
 gnyis 'dzin bral ba'i don la ltos //
 don zhes bya ba blo la 'das // 'das
 pa'i (2) rjes su ma 'br(e?)l bar //
 blo tshig bral ba'i ngang la ltos //
 ltas pas mthong ba'i yul med kyis
 // ma bltas bzhag pas chos nyid
 mthong / ma bsgrubs bzhag pas
 (3) sems ny(i)d 'grub // bzung
 rlod pas rang sar grol // de ltar
 mthong ba'i gang zag la // 'khor
 'das gnyis su ngas ma mthong //
 dge sdig gnyis su ngas ma mthong
 // (4) (bza?)ng ngan ba gnyis su
 ngas ma mthong // rtag chad
 gnyis su ngas ma mthong // pho
 mo gnyis su ngas ma mthong //
 bde sdug gnyis su ngas ma
 mthong // nye ring gnyis+u ngas
 (5) ma mthong // thon dman
 gnyis su ngas ma mthong // gsal
 sgrib gnyis su ngas ma mthong //
 mthong ba med pa'i ngang nyid
 las // sna tshogs shar ba rang nyid
 yin // sna (6) tshogs 'dzin pa bral
 bar zhog / sna tshogs spang blang
 (*possibly something is rubbed out
 here*) med par zhog // sna tshogs
 'dzin bral chos sku yin ma 'gags
 gsal ba long (sic) sku yin // sna
 tshogs (7) grol ba bsprul sku yin
 // rtog pa med pa chos sku yin //
 chos nyid 'dod pa mtha' ma la yin
 // blo las 'das pa de nyid yin //
 'dod pa bral na don dang phrad
 //.

GLR (Sde dge 74a6–74b4):

bzang ngan med pa'i yul la ltos //
 phyi nang med pa'i sems la ltos //
 pho mo med pa'i sems la ltos //
 gnyis 'dzin bral ba'i don la ltos //
 don zhes bya ba blo las 'das //
 'das pa'i rjes su ma 'brang bar //
 blo tshig bral ba'i ngang la ltos //
 bltas pas mthong ba'i yul (74v1)
 med kyis // ma bltas bzhag pas
 chos nyid mthong // ma bsgrubs
 bzhag pas sems nyid grub // ma
 bzung ma glod rang sar grol // de
 ltar mthong ba'i gang zag la //
 'khor 'das gnyis su ngas ma
 mthong // dge sdig gnyis su ngas
 ma mthong // bzang ngan gnyis
 su ngas ma (2) mthong // rtag
 chad gnyis su ngas ma mthong //
 pho mo gnyis su ngas ma mthong
 // bde sdug gnyis su ngas ma
 mthong // yin min gnyis su ngas
 ma mthong // nye ring gnyis su
 ngas ma mthong // mthon dman
 gnyis su ngas ma mthong // gsal
 grib gnyis su ngas ma mthong //
 mthong ba (3) med pa'i ngang
 nyid nas // sna tshogs shar ba
 rang nyid yin // sna tshogs 'gag
 pa med par zhog // sna tshogs
 'dzin pa med par zhog // sna
 tshogs spang blang med par zhog
 // sna tshogs 'dzin bral chos sku
 yin // ma 'gags gsal ba longs sku
 yin // sna tshogs bral ba sprul sku
 yin // (4) tha mal rtog med chos
 sku yin // chos nyid 'dod pa tha
 mal yin // blo las 'das pa de nyid
 yin // 'dod pa bral na don dang
 bral //.

Maṅi bka' 'bum (1975: vol. 2, 644.3–645.2; *wam* part II, 13b3–14a2):

bzang ngan med pa'i rgyu la ltos // phyi nang med pa'i sems la ltos //
 pho mo med pa'i yid la ltos // gnyis 'dzin bral ba'i don la ltos // don
 zhes bya ba blo las 'das // 'das pa'i rjes su ma 'brang bar // (4) blo tshig
 bral ba'i don la ltos // ltas pas mthong ba'i yul med kyi // ma bltas bzhag
 pas chos nyid mthong // ma bsgrubs bzhag pas sems nyid 'grub // ma
 bzung glod pas rang sar grol // de ltar mthong ba'i gang zag la // 'khor
 (5) 'das gnyis su ngas ma mthong // dge sdig gnyis su ngas ma mthong
 // bzang ngan gnyis su ngas ma mthong // rtag chad gnyis su ngas ma
 mthong // pho mo gnyis su ngas ma mthong // bde sdug gnyis su ngas
 ma mthong // yin min (6) gnyis su ngas ma mthong // nye ring gnyis su
 ngas ma mthong // mtho dma' gnyis su ngas ma mthong // mthong ba
 med pa'i ngang nyid las // sna tshogs shar ba'i rang bzhin la // sna
 tshogs (14r1) 'gag pa med par zhog/sna tshogs 'dzin pa bral bar zhog
 /sna tshogs spang blang med par zhog // sna tshogs 'dzin bral chos sku
 yin // ma 'gags gsal ba longs sku yin // sna tshogs grol ba sprul sku yin
 // (2) tha ma la rtog med chos nyid yin // chos nyid 'dod pa tha ma la
 yin // blo las 'das pa de nyid yin // 'dod pa bral na don dang phrad //.

KGT (*ja* 50b1–4):

bzang ngan med ba'i dbyings la ltos // phyi nang med pa'i sems la ltos
 // pho mo med pa'i rgyud la ltos // gnyis 'dzin bral ba'i don la ltos //
 don zhes bya ba blo las 'das // 'das pa'i rjes su ma 'brang (2) bar // brjod
 tshig bral ba'i ngang la ltos // bltas pas mthong ba'i yul med kyi // ma
 bltas bzhag pas chos nyid mthong // ma sgrubs bzhag pas sems nyid
 'grub // ma bzung glod pas rang sar grol // de ltar mthong ba'i gang zag
 la // 'khor 'das gnyis su ngas ma mthong // (3) dge sdig bzang ngan rtag
 chad dang // pho mo bde sdug yin min dang // nye ring mtho dman
 gnyis ma mthong // gsal 'grib gnyis su ngas ma mthong // mthong ba
 med pa'i ngang nyid nas // sna tshogs shar ba rang nyid yin // sna
 tshogs 'gag pa med par zhog // 'dzin med spang blang med par (4) zhog
 /sna tshogs 'dzin bral chos sku yin // ma 'gags gsal ba longs sku yin //
 sna tshogs grol ba sprul sku yin // tha mal rtog med chos sku yin // chos
 nyid 'dod pa tha mal yin // blo las 'das pa de nyid yin // 'dod pa bral na
 don dang phrad //.

LACMA folio M.84.171.5 verso:

(1) gnyis 'dzin grol na gnas su
rt(o?)l // spang b(l)ang med na
dngos grub thob // 'gro don byed
na phrin las rdzogs // blo thag
chod na 'gro sar phyin / phyin pa
med na rt(o)l ba (2) yin // de lta
bu'i gang zag la // rig pa thams
cad rang rig yin // shes pa thams
cad rang shes yin // grol ba thams
cad rang grol yin // gsal ba thams
(3) cad rang gsal yin // stong pa
thams cad rang stong yin // 'dug
pa thams cad rang 'dug yin //
gnas pa thams cad rang gnas yin
// bde ba thams cad rang (4) bd(e)
yin // sdug pa thams cad rang
sdug yin // thams cad rang gi
snang ba yin // sgom rgyu med
pas bsam du med // rgyud la
sbyar du med de yengs su med //
(5) bzhag rgyu med de btang rgyu
med // brjo(?)d du med de nor
rgyu med // ye shes la yang
rgyun chad med // ting nge 'dzin
la 'thun tshams med // dmigs pa
la ni btang (6) zung med // rnam
rtog la ni bzung ngan med // yid
kyi yul la phyi nang med // dngos
po med pas pho mo med // re
dogs med pas skyon dang bral //
'dod pa (7) med pas thob pa med
// rtsol ba med pas lam skyon
sangs // 'bras bu la (r)e 'khan med
pas // sangs rgyas kyi 'dod pa
zhig / bsam brjod blo las.

GLR (Sde dge 74b4–75a2):

gnyis 'dzin grol na gnas su rtogs
// spang blang med na dngos
grub thob // 'gro don byed na
'phrin las rdzogs // blo thag chod
na 'gro sar phyin // phyin (5) nga
med na brtol pa yin // de lta bu yi
gang zag la // rig pa thams cad
rang rig yin // shes pa thams cad
rang shes yin // grol ba thams cad
rang grol yin // gsal ba thams cad
rang gsal yin // stong pa thams
cad rang stong yin // 'dug pa
thams cad rang 'dug yin // gnas
(6) pa thams cad rang gnas yin //
bde ba thams cad rang bde yin //
sdug bsngal thams cad rang sdug
yin // thams cad rang rig rang
snang yin // sgom du med pas
bsam du med // rgyud la byar
med yengs su med // bzhag rgyu
med de btang rgyu med // brjed
rgyu med de nor rgyu med // ye
(75r1) shes de la rgyun chad med
// ting nge 'dzin la thun mtshams
med // dmigs pa la yang btang
bzung med // rnam rtog la yang
bzung ngan med // yid yul la
yang phyi nang med // dngos
med la yang phyi nang med // re
dogs spangs na skyon dang bral
// 'dod pa med pas thob (2) pa
med // rtsol ba med pas skyon
rnams sangs // 'bras bu la re
mkhan med pas sangs rgyas kyi
dgongs pa zhig // bsam brjod blo
las 'das pas smra ba'i ngag dang
bral //.

Mañi bka' 'bum (1975: vol. 2, 645.2–646.1; *wam* part II, 14a2–14b1):

gnyis 'dzin grol na gnas su rtol // spang blang med na dngos grub thob // 'gro don byed na phrin las (3) rdzogs // blo thag chod na 'gro sar phyin // phyin pa med na rtol ba yin // de lta bu yi gang zag la // rig pa thams cad rang rig yin // shes pa thams cad rang shes yin // grol ba thams cad rang grol yin // gsal ba thams cad rang (4) gsal yin // stong pa thams cad rang stong yin // 'dug pa thams cad rang 'dug yin // gnas pa thams cad rang gnas yin // bde ba thams cad rang bde yin // sdug bsngal thams cad rang sdug yin // thams cad rang gi rang snang (5) yin // sgom rgyu med de bsam rgyu med // rgyud la sbyar med yengs su med // bzhag rgyu med de btang du med // brjed rgyu med de nor rgyu med // ye shes la ni rgyun chad med // ting nge 'dzin la thun mtshams med // dmigs (pa?) la ni btang bzung (6) med // rnam rtog la yang bzang ngan med // yid kyi yul la phyi nang med // dngos po med la pho mo med // re dogs bral bas skyon rnam bral // 'dod pa med pas thob pa med // rtsol ba med pas lam skyon sangs // 'bras bu la re (14v1) pa med pas sangs rgyas kyi 'dod pa zhig / bsam brjed blo las 'das pas smra ba'i ngag dang bral lo/.

KGT (*ja* 50b4–51a1):

gnyis 'dzin grol na gnas su (5) gtol // spang blang med na dngos grub thob // 'gro don byed na 'phrin las rdzogs // blo thag chod na 'gro sar phyin // phyin sa med na gtol ba yin // de lta bu yi gang zag la // rig pa thams cad rang rig yin // shes pa thams cad rang gsal yin // grol ba thams cad rang grol yin // (6) gsal ba thams cad rang gsal yin // stong pa thams cad rang stong yin // 'dug pa thams cad rang 'dug yin // gnas pa thams cad rang gnas yin // bde ba thams cad rang bde yin // sdug bsngal thams cad rang sdug yin // thams cad rang rig rang snang yin // sgom du med (7) pas bsam du med // rgyud la byar med yongs su med // bzhag rgyu med ste btang rgyu med // brjed rgyu med ste nor rgyu med // ye shes de la rgyun chad med // ting nge 'dzin la thun mtshams med // dmigs pa la yang btang bzung med // rnam par rtog pa bzang ngan med // yid kyi (51r1) yul la phyi nang med // dngos po med la pho mo med // re dogs spangs pas skyon dang bral // 'dod pa med pas thob pa med // rtsol ba med par skyon rnam spangs // 'bras bu la re pa med pas sangs rgyas kyi 'dod pa zhig / (*shad* in the middle) bsam brjed blo las 'das pas smra ba'i ngag dang bral /.

Appendix 6. Newark Folio 6

LACMA folio M.84.171.6 recto:

(1) \$\$ / (space) / ye shes nang nas
 shar b(?)l // [\pm 3 syllables
 obscured] (?)og? rang grol zer ba
 yin no // yin min blo las 'das pa la
 // dgag sgrub bral ba zer ba yin
 no // 'bad (2) rtsol ngos (z?)in pa
 la // chos nyid (?)o [\pm 7 syllables
 obscured] skye ba med pa la //
 'bras bu rang shar zer ba yin no //
 go ba dang rtogs pa dus mnyam
 // shes pa (3) dang grol ba dus
 mnyam // [\pm 8 syllables] ('b(y?)ar
 ba dang reg (second *reg*, scrubbed
 out?) pa dus mnyam / br(l?)an pa
 dang gsher pa dus mnyam+o //
 de ltar shes pa'i (4) gang zag gis //
 lta ba la [\pm 9 syllables] pa la gsal
 'grib med kyis nyi ma khur //
 spyod pa la thogs sdugs med kyis
 rlung la (5) zhon // 'bras bu la
 blang [\pm 8 syllables] (?)tar rtogs
 pa'i gang zag la // lta ba la lta
 rgyu gda' y(e) // sgom pa la sgom
 rgyu gda' ye // (6) spyod pa la
 spyod rgyu gda' ye [\pm 8 syllables]
 // rig pa shes thog du skyol //
 mtshan ma rang grol du thong //
 phyi nang gi 'dzin pa shig / bzang
 ngan (7) gyi blang dor sbongs //
 chags zhen gy(i?) [\pm 2 syllables]
 khr(o?)l // bzang 'dod kyi nga
 rgyal chog // 'dren sems kyi phra
 dog shol // zhe sdang gi me? chen
 gsod / gti.

Mani bka' 'bum (1975: vol. 2, 647.4–
 648.3; *wam* part II, 15a4–15b3):

ye shes nang nas shar ba la rnam
 rtog rang grol zer ba yin no // yin
 min blo las 'das pa la dgag sgrub
 dang bral ba zer ba (5) yin no //
 'bad rtsol ngos zin pa la chos nyid
 glong rdol zer ba yin no // lhun
 grub skye ba med pa la 'bras bu
 rang shar zer ba yin no // lhun
 grub skye ba med pa la 'bras bu
 rang shar zer ba yin no // de ltar
 go ba dang rtogs pa dus mnyam /
 shes pa dang grol ba dus mnyam
 / gsal ba dang mthong (6) ba dus
 mnyam / 'byar ba dang reg pa dus
 mnyam / rlan pa dang gsher ba
 dus mnyam mo / de ltar shes pa'i
 gang zag gis / lta ba la phyogs ris
 med kyis nam mkha' gyon / sgom
 pa la gsal 'grib med kyis nyi ma
 'khur / (15v1) spyod pa la thogs
 rdugs med kyis rlung la zhon /
 'bras bu la blang dor med kyis gser
 gling du sdod / de ltar rtogs pa'i
 gang zag la / lta ba la lta rgyu gda'
 ye / sgom pa la sgom rgyu gda' ye
 / spyod pa la spyod rgyu gda' ye
 / 'bras bu la (2) sgrub rgyu gda' ye
 / rig pa gshis thog tu skyol /
 mthsan ma rang grol du thong /
 phyi nang gi 'dzin pa shig / bzang
 ngan gyi blang dor spongs / chags
 zhen gyi 'dzin pa khrol / bzang
 'dod kyi nga rgyal chog 'gran sems
 kyi phrag dog (3) bshol / zhe
 sdang gi me chen sod / gti.

GLR (Sde dge 75b3–76a1):

ye shes nang nas shar ba la (4) rnam rtog rang grol zer ba yin no // yin min blo las 'das pa la dgag sgrub bral ba zer ba yin no // 'bad rtsol ngos zin pa la chos nyid klong rdolzer ba yin no // lhun grub skye ba med pa la 'bras bu rang shar zer ba yin no // 'o de ltar du go ba dang rtogs pa dus mnyam / shes pa dang grol ba dus (5) mnyam / gsal ba dang mthong ba dus mnyam / 'byar dang reg pa dus mnyam / brlan pa dang gsher ba dus mnyam / 'o de ltar shes pa'i gang zag gis / lta ba la phyogs ris med kyis nam mkha' gon / sgom pa la gsal 'grib med kyis nyi ma khur / spyod pa la thog brdug med kyis rlung la (6) zhon / 'bras bu la blang dor med kyis gser gling ltos / de ltar rtogs pa'i rnal 'byor la / lta ba la lta rgyu gda' ye / bsgom pa la bsgom rgyu gda' ye / spyod pa la spyod rgyu gda' ye / 'bras bu la bsgrub rgyu gda' ye / des na rig pa gshis thog tu sgyel / mtshan ma rang grol du thong / (76v1) phyi nang gi 'dzin pa shigs // bzang ngan gyi blang dor spongs / chags zhen gyi 'dzin pa khrol / bzang 'dod kyi nga rgyal thong / gran sems kyi dra dog khrol / zhe sdang gi me chen gsod / gti.

KGT (ja 51b2–5):

ye shes nang nas shar ba la mam rtog rang grol zer ba yin no // yin min blo las 'das pa la dgag sgrub bral ba zer ba yin no // 'bad rtsol med par zin pa la chos nyid klong rdolzer ba yin no // lhun grub skye ba med (3) pa la 'bras bu rang shar zer ba yin no // de ltar go ba dang rtogs pa dus mnyam shes pa dang grol ba dus mnyam gsal ba dang mthong ba dus mnyam 'byar ba dang reg pa dus mnyam brlan pa dang gsher ba dus mnyam / 'o de ltar shes pa'i gang zag gis lta ba la phyogs ris med kyis na mkha' (4) gon / sgom pa la gsal 'grib med kyis nyi zla khur / spyod pa la thogs brdugs med kyis rlung la zhon / 'bras bu la blang dor med kyis gser gling ltos / de ltar rtogs pa'i gang zag gis lta ba la blta rgyu gda' ye / sgom pa la sgom rgyu gda' ye spyod pa la spyod rgyu gda' ye 'bras bu la sgrub rgyu (5) gda' ye / rig pa gshis thog du skyol mthsan ma rang grol du thong phyi nang gi 'dzin pa shig bzang ngan gyi blang dor spongs chags zhen gyi 'dzin pa khrol bzang 'dod kyi nga rgyal chog 'gran sems kyi phra dog shol zhe sdang gi me chen sod gti.

LACMA folio M.84.171.6 verso:

(1) mug gi ma rig pa gsel // byar
 med du gzhag gnyis 'dzin gyi blo
 nam mkha'i dbyings su rgyas thob
 // don la sgom rgyu med kyis rig
 pa rang sar zhog / (2) de lta bu'i
 gang zag gis // bskyed rims
 bsgoms na snang srid lhar 'gyur
 // rdzogs rims dran gnyis 'dzin
 mtshan ma shig // zung 'brel 'dod
 na bar snang (3) 'ja' mtshon ltos //
 don go mthong na tha ma la chos
 med(+e/o?) // ma mthong bla ma
 bka' rgyu(d) st(e?)n // chos spyod
 byed na rang 'dod zhen pa spongs
 // mi 'jigs go cha (4) 'dod na sgo
 gsum lha ru bsgyur // gzhan don
 byed na 'gro la phan sems bskyed
 // rang don sgrub na 'du 'dzi
 g.yeng ba spongs // dgra dgyegs
 'dul na rtsa bral (5) snying rje
 skyed // phyi mi bde 'bras 'dod
 na / da lta dka' ba spyad // 'gro
 ba dbang? (d)u (?)d na bdag pas
 gzhan ces gyis // skyed dang
 snyoms las che na / mi (6) rtag 'chi
 ba sgoms // chags zhen 'dzin pa
 byung na rmi lam sgyu mar ltos
 // bar chad (b?)dud (k) yis bred na
 rang sems bstan la phob // chos
 bzhin byed na chos min bu (7) ba
 spongs // (nga dang?) grogs
 kyang de las med // nga dang
 bral kyang de las med / sangs
 rgyas ngag dang 'byal kyang de
 las med do // ces rgyal pos
 dgongs pa.

Mani bka' 'bum (1975: vol. 2, 648.3–
 649.2; *wam* part II, 15b3–16a2):

mug gi ma rig pa sangs / byar
 med kyi ngang la yengs med tu
 zhog / gnyis 'dzin gyi blo nam
 mkha'i dbyings su rgyas thob /
 don la sgom rgyu med kyis rig pa
 rang sar zhog / de lta bu'i gang
 zag (4) gis / bskyed rim sgom na
 snang srid lha ru bsgyur //
 rdzogs rim dran na gnyis 'dzin
 mtshan ma bshig / zung 'brel 'dod
 na bar snang 'ja' tshon ltos // don
 go mthong na tha mal chos med
 sdod // ma mthong lta bar 'dod
 na bla ma bka' rgyud (5) bsten //
 chos spyod byed na rang 'dod
 zhen pa spongs // mi 'jigs go cha
 'dod na sgo gsum lha ru bsgyur //
 gzhan don byed na 'gro la phan
 sems bskyed // rang don sgrub na
 'du 'dzi g.yeng ba spongs // dgra
 bgegs 'dul na rtsa bral snying (6)
 rje bskyed // phyi ma bde 'bras
 'dod na da lta dka' ba chod // 'gro
 ba dbang du bsdud na bdag pas
 gzhan gces gyis // sgyid soms
 ngang la las na mi rtag 'chi ba
 bsgoms // chags zhen 'dzin pa
 byung na rmi lam sgyu ma ltos //
 bar chad bdud (16r1) \$\$ / (space)
 / kyis bred na rang sems gtan la
 phob // chos bzhin byed na chos
 min thams cad spongs // nga
 dang bral yang de las med //
 sangs rgyas gzhan dang mjal yang
 de las med // zhes rgyal pos (2)
 dgongs pa mngon du phyung bas
 /.

GLR (Sde dge 76a1–5):

mug gi ma rig pa sangs / byar med kyi ngang la yengs med du zhog / gnyis (2) 'dzin gyi blo ni nam mkha'i dbyings su rgyas thob / don la bsgom rgyu med kyis rang sar zhog / 'o de lta bu'i gang zag gis bskyed rim bsgom na yi dam lha ru 'gyur / rdzogs rim dran na gzung 'dzin mtshan ma zhig / zung 'bral 'dod na bar snang 'ja' tshon ltos / don go mthong na tha mal chos mi ltos / (3) ma mthong bar du bka' brgyud bla ma bsten // chos spyod byed na rang 'dod zhen pa spongs // mi 'jigs go cha 'dod na sgo gsum lha ru bsgyur / gzhan don byed na 'gro la phan sems bskyed // rang don bsgrubs na 'du 'dzi g.yeng ba spongs // dgra bgegs 'dul na rtsa bral snying rje bskyed // phyi ma (4) bde 'bras 'dod na da lta dka' ba spyod // 'gro ba dbang du sdud na bdag pas gzhan gces gyis // snyom las dran na 'chi ba mi rtag bsgom // chags zhen 'dzin pa byung na rmi lam sgyu ma bsgom // bar chad bdud kyis bred na rang sems gtan la phob // chos bzhin byed na chos min thams (5) cad spong / nga dang 'grogs kyang de las med // sangs rgyas gzhan dang mjal yang de bas med // ces chos skyong ba'i rgyal pos dgongs pa mngon du phyung pa dang //.

KGT (ja 51b5–52a2):

mug gi mun pa sol / byar med kyi ngang la yengs (6) med tu zhog / gnyis 'dzin gyi blo na mkha'i dbyings su rgyas thob / don la sgom rgyu med kyis rig pa rnag sar zhog / 'o de lta bu'i gang zag gis skyed rim bsgoms na snang srid lha ru 'gyur / rdzogs rim dran na gnyis 'dzin mtshan ma zhig / zung 'brel 'dod na bar snang 'ja' tshon ltos / don go (7) mthong na tha mal chos med sdod // ma mthong bar du bla na bka' rgyud bsten // chos spyod byed na rang 'dod zhen pa spongs // mi 'jigs go cha 'dod na sgo gsum lha ru bsgyur // gzhan don byed na 'gro la phan sems skyed // rang don sgrub na 'du 'dzi g.yeng ba spongs // dgra bgegs (52r1) 'dul na rtsa bral snying rje skyed // phi ma bde 'bras 'dod na da lta dka' ba chod // 'gro ba dbang dus dud na bdag pas gzhan gces gyis // snyom las le lo dran na 'chi ba mi rtag sgoms // chags zhen 'dzin pa byung na rmi lam sgyu mar sbyongs // bar chad bdud kyis bred na rang sems gtan la phob // lha (2) chos tshul bzhin byed na chos min thams cad spongs // nga dang yun du 'grogs kyang de las med // sangs rgyas gzhan dang mjal yang de las med // ces chos kyi rgyal pos thugs kyi brnag pa gab pa mngon du phyung ba dang.

Appendix 7. Newark Folio 7

LACMA folio M84.171.7 recto:

(1) \$\$ (space) – rje chen po'i sprul pa chos skyong ba'i rgyal po srong brtsan rgam po la / nang blon sna chen pos gser dngul skyogs gang phul nas (2) phyag btsal bskor ba byas te zhus pa / ^e ma ho // mnga' bdag chen po lags / byang chub sems dpa'i sprul pa'i sku / bdag na s(o?) rgas / shes (3) pa rmongs / chos ma mthos 'khor ba'i las ka la mi tshe yangs ma lam du zad pas / da/nga rgan po 'chi ka ma'i chos / skye shi rtsad nas gcod pa thug+s (4) rje chen po'i gdams pa tshig gsum zhu 'tshal ces zhus pas / chos skyong ba'i rgyal pos gdams pa / gnang ba zhang blon rgan po nyon cig / (5) rig pa byang chub kyi sems 'di la / sngon thog ma med pa nas rgas shing rgud pa med par gnas / da ltar gyi 'byung ba rgas pas / sems la phan (6) ma rtags / gnod pa ma skyal / chos nyid byang chub sems kyi sku la gsal sgrib med / sems mi gsal ba ni sems kyi rten / 'byung ba s(gra?) (7) chag pa yin / 'byung ba'i rten lus sems ma bcos rang sar zhog / chos nyid yang dag pa'i don bstan zhing bshad du med / chos la thos.

Maṇi bka' 'bum (2000: 407.5–408.2; *wam*, 204a5–204b2):

thugs rje chen po'i sprul pa chos skyong ba'i rgyal po srong btsan sgam po la nang gi blon po sna chen pos gser dngul skyogs gang phul te / phyag dang bskor ba byas nas / ^e ma ho mnga' bdag (6) chen po lags / byang chub sems dpa' bdag na so rgas / shes pa rmongs / chos ma thos / 'khor ba'i las ka la mi tshe zad pas / rgan po 'chi kha ma'i chos skye shi rtsad nas gcod pa / thugs rje chen po'i gdams pa tshig gsum zhu 'tshal zhes gsol pas / chos skyong ba'i (204v1) (r)gyal pos bka' gtsal pa / zhang blon rgan po nyon cig / rig pa byang chub kyi sems la / sngon thog ma med pa nas da lta yan chad la rgas shing rgud pa m(e)d par gnas / da lta'i 'byung ba rgas pas sems la phan ma btags / gnod pa ma bskyal / chos nyid byang chub kyi sems chos kyi sku la (2) gsal sgrib med / sems gsal bas sems kyi rten 'byung bchags pa yin / 'byung ba'i rten lus sems ma bcos rang sar zhog / chos nyid yang dag pa'i don bstan zhing bshad du med pas chos la thos pa.

LACMA folio M84.171.7 *verso*:

(1) bsam byar med / 'khor ba spang mi dgos / 'chi kar gdams pa 'di nyams su long cig / skye shig g(ts?)ang nas bcod pa thugs rje chen po'i (2) gdams pa tshig gsum la / lus lhar gsal / d/ngag sngags su gsal / sems chos nyid du gsal ba'o // dang po lus lhar gsal ba ni / (3) thugs rje chen por skad cid dran rdzogs ky(i)s bsgoms la / sgom pa'i mkhan po rang sems yin pas / gsal mi gsal med par ngo bstong pa (4) ^om ma Ni padm+e h'uM // ces pas grag stong rang sgra las stong pa'i ngad? du thim / (space) sems ni stong gsal chos nyid rang 'byung ngad? la zhog / zab mo lha (5) sgom pa'i gdams pa gsum / lta ba stong gsal ma bcos mtha' dang bral / sgom pa st(o)ng gsal bying dgod tha dang bral / spyod pa byar med chags (6) sdad? sk(y)on dang bral / 'di ltar nyams su long // rgas kar thugs rje chen por 'gyur skye shi rtsad nas bcod / 'kh(o)r bar kye dogs med / rgas nas chos (7) med mchi stong log yin / rgas kar chos dang 'phrad na pho rgod mdo can yin / nang blon chen po'i thugs la de ltar zhog ces gdams(o?) //.

Mani bka' 'bum (2000: 408.2–6; *wam* 204b2–204b6):

byar m(e)d / 'khor ba spang mi dgos / 'chi khar gdams pa (3) 'di nyams su long mdzod / skye shi rtsad nas gcod pa'i thugs rje chen po'i gdams pa tshig gsum la / lus lhar gsal ba / d/ngag sngags su gsal ba / yid chos nyid du gsal ba'o // lus lhar gsal ba ni thugs rje chen po skad cig dran rdzogs su bsgoms / gsal (4) dang mi gsal med / snang la rang bzhin med / ngo bo stong pa / ngag ^om ma Ni padm+e h'uM zhes grag kyang stong pa'i ngang las byung nas stong pa'i ngang du thim / yid ni stong gsal chos nyid rang byung ngang la zhog / (z)ab mo s(k)yod lha sgom spyod pa gsum la / lta ba bcos stong gsal (5) mtha' dang bral / s(g)om pa stong gsal bying rgod dang bral / spyod pa bya bral byed spyod skyon dang bral / 'di ltar nyams su long / rgas khar thugs rje chen por 'gyur ro // skye (sh)i rtsad (n)as gcod 'khor bar skye dogs med / rgas nas chos med mdo med stong log yin // rgas (6) khar chos dang phrad na mdo can pho rgad yin // zhang blon chen po'i thugs la de ltar zhog / ces gdams so // ^i+th+i // (space) .



Goldmine of Knowledge: The Collections of the Gnas bcu lha khang in 'Bras spungs Monastery

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 In recent years, a massive amount of texts has been revealed in Tibet, treasures of our generation, published in collections made up of hundreds of volumes. Many of these texts were concealed at the time of upheaval in Central Tibet in the mid-17th century and revealed in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution in the Sixteen Arhats Temple (Gnas bcu lha khang) within 'Bras spungs Monastery. Many historical, philosophical and doctrinal texts—sometimes never heard of, sometimes only rumoured to exist—became available and a new chapter in Tibet's historiography was open. Today, many scholars work with these texts, but their history, though crucial to understanding the context in which these volumes were written, remains mysterious. The aim of this article is to shed some light on the history of some of the specific collections discovered in 'Bras spungs, especially with regard to their origin and the way they may have been collected, how they were stored in the temple, and how they were revealed in the late 20th century. Most findings are only preliminary, but I hope that this article may represent a starting point for further inquiry.

1. *The Sixteen Arhats Temple's Library*

In 2004, a two-volume, 2483-page catalogue (henceforth *'Bras spungs Catalogue*) listing the titles of texts housed in five libraries of 'Bras spungs Monastery was published in China by the Paltsek Tibetan Rare Texts Research Centre (Dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang, henceforth Paltsek). The content of four of the five libraries corresponds to what we would expect of one of the most massive Dge lugs establishments to contain, i.e., writings of the authors of this school, canonical collections, etc. One of the five libraries, however, shelters thousands of volumes, apparently untouched since the middle of the 17th century. With the progressive publication of these volumes, many rare or seemingly lost texts have

Cécile Ducher, "Goldmine of Knowledge: The Collections of the Gnas bcu lha khang in 'Bras spungs Library," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 55, Juillet 2020, pp. 121–139.

become available again, and the editors of the catalogue and of many of the ensuing collections therefore compare the importance of this discovery for the history of pre-17th century Tibet to that of the Dunhuang library-cave for pre-11th century Central Asia.¹ Before entering into the history of this discovery, its scale can be measured by listing some of the published collections that contain texts from the Sixteen Arhats Temple:

- 2006, 2007, 2009, 2015: *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs bsgrigs* (120 vols). According to Karma bde legs,² 80% of the titles of the collection come from the Sixteen Arhats Temple.
- 2007: *Rngog chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* (10 vols): 100%.
- 2008: *Jo nang tā ra na tha'i gsung 'bum phyogs bsgrigs par blangs par ma* (10 vols) and other complete works of Jo nang masters (more than 100 volumes): 70% stem from the Sixteen Arhats Temple.
- 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015: *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs* (120 vols). According to Karma bde legs, these historical texts fill more than 500 volumes, and 40% come from the Sixteen Arhats Temple.
- According to Karma bde legs, 60% of the 400 volumes of Bka' brgyud material published recently come from the Sixteen Arhats Temple, including:
 - 2011: *Lho brag mar pa lo tsā'i gsung 'bum* (7 vols).
 - 2011: *Ras chung snyan brgyud skor* (19 vols).
 - 2011: *Rje btsun mi la ras pa'i gsung 'bum* (5 vols).
 - 2013: *Sgam po'i gdan rabs rim byon gyi gsung 'bum* (19 vols).
 - 2013: *Dpal rgyal dbang karma pa sku phreng rim byon gyi gsung 'bum* (108 vols), etc.
- 2012, 2014: *Dus 'khor phyogs bsgrigs chen mo* (40 vols); 150 volumes in total, 70% are from the Sixteen Arhats Temple.

Alongside these publications, many studies and translations of individual texts have been undertaken, and collections have been recompiled in numerous Tibetan publications. The origin of these

¹ *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol.1: 10.

² Karma bde legs 2019. Karma bde legs was one of the editors from Paltsek who took part in the work in the 'Bras spungs libraries in 2002–2003. 2002 was the year of the creation of the Paltsek Research Centre. For a list of their publications, see, for instance, the online Tibetan bookstore managed by Jörg Heimbels: <https://www.tibetanbookstore.org/book-list-dpal-brtsegs/>. Accessed April 8, 2019.

texts, however, has not been thoroughly described. Although the present article does not intend to be a complete assessment of the texts that were once stored in the Sixteen Arhats Temple, its aim is to open a door to that secret chamber, especially with regards to the Mar rñog Bka' brgyud texts that the author of the article has particularly studied.³

The sources used are the following:

- The introduction to the catalogue contained in the first volume of the 2004 publication (*'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 1: 1–16). It describes the origin of the texts catalogued and the way they were sorted, together with some pictures.
- An article published online in 2019 by Karma bde legs who participated in the work leading to the publication of the *'Bras spungs Catalogue* and who is one of its main authors. This publication describes further the origin of the Sixteen Arhats Temple collection and aims at refuting the widespread rumour that texts from the Sixteen Arhats Temple were put under lock by the 5th Dalai Lama out of partisanship. This article contains several pictures, and Karma bde legs posted more pictures on his Wechat account in September 2018. I had oral exchanges with him (via WeChat) in April 2019.
- Articles formerly published on the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC) blog by Michael Sheehy, Maho Iuchi, Kazuo Kano, and Jörg Heimbel, who worked on texts coming from the Sixteen Arhats Temple, as well as oral and written exchanges with these scholars.
- Oral information provided by 'Bri gung Che tshang Rin po che regarding a 'Bri gung collection not published by Paltsek but which nonetheless comes in large parts from the Sixteen Arhats Temple.

2. *The Origin of the Collection*

1642 marked a turning point in Tibetan history. The Mongol tribes of Gushri Khan reached Central Tibet after having conquered the east of Tibet. They rode until Gtsang, where the ruler Karma bstan skyong

³ See Ducher 2017. The Mar rñog Bka' brgyud lineage was initiated in Tibet by Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros (1000–1081) and his disciple Rñog Chos kyi rdo rje (1023–1090) and continued for several centuries as a family lineage before merging into the other Bka' brgyud lineages. Rñog was specialized in the Hevajra practice and considered the holder of Mar pa's commentarial lineage (*bshad brgyud*), as opposed to the practice lineage (*sgrub brgyud*) held by Mi la ras pa (1028?–1111?).

dbang po (1606–1642) was defeated at the foot of his Bsam grub rtse Palace in Gzhis ka rtse. Gushri Khan symbolically offered the 13 myriarchies of Tibet to his patron, the head of the Dge lugs pa order, the 5th Dalai Lama Blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682), who then became the new ruler of Tibet.⁴ Before the construction of the Potala in 1649, the Dalai Lama, one of the incarnation lineages of 'Bras spungs Monastery, ruled from his residence within the monastery, called the Dga' ldan Palace (Dga' ldan pho brang), which gave the name to his new government.

'Bras spungs Monastery was founded in 1416 by 'Jam dbyang chos rje Bkra shis dpal ldan (1379–1449), one of Tsong kha pa's (1357–1419) main disciples, and it became an important monastery and a centre of monastic education of the Dge lugs pa school as well as the seat of the first Dalai Lamas. After the takeover of the 5th Dalai Lama, 'Bras spungs developed significantly; most importantly the Great Assembly Hall (Tshogs chen) was rebuilt and the Dga' ldan Palace enlarged. One of the temples built at that time was the chapel at the rooftop of the Great Assembly Hall, called the Temple of the Sixteen Arhats (Gnas bcu lha khang). It was named after the sandalwood statues of the 16 disciples of Buddha Śākyamuni that were initially housed in the Karma Bka' brgyud monastery Rtse lha sgang in Kong po and brought to 'Bras spungs when their initial home was taken over by Dge lugs-led forces after 1642.

Although information about the statues had been black on white since 1744 in Phur bu lcog Ngag dbang byams pa's (1682–1762) survey of the main Dge lugs pa monasteries,⁵ what became public with the publication of the *'Bras spungs Catalogue* in 2004 is that it was not only statues and a few books that were housed in the temple but a complete library of non-orthodox literature that was kept secret for centuries.

Somehow ironically, these thousands of volumes were spared from the destructions that hit many monasteries between the 18th and the 20th century. Several of the monastic libraries seized by Mongol

⁴ See, e.g., Shakabpa 2010: 346–347.

⁵ In his description of the content of the Sixteen Arhats Temple that is part of his depiction of 'Bras spungs's Monastery, Ngag dbang byams pa, an important 18th-century Dge lugs pa hierarch, describes the origin of the 16 clay statues: "The Ming Emperor [in fact Khubilai Khan] offered them to the Protector of Beings Chos rgyal 'phags pa (1235–1286), and they later became a practice support of the Rgyal ba Karma pa in his Rtse lha sgang [Monastery] in Kong po. Having been brought as a support of practice by the Victorious Great Fifth [Dalai Lama], they are now housed here [within the Gnas bcu lha khang]" (*tā ming rgyal pos 'gro mgon chos rgyal 'phags par phul ba/ rim gyis rgyal ba karma pa'i thugs dam rten du kong po rtse lha sgang du bzhugs pa/ rgyal dbang lnga pa chen po'i thugs dam rten du spyang drangs te 'dir bzhugs pa yin/*, see Phur bu lcog Ngag dbang byams pa: 96).

forces in the mid-17th century and moved to 'Bras spungs were later destroyed by the Dzungar invasions in 1717–1718. Monasteries in Lhasa and along the Gtsang po in particular, Smin grol gling for instance, were burned down in 1718.⁶ Later, more radical, destructions took place when Chinese forces invaded Tibet in the second half of the 20th century. Although 40% of the monastic living quarters in 'Bras spung were destroyed, the main buildings remained, in particular the central assembly hall on top of which the Sixteen Arhat Temple is located.⁷ Influential monks such as Rje Lam rim pa Ngag dbang phun tshogs (1922–1997) managed to stay onsite during the Cultural Revolution and safeguarded as many cultural heritages as they could.⁸ During that time, in 1962 according to Karma bde legs, many of the texts from 'Bras spungs were brought to Beijing, and thus spared the destruction of the Cultural Revolution. Some of them were later returned to Tibet (see below for details).

When China adopted more liberal policies in Tibet after the 11th Party Plenary Session of 1978,⁹ religious practice progressively started again and monasteries regained some vitality. During the 1980s, there started to be some awareness of the presence of books in the Sixteen Arhats Temple, which eventually led to the cataloguing work of Paltsek that took place between July 2002 and January 2003.¹⁰ The first phase of their work was the publication in 2004 of the *'Bras spungs Catalogue*, followed over the years by the reproduction of manuscripts and increasingly by the computerized reproductions of many of the literary treasures dormant in the library for centuries.

Despite Paltsek's wonderful and laudable efforts in making these texts available, the introduction of the catalogue, as the introduction of later collection, is quite vague about what happened in the 17th century and in its description of the rediscovery in the 1980s. As shown by the article published by Karma bde legs in 2019, there remains a fair amount of uncertainty surrounding the collection, which fuels rumours about what exactly was found in the monastery. The *'Bras spungs Catalogue* for instance repeatedly refers to the place where the books were stored as "the private library of the 5th Dalai

⁶ Shakabpa 2010: 420–421. Although Shakabpa does not mention the monasteries in the Gzhung valley, my own research shows that Spre'u zhing, the Rngog pa Bka' brgyud monastery located in that valley, was damaged at the time. See Ducher 2017: 357.

⁷ Goldstein 1998: 25.

⁸ *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 1: 12.

⁹ Goldstein 1998: 10.

¹⁰ *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 1: 11.

Lama,"¹¹ and Karma bde legs insists that it was indeed a library, not a storeroom of books put under lock. The exact fact remains somehow murky, however, and a lot of questions understandably surround the collection.

One of the main rumours is that the office of the 5th Dalai Lama sealed off those texts that it wished to suppress and stored them in sealed leather bags. According to Karma bde legs, none of the books in the Sixteen Arhats Temple were stored in such bags. What was kept in leather protective pouches was a Tshal pa Bstan 'gyur in 240 volumes commissioned by Tshal pa Drung chen Smon lam rdo rje (13th c.), and it is more likely that the leather was used in this case as a protection against rodents rather than as sealing. Still, however, many of the texts in the Sixteen Arhats Temple indeed came from schools (especially the Karma Bka' brgyud and Jo nang) that were seen as the opposition when the Dga' ldan pho brang came to office, and it cannot be denied that storing them in a library within a Dge lugs monastery corresponded to a *de facto* suppression of many of these texts. As will be shown below, many of the complete works of authors and coherent collections were disbanded and reorganized, which effectively concealed their origin and complicated their potential use, even more so as neither a catalogue nor a description of the collections was found within the Sixteen Arhats Temple.

Scholars sometimes lament the lack of precision on the exact location of the various manuscripts within the Dunhuang library-cave before it was opened. Had a precise archaeological survey of the library been redacted before volumes were dispatched around the globe, it is likely that research about the Dunhuang manuscripts would have been facilitated. In the case of the books coming from the Sixteen Arhats Temple, the situation is worse than in Dunhuang. Although a listing of some texts exists—the *'Bras spungs Catalogue*—it is neither complete nor detailed, and it does not provide any precise indication or explanation about the numbers and original locations of the texts within the storeroom. This article is therefore humbly offered to the community in order to start some reflection on the subject and create the necessary awareness that may lead to some clarity about the status of these important collections.

3. Collections Described in the 'Bras spungs Catalogue

Despite these words of reserve, there is actually quite a lot that can be

¹¹ See, e.g., *'bras spungs gnas bcu lha khang gi dpe mdzod ni rgyal dbang sku phreng lnga pa'i sku sger dpe mdzod du grags shing/ dpe mdzod 'di nyid kyang dus yun ring po'i nang bka' rgya mar song [...]* (*'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 1: 7).

learned from the introduction of the *'Bras spungs Catalogue*. The two volumes provide a list of the contents of five libraries located within 'Bras spungs Monastery. The five libraries are the following:¹²

- The library of the Sixteen Arhats Temple on the second floor of the main assembly hall. This is the largest of the five libraries described;¹³
- The library of Rje lam rim pa Ngag dbang phun tshogs (1922–1997) in the 'Bras spungs Palace ('Bras spungs pho brang gzim chung gi rje lam rim pa'i dpe mdzod);¹⁴
- The library of Pho lha nas Bsod nams stobs rgyas (1689–1747) in the Dga' ldan Palace (Dga' ldan pho brang zim chung, also called Mi dbang lha khang):¹⁵ it contained 18 Bka' 'gyur and Bstan 'gyur collections from various libraries.¹⁶ This library was constituted during the time of the 18th century ruler (*mi dbang*) Pho lha nas and contains the Tshal pa Bstan 'gyur mentioned above.
- The library of 'Bras spungs Sgo mang Monastic College¹⁷, constituted in the 1930s and 1940s;¹⁸
- The library of 'Bras spungs Kun dga' rwa ba,¹⁹ constituted recently but that previously contained old Indian manuscripts.²⁰ According to the *'Bras spungs Catalogue*, it housed 127 Indian manuscripts before the Cultural Revolution, and 16 afterwards.

Out of these five, it is the library of the Sixteen Arhats Temple that housed the greatest number of texts. The *'Bras spungs Catalogue* has 22.694 entries for this library, with 1.601 entries mistakenly given the same number,²¹ thus totalling 24.295 texts. This is an inventory of

¹² See Akester 2016: 109–113 for a description of 'Bras spungs Monastery. Sources such as the *'Bras spungs chos 'byung* (Dge 'dun blo gros 1974) and *Cultural Monuments of Tibet* (Henss 2014 vol. 2: 218–228) do not contain any detailed explanation about the Sixteen Arhats Temple.

¹³ *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 1: 1–1958.

¹⁴ *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 2: 1959–2179.

¹⁵ *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 2: 2180–2197.

¹⁶ *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 1: 9.

¹⁷ *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 2: 2198–2327.

¹⁸ *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 1: 10.

¹⁹ *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 2: 2328–2475.

²⁰ *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 1: 7; this may be Atiśa's manuscripts, which used to be in Rwa sgreng. See Kano 2015 for details on the search of these manuscripts.

²¹ Thanks to Jörg Heimbel (personal conversation) for pointing out to me that at *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 1: 1024 the counting drops from 11.600 to 10.000 and continues to count from the latter number.

only a small fraction of the original content, however, and the actual location of most volumes is now unknown. The *'Bras spungs Catalogue* gives some indication of the movements that took place in the 20th century, and this is further elicited by Karma bde legs.²² If one considers the numbers inscribed on the books of the Sixteen Arhats Temple (see below for details), originally there must have been between 40.000 and 50.000 titles in the library.

A first transfer occurred at the time of the 13th Dalai Lama (1876–1933), when some of the volumes were relocated to the Potala. In 1962, eight trucks loaded with several thousands of volumes were sent to the Palace of Nationalities in Beijing. The exact amount of texts displaced is not known, but the 11th Panchen Lama Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1938–1989) managed in the 1980s to have an estimated 6.000 volumes relocated to several locations in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. Karma bde legs estimates that about 500 volumes each were sent to the three main Dge lugs monasteries (Se ra, 'Bras spungs, Dga' ldan), as well as to the monasteries of Zha lu, Bkra shis lhun po, and Sa skya. 1.000 volumes were deposited in the Nor bu gling kha and in the Tibet Library (Bod ljongs dpe mdzod khang), and close to 1.500 volumes were brought to the Tibet Museum of Historical Relics (Bod ljongs dngos mang bshams ston khang). In the process, many works collected by lamas were disbanded and the volumes deposited in the Museum are now unavailable for research. Karma bde legs thus estimates that out of more than 40.000 texts originally stored, only approximately 12.000 can be accounted for, which means that the whereabouts of more than 30.000 texts is still unknown.

The extent of the original materials is recorded in a comparative table of the *'Bras spungs Catalogue* (pp. 14–15). This table shows that, according to the numbers written on title pages, there used to be at least 4.416 bundles of texts in the library (5.700 in the 2019 article), out of which 1.819 were actually present at the time of cataloguing in 2002, that is to say less than 42% (32% of the total in 2019).²³ In the case of material related to Hevajra (marked *phyi ga*), for instance, only 56% of bundles (114 out of the 204) are described (pp. 315–397), and

²² *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 1: 12 and Karma bde legs 2019. The information provided here relies mainly on Karma bde legs's article that is more detailed.

²³ There is a big difference between the 2004 and 2019 numbers in the case of texts related to Kālacakra and Guhyasamāja. Karma bde legs does not specify whether the gap derives from omissions in the *'Bras spungs Catalogue* or the later discovery of texts. In the case of the Rngog collection, for instance, some of the texts reproduced in the 2011 computerized publication (Rngog Rin chen dpal bzang po's writings) are missing in both the *'Bras spungs Catalogue* and the 2010 edition but appear in the *Potala Catalogue*: 118–119, and may thus figure among the volumes that were moved to the Potala Palace at the time of the 13th Dalai Lama.

54% (554 out of 1032) for Bka' brgyud cycles (*Bka' brgyud chos skor sogs sna tshogs*, marked *phyi ma*, pp. 573–1357).

4. The Code Inscribed on Texts from the Sixteen Arhats Temple



Fig. 1 — Example of the code (*phyi ra* 13) on the title page of the Rngog family history, *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 22, p. 1

Line A: *phyi / nang*
 Line B: Tibetan letter corresponding to a topic
 Line C: Bundle number
 Line D: Title of the text

Although no listing or explanation regarding the texts is known to have been found within the Sixteen Arhats Temple,²⁴ the *'Bras spungs Catalogue* provides helpful clues for understanding the collection, the most important being the code illustrated above (Fig. 1) and inscribed on the title page of texts from this library (*ka rtags*). This code is present above the title on reproductions of manuscripts or xylographs found within the Sixteen Arhats Temple, for instance in some of the texts contained in the *Rngog chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, the *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs bsgrigs* and others, and thus represents an important information, one that is unfortunately missing in collections that have been published in a computerized format.²⁵

On top of the code, the catalogue also provides:

- a sorting number (*tshan grangs*), 24.295 in total for the Sixteen Arhats Temple. This corresponds to the number of titles catalogued by Paltsek;
- the title of each section (*le tshan so so'i mtshan*). It is generally the title of an independent text, although sometimes there is no title;
- the author (*rtsom pa po*) when it is available (often mistaken);
- the type of writing (*yig gzugs*): xylograph, manuscript, type of

²⁴ *'Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 1: 11.

²⁵ Although absence of proof is not proof of absence, to the best of my knowledge, this code does not appear on manuscripts coming from elsewhere than *'Bras spungs* and can therefore be considered a solid indication that a text having such a code comes from there.

- cursive handwriting;
- the number of folios (*ldeb grangs*);
- the size in centimetres (*ldeb tshad* cm).

As far as the code written on each work's title page is concerned, it has either the word *phyi* or *nang*, followed by a Tibetan letter and a number.

4.1. Line A

Regarding the first indication, texts marked with *phyi*, "external" are those from the Sixteen Arhats Temple, and this indicates that they come from outside libraries. Texts marked with *nang*, "internal," come from one of the other four libraries of 'Bras spungs Monastery, thus they are inner resources. External books arrived during the period described above, when the Dga' ldan pho brang government took power with the military means of Gushri Khan's Khoshut armies, and seized several monasteries. The libraries contained in these non-Dge lugs pa monasteries were not destroyed, like it happened so often in other places and times, but moved to 'Bras spungs where they were reorganized and stored in the back of the Sixteen Arhats Temple.

4.2. Line B

The second part of the code is a Tibetan letter that classifies texts according to their topic, in an order reminiscent of the Bka' 'gyur divisions.²⁶ For instance, texts with *ka* are said to be related to Kālacakra, those with *ma* to be Bka' brgyud cycles and those with *ra* (like the example given above), to historical writings. No explanation is provided for this system in the catalogue, which does not specify whether the editors figured out the sorting or whether the key was provided in the library. There is only one text with the letter *ta* and the editors do not provide a corresponding topic for it. This may indicate that they were the ones who tried to clarify the topic based on their analysis of each title having this letter. This thematic organization of the volumes suggests that the people in charge of rearranging the books and writing the code did intend to recreate some sort of library with the material seized, albeit not a public one, and Karma bde legs declares that many of the complete works were

²⁶ 'Bras spungs Catalogue vol. 1: 14–15.

separated at this time.²⁷ These two facts may indicate that the aim of the sorting that took place when the library was created was to euphemize the origin of the texts (it is likely that at that time, like today, converting a monastery and seizing its assets may not have been considered completely virtuous in Buddhist terms) and to constitute a new library with a coherent content. This strategy is visible as well in the case of the statues of the 16 *arhats* which were brought from a Karma Bka' brgyud monastery and were re-appropriated in the creation of the Sixteen Arhats Temple.

4.3. Line C

The last part of the code is a number that refers to groupings of texts. There are always several titles sharing the same number, sometimes only a few titles and sometimes a couple of dozens, thus forming completely identical codes. According to Karma bde legs, when the texts were catalogued, they were protected inside book covers and placed on shelves (hence forming some sort of library with sorting numbers). It is likely that each grouping of texts with an identical number formed one volume of several texts protected by a common cover. These groupings of texts with the same number thus provide a reflection of the volumes that used to be kept together in the shelves of the Sixteen Arhats Temple since the mid-17th century.

5. The Mysteries of the Sixteen Arhats Temple

Now that the code is clarified, several questions can be raised, and first of all: why does all this matter? One could mostly give two reasons why anyone would like to make sense of all this: the first being historical, whether this may concern Tibetan history in general or the social and religious history of the groups who produced these texts in particular, and the second being philological. In historical terms, the collection of the Sixteen Arhats Temple questions the campaigns launched in the mid-17th century by Gushri Khan and the motives behind the Dga' ldan pho brang's or the 5th Dalai Lama's, or anyone else's sorting of these texts in the Sixteen Arhats Temple. Another question in terms of contemporary history is that of the circulation of books in the People's Republic of China. These questions far exceed the ambition of the present article and may be

²⁷ This is obvious in the case of the Rngog texts which have many different numbers. Although it is possible that the texts came from several libraries, it is unlikely that there were so many different libraries that held Rngog texts but that all of the texts available today only come from the Sixteen Arhats Temple.

the object of future research.

The impetus for the research discussed in the present article were the ten volumes of disparate texts of the Rngog pa Bka' brgyud lineage that form the core of this author's doctoral dissertation. In order to understand the history of these texts, it was necessary to clarify where they may have been produced, how they circulated, the date and authorship of the manuscripts and of the texts they contained. As Sam van Schaik showed in his studies of the Dunhuang collection, it is important to understand the social framework of text production and to see texts as objects, not only as content.²⁸ To do this, it proved necessary to investigate the origin of the texts, tracing their source as early as possible.

Another important question is that of the moment when the code was inscribed on the texts. No information is provided on that in the *Bras spungs Catalogue*, and Karma bde legs maintains that there was no indication in the storeroom. Most scholars interviewed on the subject and Karma bde legs himself think that the code was written on the volumes when the texts were collected within the Sixteen Arhats Temple. Karma bde legs is adamant on the fact that Paltsek was not responsible for reordering the texts in this way at the time of cataloguing, and we can therefore conclude that the code was inscribed in the 17th century.²⁹ What is not clear, however, is whether the groups of texts were like they appear to be in the catalogue when they were brought inside the Sixteen Arhats Temple (that is to say that volumes were only opened, registered with the sorting number of the Sixteen Arhats Temple library, and packed again) or whether the original volumes were opened, separated into various sections, sorted with a code and packed in new bundles with that code. If we take as an example the texts now compiled in the Rngog collection,³⁰ it can be observed that each grouping contains texts of different sizes of paper and various styles of writing. Some groups are related by topic, but for some the link is not obvious. This might indicate that individual groups may not necessarily have been considered as forming a whole with the other texts with the same number and may have come from various libraries, and that texts from the same library could have been dispatched in many different groups and sections. A much more thorough examination of the various collections and collected works of authors would be necessary to clarify this question.

If we continue with our example, however, it is obvious that the various texts now compiled in the *Rngog chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* were

²⁸ See, e.g., van Schaik 2016.

²⁹ Private conversation via WeChat, April 2019.

³⁰ Dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang 2007.

grouped in many different volumes in the Sixteen Arhats Temple. They contain texts of different sizes and handwriting. It seems therefore likely that this collection is artificial and did not exist in the 17th century or earlier. It most probably gathers texts coming from several libraries seized at the period, and Paltsek did an excellent work by gathering together pieces of the tradition that were separate until then. Even if the texts come from a single library, they probably did never constitute a single collection organized by an editor. My initial hypothesis was that by analysing groupings and their content it may be possible to guess where each particular volume may have come from, and hence to understand who were the people responsible for the copy of specific manuscripts, and on that basis one can clarify the history of the Rngog family of Spre'u zhing. If, however, volumes were disbanded upon arrival in the Sixteen Arhats Temple and do not reflect an earlier situation, this may prove difficult. What seems possible is to recreate collections by grouping texts with the same paper size, similar ductus, topic, etc. This too may be the object of future research.

Another question that is quite important and germane to the previous one is that of the identity of the libraries seized. Even though it is difficult for the moment to pinpoint the exact origin of a particular text, it is still useful to know which libraries were displaced in the 17th century. To continue with the Rngog example, several of the monasteries listed below were likely to contain these texts, which explains why some of the texts appear several times in the *'Bras spungs Catalogue*.

Although an extensive listing of the monasteries seized is not provided in the *'Bras spungs Catalogue*, it mentions three libraries contained in the Sixteen Arhats Temple, albeit without specifying its source for such claim. The three are the library of the Sne gdong Palace built by the Phag gru rulers (14th–15th c.), that of the Bsam grub rtse Palace built by the Gtsang pa rulers, and that of Rtse lha sgang, related to the Karma Bka' brgyud school and its head, the Karma pas. It is likely that the editors, like the present author, examined 17th-century history to define which monasteries were converted, hence which libraries may have fed the new book depository. Here again, further research on the conquest of Central Tibet by Gushri Khan's army in 1642 and of his dealing with the rebellions that took place in the following years may bring further information and the following is only an introduction to the topic.

The library of the Phag mo gru pa hierarchs in the Sne gdong Palace in Lho ka³¹ may have been very rich as many famous masters

³¹ Akester 2016: 409–411.

and rich patrons were related to it between the 14th and the 16th centuries.³² As far as the Rngog transmission is concerned, the Phag mo gru pa hierarch Grags pa 'byung gnas (1414–1448) received several transmissions from Rngog Byang chub dpal (1360–1446) and was an important patron of Lo chen Bsod nams rgya mtsho (1424–1482) and his master, 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal (1392–1481). Both masters were instrumental in the transmission of the seven *maṅḍalas* of the Rngog to the 4th Zhwa dmar, who himself served as the Gdan sa mthil abbot for 12 years. It is therefore likely that the Sne'u gdong Palace, like the Gdan sa mthil Monastery which may have been seized as well, contained texts of the Rngog tradition, and in fact several of the manuscripts were copied in the region. This library is therefore most probably the main source of tantric exegetic texts related to the Rngog tradition found in the Sixteen Arhats Temple, although it is not clear at which time it was seized.³³

The library of the Gtsang pa hierarchs in the Bsam grub rtse Palace, in Gzhis ka rtse, was seized when the regime was toppled in 1642.³⁴ As the regime was close to the Karma Bka' brgyud order, it may have contained many texts from this tradition.³⁵

The Karma Bka' brgyud Library of Rtse lha sgang in Kong po housed a renowned library established by the 1st Karma pa (1110–1193). In it there was a treasure room called the “Black Treasury” (Mdzod nag ma), containing *inter alia* a large biography of Mi la ras pa.³⁶ It is likely that most Bka' brgyud collections published by Paltsek mentioned earlier come from Rtse lha sgang. As said, the name of 'Bras spungs' Sixteen Arhats Temple derives from the statues of the 16 *arhats* taken from Rtse lha sgang when the monastery was seized. The reason why this monastery in particular was targeted is that its landlord, Rtse lha sgang pa, spearheaded the rebellion against the Central Tibetan forces in 1643.³⁷ The battle was fierce and the Central Tibetan forces, assisted by Gushri Khan's army, annihilated the resistance, killing “some five or six thousand pro-

³² See, e.g., Farmer 2017 and Ducher 2017.

³³ For more information on the history of that monastery, see Czaja 2013.

³⁴ Shakabpa 2010: 346–347.

³⁵ More information about the institutions of the Gtsang pa regime will be available when the dissertation of Jetsun Deleplanque (Divinity School, Chicago) is finished. See Deleplanque 2019 for a description of the court before it was destroyed.

³⁶ Quintman 2014: 105–107. Quintman indicates on p. 106 that the Black Treasury may have been intact until the Cultural Revolution, but it is likely that it was actually emptied in the 17th century. For a description of the modern location, see Chan 1994: 749.

³⁷ Shakabpa 2010: 348–349.

Karma Kagyü troops from Kongpo.”³⁸ In all likelihood, the whole library, together with the statues, etc., were brought to ‘Bras spungs. The fate of the monastery after that date is not clear, but it definitely lost most of its assets.³⁹

The monastery of Tāranātha, Rtag brtan phun tshogs gling, was seized by the government in 1650 and turned into a Dge lugs monastery in 1658.⁴⁰ It is most probably the origin of the many volumes of the Jo nang tradition held in the Sixteen Arhats Temple. Regarding the Rngog tradition, Tāranātha was, like the 4th Zhwa dmar, an important proponent and compiler, and his library too could have housed Rngog materials.

Another library that is not explicitly mentioned in the *‘Bras spungs Catalogue* and Karma bde legs’ article is that of ‘Bri gung thil. According to the information provided by the present Che tshang Rin po che, there were around 40 boxes of ‘Bri gung Bka’ brgyud texts in the Sixteen Arhats Temple. He personally heard about their presence within ‘Bras spungs in the 1980s and organized the reproduction of several volumes he was interested in by introducing a photocopy machine within the monastery’s compounds. The texts were retrieved before the start of the cataloguing process of the *‘Bras spungs Catalogue* and do not figure in it. A large part of what is now called the *‘Bri gung bka’ brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*⁴¹ comes from there, although in an indiscernible form as this collection has been completely rewritten by hand. Some of the materials probably date back to the period of the 4th Zhwa dmar, who had close ties with the 15th and 16th ‘Bri gung throne-holders, Kun dga’ rin chen and Bkra shis phun tshogs, and the collection contains key instructions of the Mar rngog tradition unavailable anywhere else.⁴²

Although these five libraries surely had a very eclectic content and could contain the various holdings described in the *‘Bras spungs Catalogue*, it is also possible that other libraries were incorporated, as one finds many texts associated with the Zhi byed, Gcod yul, Shangs pa, Gya’ bzang, Mtshal pa, Smar tsang, and Snye mdo traditions, as well as works of Dge lugs pa lamas whose writings are now unavailable.⁴³ It is as well possible that the many Bka’ gdams pa texts, as well as the Indian manuscripts, may have come from Rwa sgrenng. This as well may be elucidated by further research.

³⁸ Shakabpa 2010: 346.

³⁹ Quintman 2014: 253n71.

⁴⁰ Stearns 1999: 70–71; Sheehy 2009: 227; Akester 2016: 623–628. The *‘Bras spungs Catalogue* does not name this library in particular, but Karma bde legs 2019 does.

⁴¹ A mgon Rin po che 2004.

⁴² Personal discussion with Che tshang Rin po che, June 2017.

⁴³ *‘Bras spungs Catalogue* vol. 1: 8; Shakabpa 2010: 349; Shamar 2012: 46.

6. Conclusion

Although many of the findings in this article are preliminary, my hope is that shedding some light on the collection of the Sixteen Arhats Temple may trigger further research and bring more clarity on the identity of the libraries seized, how they were incorporated in the new Sixteen Arhats Temple library and the whereabouts of the missing texts.

The descriptions of the state of the Sixteen Arhats Temple library in the late 20th century show that it may correspond to the idea we have of a library, that is to say a place that holds a collection of books whose content is coherently organized (here in the way of Tibetan canonical collections). Although in this case, the aim was clearly more to preserve—or maybe to avoid the destruction?—than to spread. Whatever the intention of the creator of the book depository might have been, the fact remains that, somehow ironically, the seizing and disbanding of libraries in the 17th century rescued many books from the destructions of the following centuries and, often, from oblivion. Most of the Rngog commentaries, for instance, are known only through copies conserved in the Sixteen Arhats Temple, and this is true as well for many Bka' gdams pa philosophical manuals, historical narratives and other Jo nang and Karma Bka' brgyud practice liturgies. In all likelihood, however, this is only the tip of the iceberg, and it is hoped that in the future many more treasures may appear that will enrich our knowledge of pre-17th century Tibet.

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Re-adapting a Buddhist Mother's Authority in the Gung ru Female *Sprul sku* Lineage

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 In August 2013, about 1,000 Tibetans, including many dressed in traditional garb, traveled by motorcycle, by horseback and by foot to the estate of the Gung ru Ye shes Mkha' 'gro ma female *sprul sku*, or reincarnation lineage.¹ These Tibetans arrived at the estate located behind Brag dkar (Baishiya 白石崖) Monastery, a small monastery in the Dge lugs tradition founded on the Rgan gya (Ganjia 甘加) grassland of Gansu in 1644 that in the 18th century became a subsidiary to Bla brang Monastery (Labulengsi 拉卜楞寺) in Xiahe 夏河, Gansu.² They attended the final session of the annual five-day recitation of *Gcod*, the Buddhist practice of cutting the ego³ founded by the yogini Ma gcig lab sgron (1093–1191). After Brag dkar's monks finished the climactic *Gcod* blessing in front of a large fire, many locals prostrated in front of the *mchod rten* of Bskal bzang dam chos sgröl ma (Gacang Danqu Zhuoma 尕藏丹曲卓玛, 1936–2013, Bskal bzang from hereon), the 6th Gung ru *sprul sku* who passed away in January 2013 and, who along with Rgan gya elders, re-started this popular *Gcod* event in 2000.⁴ In fact, the line to lay a *kha btags* at Bskal

¹ The Bsam sding Rdo rje phag mo lineage is the other. The Gung ru lineage is one of only two contiguous female *sprul sku* lineages out of more than 2,000 total lineages in Tibetan history (Schneider 2015).

² See Yang 2009: 111, 142 and Nietupski 2011: 67, 69. As one of the major Dge lugs monasteries, Bla brang developed a large periphery in present-day Gansu and Sichuan provinces with many subsidiary monasteries, such as Brag dkar. Bla brang opened in 1709 and quickly developed into one of the major Dge lugs monasteries of Tibet.

³ See Gyatso 1985, Edou 1996, Harding 2004, and Sorenson 2012 for descriptions of the *Gcod* practice.

⁴ This document provided by Brag dkar Monastery in August 2017 claims that Bskal bzang and the sponsors in Rgan gya restarted the *Gcod* event in 2000.

bzang's *mchod rten* placed in the estate's shrine room extended outside the estate's main gate and remained that way for nearly two hours.⁵

Around the same time as the *Gcod* event at the Gung ru estate, Bskal bzang's youngest son Bde dpon Bkra shis (50) handed me an electronic copy of Bskal bzang's Obituary, a 14-page document written entirely in Chinese but with no confirmed author or publication history. Due to the Obituary's meticulous historical and religious detail, presumably, the author was a part of the Tibetan religious establishment or the People's Republic of China (PRC) government where Bskal bzang had worked for decades in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) of Xiahe (Bla brang), which is located 35 km south of Brag dkar. Two local sources from Bla brang told me that the Obituary resembled an official government document or presentation, which would explain, in part, the significance of an author writing the text in Chinese.⁶

Bskal bzang first joined the government in the early 1950s and later as a laywoman entered the CPPCC, where she served on several local and provincial Buddhist and women's associations and helped manage nunneries in Bla brang after the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Bskal bzang and many other *sprul sku* laicized in 1958 after the Chinese communist government's forceful response to local protests against the PRC reforms imposed in A mdo.⁷ She later married and had four children prior to and during the Cultural Revolution, when she was a laborer.⁸

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the Obituary's authorship and publication—not uncommon in Tibet and the genre of Tibetan life writing more broadly⁹—this Obituary, given its extensive detail about Ma gcig lab sgron, the Gung ru lineage, A mdo, and Tibetan history, deserves the scholarly attention as a new text composed about a Tibetan woman. In this regard, this well-written text belongs in the conversation with the Gung ru lineage's lone *rnam thar*¹⁰ titled *The Biography of the Gung ru Wisdom Dākinī Called the White Lotus Vine*, or the *Lotus Vine*, written about the 4th Gung ru Rig 'dzin dpal mo (1814–

⁵ The author of the article attended this event in August 2013 at Brag dkar Monastery in Rgan gya.

⁶ Conversations between the author and two Tibetans in Bla brang in 2019 who suggested that the Obituary was likely a CPPCC work and perhaps an official presentation given the headings contained in the document.

⁷ See Slobodnik 2004: 8–9.

⁸ Anonymous, Bskal bzang's Obituary written in 2013.

⁹ See Diemberger 2007: 83; Gyatso 1998: 103.

¹⁰ There are about 2,000 total *rnam thar* of Tibetan figures from the 8th to the 20th centuries. Less than one percent are *rnam thar* about women and autobiographies by women (Schaeffer 2004: 4).

1891) in 1897.¹¹ Even though Bskal bzang's Obituary is not a *rnam thar*, this Obituary that describes her birth, her deeds, and her enlightenment raises important questions about how it uses narrative and legitimation strategies that represent and bolster Bskal bzang's authority as the 6th Gung ru *sprul sku*. What strategies does the Obituary use, and how does the Obituary deploy gendered discourses as part of these legitimating strategies to represent Bskal bzang's authority? Significantly, how does the Obituary resemble the narrative and legitimation strategies as rooted in *The Lotus Vine* about the 4th Gung ru Rig 'dzin dpal mo? This article will discuss the answers to these questions.

Bskal bzang's Obituary shows many examples of how an audience of monks, nuns and laymen and women in Rgan gya and Bla brang judge the insignia, speech and actions of Bskal bzang to be "right" as a charismatic universal Buddhist mother who was an emanation of Ma gcig lab sgron, as the *mkha' 'gro ma*¹² Vajravārāhī and as a surrogate mother in the community thereby producing the "effect" of her authority.¹³ Here, I employ Bruce Lincoln's model of authority as a guide that suggests that the "effect" of authority is discursive and relational rather than inherently given or adjudicated from a top-down position.¹⁴ To be clear, by Buddhist motherhood, I refer to Reiko

¹¹ Zhang ston Bstan pa rgya mtsho's four-volume collected works were edited in 2009 and include the 18-folio biography of Rig 'dzin dpal mo titled *Gung ru ye shes kyi mkha' 'gro ma'i rnam par thar ba pad dkar 'khri shing zhes bya ba bzhuvs so* [The Liberation Story of the Gung ru Wisdom Dākinī called the *White Lotus Vine*] (2009: 181–208). The *rnam thar* was first printed in 1897.

¹² A *mkha' 'gro ma* (Chin. *kongxingmu* 空行母, Skt: *dākinī*), literally a "sky goer," can assume many roles and functions, including a "goddess, a yogini, a consort, a wife, a message-bearing epiphany or a woman" (Gyatso 1998: 246). See also Sarah Jacoby's description of *mkha' 'gro ma* who "can be worldly and thus enmeshed in *samsara* and thus of questionable virtue, or they can be wisdom *dākinīs* who are fully enlightened" (Jacoby 2014: 135–137).

¹³ Many great works (e.g., Schaeffer 2004, Diemberger 2007, Jacoby 2014) discuss issues pertaining to motherhood and how it is used (or not used) in narrative structure. Max Weber writes that charisma represents a "certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, exceptional powers and not accessible to ordinary people, but regarded as divine" (Weber 1947: 358–359). In contrast, Worsley (1968: xii) defines charisma as a social relationship and not an attribute of an individual personality or mystical quality.

¹⁴ Lincoln (1994: 10–11) defines authority as a relational "effect" and not an entity super-imposed from a top down source or what can be labeled as extraordinary or superhuman charisma. Rather, authority occurs when an audience judges or trusts as "right" a figure's speech, actions and insignia that produce an "effect" that builds off Worsley's description of the relational dynamic of charisma. Weber, on the other hand, describes "charismatic authority" as occurring within an audience but in his description of charismatic authority he elides authority more with the position of the ruler or leader as "rule over men to which the governed submit

Ohnuma's analysis of Indian Buddhist mothers who appear in texts as signifiers of Buddhist principles, such as universal compassion and renunciation of householder life. These Buddhist mothers garnered acceptance and prestige from a patriarchy such as Bla brang for showing love for all beings like the Buddha does, as opposed to the "particular" love shown by an actual mother for her own children.¹⁵

Along these lines, Bskal bzang's Obituary links Bskal bzang to Ma gcig, who ironically was an actual mother of five children in the 12th century, but who later became known as "The Great Buddhist Mother" and has been feted by current scholars as an "authorizing referent" for many Tibetan women, including women in the Gung ru lineage.¹⁶ As it was already mentioned, Bskal bzang's Obituary also connects Bskal bzang with the famed *mkha' 'gro ma* figure Vajravārāhī, a wrathful form of Vajrayoginī associated in *yab-yum* consort practices with the deity Heruka in Cakrasaṃvara tantric rituals that were often practiced in the cave located behind Brag dkar Monastery and elsewhere around Bla brang.¹⁷ Moreover, the Obituary highlights the numerous deeds that Bskal bzang performed in Rgan gya and Bla brang as a surrogate or proxy mother, such as helping to rebuild the destroyed Brag dkar Monastery in the 1980s and manage nunneries in the 1990s in Bla brang after the Cultural Revolution.

Yet, in order to understand the full "effect" of Bskal bzang's authority as a charismatic mother within this community—and by that, I suggest the profound "effect" not only as an elite Buddhist practitioner but as a vital temporal symbol of peace and harmony across this A mdo grassland community—it is important to analyze the intention or function of the Obituary that was written for a specific audience. To do so, it is necessary to study Bskal bzang's Obituary as a master narrative where the author, in the words of Michel Foucault's critique of grand stories, "reconstitutes a tradition with a story based on an evolutive curve and a recourse to metaphors for life."¹⁸ Following this track, motherhood became the main metaphor

because of their belief in the extraordinary qualities of the specific person" (Weber 1948: 295).

¹⁵ Buddhist texts rarely feature actual mothers because of what is deemed a mother's attachment to their own children as opposed to caring for all beings. Two examples of idealized Buddhist mothers who never became involved with or later renounced the householder life include Māyā, who became a deified figure after she died shortly after giving birth to the Buddha, and Mahāprajāpatī, who became a nun after she raised the Buddha. See Ohnuma 2012: 8, 14–16, 34–36, 43, 50, 116.

¹⁶ See Gyatso and Havnevik 2005: 22 where they lay out "authorizing referents" for Tibetan women including Ma gcig and also Ye shes mtsho rgyal, the alleged consort of Padmasambhava.

¹⁷ Epstein and Peng 2004: 324.

¹⁸ Foucault 1972: 12.

deployed by the Obituary that celebrates Bskal bzang or “reconstitutes the tradition” of her as an elite practitioner linking her to past *sprul sku* in the Gung ru lineage feted as an emanation of Ma gcig Lab sgron, the *mkha' 'gro ma* Vajravārāhī and as a surrogate mother. Just as significant, the Obituary also “reconstitutes a tradition” of Bskal bzang in the Gung ru lineage as a beacon of unity, peace, and reconciliation on these A mdo grasslands in the wake of the chaotic Cultural Revolution when thousands of Tibetan monasteries were destroyed, including Brag dkar and Bla brang.¹⁹

What's remarkable is that Bskal bzang's Obituary utilized many of the same legitimating and narrative strategies that the *Lotus Vine* deployed about the 4th Gung ru Rig 'dzin dpal mo (Renzeng Huamaozeng 仁增华茂曾, 1814–1891) in the 19th century. And while this article does not compare these two texts extensively side by side, it does show areas where the Obituary resonates with the *Lotus Vine*'s authoritative narrative (or its “textual authority”²⁰) and even re-adapts certain important parts of the *Lotus Vine* to represent Bskal bzang's authority as a charismatic mother, in particular as an emanation of Ma gcig, Vajravārāhī and as a surrogate mother in the local community. In other words, the Obituary pays homage to the *Lotus Vine*, or what I label as the “Gung ru Master Narrative,” that “reconstituted a tradition” about Rig 'dzin dpal mo and the elite community of A mdo *sprul sku* in which she interacted during the political tumult in the 19th century, which included inter-monastery rivalries and grassland violence. In this vein, Bskal bzang's Obituary written over a century later follows the *Lotus Vine* model of charismatic motherhood. Like the *Lotus Vine*, the Obituary presents Bskal bzang's authority as an elite Buddhist practitioner and as a figure of reconciliation during this post-Cultural Revolution temporality in Rgan gya and Bla brang when monasteries and *sprul sku* functioned at a lower status within the new religiopolitical power structure.²¹

Equally remarkable is that Bskal bzang's Obituary, like the *Lotus Vine* before it, featured as its main protagonist a compassionate Buddhist mother figure that resonated as “right” within the religio-social fabric in this A mdo society, in particular where sons felt indebted to their own mothers and in many cases worried about their

¹⁹ Slobodnik 2004: 9.

²⁰ See Diemberger 2007: 4–5 for a discussion about textual authority with various audiences in changing temporalities.

²¹ See Makley 2007: 76–134. Makley discusses how *sprul sku*, who once maintained great power assuming many roles in Bla brang, faced new roles within the new “father” PRC state.

mother's future rebirths.²² For example, the renowned A mdo yogin Zhabs dkar (1781–1851) from Reb gong (Tongren 同仁), Qinghai in his autobiography and the famous Gesar in his epic demonstrate their devotion and concern for their mother's future rebirth—a situation that many monks and *sprul sku* in Rgan gya, Bla brang and across A mdo likely encountered. Therefore, a metaphorical representation of motherhood worked well both as a legitimating strategy for Bskal bzang and the Gung ru lineage in a society that values the continuity of mothers in the Tibetan family and as a tool of propagation of the Buddhist faith and temporal prosperity in the region. Fascinatingly, Bskal bzang, as a mother figure, stands at the hub of this wheel of continuity. Today, in the period before an official *rnam thar* gets published about Bskal bzang and her *sprul sku* (the 7th Gung ru) returns to Brag dkar perhaps by autumn 2020, Bskal bzang's Obituary links Bskal bzang on the continuum to the Gung ru lineage's past, the lineage's present and to its future in A mdo and the PRC. Motherhood—and the legitimating authorizing power of its charisma with others—has proven to be the lynchpin of her story.

1. Re-adapting a Mother's Authority as Ma gcig labs sgron

Likely taking a cue from the *Lotus Vine* of the 19th century, the author of Bskal bzang's Obituary prominently features Ma gcig lab sgron the "Great Mother" at the outset of the text. In fact, the Obituary includes a lengthy biographical section about Ma gcig right after the opening segment that detailed Bskal bzang's 35-km funeral procession in January 2013 from Bla brang to Brag dkar. This high placement of Ma gcig's story before any further details of Bskal bzang's life illustrates Ma gcig's significance as both a religious and temporal symbol to adjudicate Bskal bzang's authority as a "right" charismatic Buddhist mother in the period after the destructions of the Cultural Revolution.

Whereas the *Lotus Vine* opens by beseeching the mother Ma gcig saying, "Ma gcig, out of great love you always protect the sacred site of Brag dkar, the home of the distinguished victorious mother *mkha' 'gro ma*,"—words that can be interpreted as both a religious and temporal plea for help at that time—Bskal bzang's Obituary adopts a more didactic tone.²³ The Obituary's section on Ma gcig linked the Gung ru lineage's authority to Ma gcig the "Supreme Buddhist Mother" stating:

²² See Ricard's translation of Zhabs dkar's autobiography in 2001: 200–203. See Kapstein's (2007: 359–363) analysis of Gesar's epic and the Chinese Mulian legend.

²³ Zhang ston 1897: 181–182.

The successive generations of the [four-century old] Gung ru Ye shes Mkha' 'gro ma lineage is a reincarnate lineage of Ma gcig the Supreme Mother of Tibetan Buddhism and founder of the *Gcod* Buddhist tradition. *Gcod* originated from the famous monk Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, who is from south India. Ma gcig is one of the most famous female tantric Tibetan Buddhist practitioners in Tibetan history and is the only woman in Tibetan history to establish a tradition. This is a rarity in human religious history.²⁴

Furthermore, the author includes historical information about the famous Ma gcig and the spread of the *Gcod* tradition that the *Lotus Vine* did not. The Obituary mentions:

As for the *Gcod* tradition, by using the unique teaching method and having a distinct practice, it became distinguished from other sects in Tibetan Buddhism. Ma gcig lab sgron not only deeply influenced the many various schools of Tibetan Buddhist thought, but her teachings were also popular in Tibetan areas and had a huge influence among Tibetans and on Tibetan society and livelihood—such as the sky burial being the most popular way to bury the dead. The custom of sky burial arose in Tibetan areas, and the fact that it spread is directly due to Ma gcig and the *Gcod* tradition.²⁵

In another key move that resembled the effective legitimating strategies of the *Lotus Vine*, the Obituary represents Bskal bzang's authority as Ma gcig the "Great Buddhist Mother" as a renowned practitioner of the *Gcod* practice mentioned in the introduction to this article. While the *Lotus Vine* shows how the 4th Gung ru Rig 'dzin dpal mo studied *Gcod* with the famed Bsod grags dkon mchog rgya mtsho (1790–1858) *sprul sku* of Bla brang and then became a well-known teacher of *Gcod* herself, the Obituary illustrates how Bskal bzang, too, studied with top teachers as a young girl around A mdo. Bskal bzang recited *Gcod* in 1946 at Sku 'bum byams pa gling Monastery (Taersi 塔尔寺) in Qinghai with the 10th Pañchen Lama Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1938–1989) in attendance. The author quotes her teacher La

²⁴ 历代光日益西堪玛玛为藏传佛教尊母玛久拉仲的转世世系，玛久拉仲一为藏传佛教息解派的创建者，息解派源于南印度著名僧人帕丹巴桑杰，由藏族著名的女密宗大师玛久拉仲所创立，是藏传佛教史上唯一由女性创立的一个宗派，这在人类宗教史上尚属罕见 (Bskal bzang's Obituary 2013: 2–3).

²⁵ 该宗派，以自己独特的教法义理和别具风格的修持方法，成为藏传佛教中独树一帜的宗派。她不仅对藏传佛教诸宗派产生过深刻影响，而且曾几度风靡整个藏区在藏族社会生活中产生过巨大影响，天葬是本民族最普及的丧葬方式，天葬习俗在藏区的产生和传播直接归功于玛久拉仲及其息解觉域法，在全世界唯有藏族有此习俗 (Bskal bzang's Obituary 2013: 2–3).

gu Rin po che Rdo rje 'jigs med rgya mtsho (1877–1949) praising Bskal bzang and linking her to Ma gcig, the “owner of this great teaching.”

[Bskal bzang] was able to recite from memory Ma gcig Lab sgron's composed text (*The Conduct and Logic of Gcod*) and religious classics [...]. In 1946, the [La gu] Rin po che Rdo rje 'jigs med rgya mtsho performed a Kālacakra Ceremony at Sku 'bum [Monastery]. At that time, the 10th Panchen Lama and other reincarnate figures, including Bskal bzang, sat in the front of the hall. [At the Kālacakra], La gu told the Mkha' 'gro ma, who was only ten years old, to recite the prelude of the *Gcod* [sutra]. After she finished, La gu let her sit next to him, and from that time, he started to teach *Gcod* to the reincarnates who were assembled there [including the 10th Panchen]. After the teachings ended, La gu held her hand and said, “Today, I have returned this *Gcod* practice back to the owner of this great teaching.”²⁶

However, in order to understand the full “effect” of Bskal bzang's authority as Ma gcig in Bla brang it is imperative to unpack the Obituary's most stunning adaptation of the *Lotus Vine* that featured the metaphor of Ma gcig acting as a mother of elite A mdo sprul sku, her figurative sons. Ironically, in the 12th century, Ma gcig was an actual mother of five children, including three sons.²⁷ This metaphorical arrangement where A mdo sprul sku serve as reincarnations of Ma gcig's actual sons illuminates a distinct temporal dimension to Bskal bzang's authority as a charismatic Buddhist mother who represented unity and reconciliation around Bla brang. Following the *Lotus Vine* and even the precedent of the 18th-century biography of the 1st 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa Ngag dbang brtson 'grus (1648–1721), Bskal bzang's Obituary calls on this unique gendered adaptation of a mother-son network that linked her to three of the most powerful male sprul sku in the Bla brang region as emanations of Ma gcig's three sons. In his biography, the 1st 'Jams dbyangs bzhad pa is quoted as saying: “I can confirm that I am [a reincarnation of] the son of Ma gcig lab sgron,” and that Ma gcig prophesied through the revelation of a treasure (*gter ma*) where to build Bla brang Monastery.²⁸ Bskal bzang's Obituary states:

²⁶ 能背诵始祖空行母玛久拉仲撰著的《息解觉域教法义理大品》等教法经典，此为觉域法的根本教法。一九四六年多杰强久美嘉措（拉阔）仁波切在塔尔寺举行时轮金刚灌顶大法会，届时聚集十世班禅等金座大活佛在前厅，仁波切当众点十岁的光日堪召玛祈颂息解觉域法开场。祈颂完觉域法后多杰强久美嘉措（拉阔）仁波切让堪召玛就做与自己身边，给众活佛授权觉域大法，授受完毕，多杰强久美嘉措（拉阔）仁波切拉着佛母之手扬言说道：“我今将息解觉域大法归还给了大法的主人了” (Bskal bzang's Obituary 2013: 6).

²⁷ Kollmar-Paulenz 1993: 101; Sorenson 2013: 6.

²⁸ Ngag dbang bkra shis n.d.: 141a.

In [Ma gcig's] biography, the author said, "Her disciples together are boundless." She is really proud of her 18 favorite disciples, and so forth, who helped spread the practice of *Gcod* all over the Tibetan Plateau, including her second son, "To Ning Sang Gu," [Thod snyon bsam 'grub] and "Dong Da E Ge Ang Xiu" [Dong sde ngag dbang phyug] (the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's previous incarnation) and "Shao Dai Jiang Nai" [Grol sde rgyal chung na] (the De ba's previous reincarnation) [at Bla brang] and "Ro sai Yang Zhen" (the Bse tshang reincarnate) [at nearby Gter lung].²⁹

The *Lotus Vine's* passage is as follows:

Furthermore, a reliable source states that Ma gcig's first son, Dong sde ngag dbang phyug, is the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. Grol sde rgyal chung na is Sde khri rin po che, and Thod snyon bsam 'grub is Thu'u bkwan. The mother and her sons came together here in this region, blessed it and hid many treasures (*gter ma*) here, and so forth. And similarly, the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa founded Bla brang.³⁰

The *Lotus Vine's* passage reflects a 19th-century temporal context that became more unstable in Bla brang's periphery throughout the 4th Gung ru's lifetime, thus heightening the importance of the Gung ru lineage at Brag dkar to Bla brang. Regional violence between monasteries in A mdo intensified as Rong bo (Longwusi 隆务寺), Gter lung (Shagousi 沙沟寺) and Gtsos (Heicuo 黑措) monasteries opposed Bla brang's expansive periphery. Grassland disputes littered the landscape near Brag dkar, and groups of Muslims from territory in the present-day Qinghai and Gansu provinces threatened the political and economic status quo in Bla brang's periphery. Furthermore, Tibetan relations with the Khoshut Mongols, who had been the chief patrons of Bla brang Monastery, had deteriorated after the Mongolian Palace at Bla brang burned to the ground in 1883, creating more instability in-and-around Bla brang.³¹ This turmoil likely compelled the author to write the *Lotus Vine* and "reconstitute a tradition" of a glorious and continuous past about the Gung ru lineage and Bla brang as a powerful

²⁹ 其传记中写道：“她的徒众与天共齐，无边无垠”，众弟子中有尊母次子托宁桑珠，有“东代额个昂秀”[加木央大师前世]，“召代江乃”[德哇仓前世]，“赛央真”[赛仓活佛]等十八位得意门生，众门徒学成各自为业，弘扬息解觉域法，遍及整个雪域高原 (Bskal bang's Obituary 2013: 3).

³⁰ *de yang yum chen lab kyi sgrol ma'i sras stong sde ngag gi dbang phug ni kun mkhyen bla ma yin cing grol sde rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas sde khri rin po che dang/ thod snyon bsam grub ni rje thu'u bkwan pa yin par tshad ma'i lung las gsungs la yum sras rnam lhan cig phyogs 'dir phebs nas byin gyis brlabs te gter sbed pa sogs gnang ba bzhin kun mkhyen chen bos bkra shis 'khyil phyag 'debs mdzad* (Zhang ston 1897: 205).

³¹ Nietupski 2011: 137–141; Yang 2009: 112, 124, 141–144.

Sino-Tibetan borderland community. In this scenario, the *Lotus Vine* promoted the 4th Gung ru *sprul sku* as Ma gcig the powerful and unifying mother within a network of high-ranking A mdo *sprul sku*, including the Thu'u bkwan from Bla brang ally Dgon lung Monastery in present-day Qinghai.

On the other hand, Bskal bzang's Obituary's passage of Ma gcig's motherhood of A mdo *sprul sku* represents the political realities under a new state dynamic in the PRC where *sprul sku* no longer maintained the all-powerful status that they did before 1958.³² Along these lines, Bskal bzang's Obituary switched out the names of two reincarnations of Ma gcig's sons. The Obituary replaced the Sde khri *sprul sku* with Bde ba and included the Bse tshang *sprul sku* from nearby Gter lung (Bla brang's old rival) in place of the Thu'u bkwan of Dgon lung. This switch likely reflects the changed temporal circumstances in which the Sde khri and Thu'u bkwan no longer maintained close religious and temporal ties with the Gung ru lineage and with Bla brang. Nevertheless, linking Bskal bzang to these three A mdo *sprul sku* connects her authority to the current elite *sprul sku* establishment and, by extension, to the PRC in which all of these *sprul sku* (including Bskal bzang) operated.³³ For example, the 6th 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa Blo bzang 'jigs med (b. 1947) still carries major political, religious, and social influence in the Tibetan community as a lay married government official based in Lanzhou and Beijing. As for the Bse tshang reincarnate at nearby Gter lung, Bskal bzang long maintained a close relationship with him.

However, this unique Ma gcig mother-son metaphorical dynamic also signifies another key religio-social reason why a charismatic mother figure in the Gung ru lineage resonated as "right" in A mdo: sons often showed indebtedness and even anxiety about the fate of their mother's future lives or rebirths in a Buddhist context. The autobiography of A mdo yogin Zhabs dkar and the Gesar epic exemplify sons who exhibited filial anxiety over their mother's Buddhist rebirth around the time of their mother's death.³⁴ Zhabs dkar expressed regret about not seeing his mother before she passed away and how he devoted his own Buddhist practice toward securing her a favorable rebirth. The Gesar epic describes Gesar's own journey to liberate his mother from the lower realms. Hence, given that many monastic men around Rgan gya and Bla brang likely encountered this fraught situation regarding their own mothers, it makes sense that a charismatic mother like the one described in Bskal bzang's Obituary (and the *Lotus Vine* before it) in the personage of Ma gcig would

³² See Makley 2007.

³³ Yang 2009: 112.

³⁴ See Ricard 2001: 200–203; Kapstein 2007: 359–363.

resonate with the dutiful son's goal to liberate his own mother. Therefore, in the end, the charismatic mother figure came to symbolize the ideal of Buddhist liberation (including actual mothers) and also temporal prosperity of Bla brang, which, of course, resonated well with the Buddhist patriarchy and also the PRC.

This first section demonstrated how Bskal bzang's Obituary, like the *Lotus Vine*, utilized the "right" maternal symbol of Ma gcig the "Great Mother" to legitimate Bskal bzang's authority in the Rgan gya and Bla brang community as both an elite practitioner and a symbol of temporal unity. As part of the Obituary's goal to "reconstitute a tradition" about the Gung ru lineage and the temporality in which she lived, the "Great Mother" Ma gcig came to represent both the continuity in the four-century-old Gung ru lineage and also the larger temporality in post-Cultural Revolution Rgan gya and Bla brang. The next section describes how the Obituary fetes Bskal bzang for performing the "right" actions or deeds as a needed and valued surrogate mother among this audience of *sprul sku*, monks, nuns, and laity in Bla brang and Rgan gya after the Cultural Revolution.

2. Bskal bzang as a Surrogate Mother of the Masses

While the Obituary does not elaborate at length Bskal bzang's role as a practitioner of Cakrasaṃvara practices—even though the text briefly mentions that she practiced such rituals at the Brag dkar cave and nearby Lo kya tun like her Gung ru predecessors—Bskal bzang's Obituary, like the *Lotus Vine*, presents her authority as a talented and heroic surrogate mother of the masses. Along these lines, the Obituary fetes her for performing numerous activities in the monastic and lay communities in Rgan gya, Bla brang, and across A mdo. These activities include the rebuilding of Brag dkar in the 1990s, managing two nunneries in Bla brang, donating to Ma gcig's home monastery in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), acting as a Buddhist teacher and solving numerous local grassland disputes that had turned deadly around Rgan gya, as will be explained below.

However, the significance of these events for how the Obituary presents and legitimates Bskal bzang's authority as a surrogate mother of many in the monastic and lay community who had been separated from their own mother, while important from a Buddhist ritual efficacious perspective interacting with monks, nuns, and the laity, must also be interpreted from a vantage point of the post-Cultural Revolution temporality in A mdo. In other words, Bskal bzang's actions as a surrogate mother figure carry significant temporal meaning in this Bla brang and Rgan gya community that, once again,

resemble the *Lotus Vine's* "reconstituting a tradition" about the 4th Gung ru Rig 'dzin dpal mo's authority as a substitute mother. Specifically, the *Lotus Vine* shows how Rig 'dzin dpal mo performed rituals in lay people's homes, donated alms to the sangha, restored people's speech as a medical healer, acted as a peacemaker on the grasslands and taught others how to control their mind in the peripheral outpost of Rgan gya during the 19th century.³⁵ To compare, Bskal bzang's Obituary depicts Bskal bzang as a talented surrogate mother who helped maintain peace, harmony, and security in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution—or this is how the Obituary author, and perhaps the monastic establishment and the PRC, would want to "reconstitute a tradition" around the Gung ru lineage acting as a needed heroic Buddhist mother who helped to re-establish this important A mdo community.

Accordingly, the Obituary illustrates Bskal bzang's authority as a surrogate mother within the monastic community who took the initiative to rebuild Brag dkar and manage nunneries in Bla brang through the help of the 'Jams dbyangs bzhad pa and the PRC government. The Obituary describes the restoration process that began in the 1980s:

In 1986, the Mkha' 'gro ma brought Rgan gya lay representatives with her to go to Lanzhou, where she sat before the 'Jams dbyangs bzhad pa to apply for permission to repair the main hall of Brag dkar Monastery. The Mkha' 'gro ma also applied to the government for 100 cubic meters of wood to build the main monastery hall, and in two years, in 1988, the monastery's main hall was built.³⁶

However, Bskal bzang's effort to rebuild Brag dkar was not the first time that a Gung ru *sprul sku* renovated the monastery or the Gung ru estate. The *Lotus Vine* shows how the 4th Gung ru expanded the main prayer hall and the sleeping rooms at Brag dkar and that the 5th Gung ru did the same.³⁷

Furthermore, Bskal bzang's Obituary touts her authority as the "right" mother figure as a *sprul sku* to manage two nunneries from different Tibetan Buddhist sects (Dge lugs and Rnying ma) under difficult logistical circumstances in Bla brang in the 1990s. These circumstances, according to the Obituary, included sectarian conflict

³⁵ Zhang ston 1897: 193–201.

³⁶ 1986 年佛母携甘加僧俗代表前往兰州嘉木央坐前申请重修寺院大殿并获准，佛母又向国家申请了建寺用的 100 方木材，历时两年 88 年建成了寺院大殿 (Bskal bzang's Obituary 2013: 7).

³⁷ Dkon mchog rgya mtsho 2008: 81.

between the local nuns who did not have a permanent place to build and establish a consistent Buddhist practice. The Obituary states:

The 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa in 1994 entrusted Bskal bzang to raise money to build Co'u rgya (Jiujia 九甲) Nunnery. But the nuns were not very rigorous and were also impoverished. Bskal bzang carried a heavy burden and made a sincere wish to build a nunnery, but she experienced many hardships. It took 13 years before two nunneries from two sects—the Dge lugs nunnery Dge ldan bstan rgyas gling (Danjielin 丹杰林) and the Rnying ma nunnery Bslab gsum Dar rgyas gling (Lasen Dajielin 拉森达杰林)—were built. These two nunneries had over 120 people living there year-round, and each nunnery built a sutra hall. Nowadays, many Buddhist worshippers continually come to make offerings to the nuns helping to ensure their livelihood. The atmosphere of [each] nunnery is genuine and sincere with incense burning vigorously. The nunnery's management is in good order, and the current [management] standard in these nunneries is magnificent and unprecedented [in their history].³⁸

Moreover, Bskal bzang's work in the community as a problem-solver and a peacemaker elucidates her authority as a charismatic mother figure as the Obituary details how she solved several deadly grassland disputes. This list includes the exact number of deaths incurred in each dispute. It shows that the Gung ru lineage (i.e., Bskal bzang) still held jurisdiction and considerable authority, i.e., she maintained trust with herders who counted on her to help solve these disputes. The Obituary states:

In order to [preserve] this herding area's peace and to prevent the further loss of husbands and fathers, the Gung ru Mkha' 'gro ma had the power to rally support among the people. She used her kindness and energy to take the initiative herself to mediate the grassland conflict and end the dispute. Because they were touched by her leadership ability and the power of her strong personality, the dispute

³⁸ 为此，1994年嘉木样大师委托光日仓活佛筹建九甲尼姑寺，拉卜楞尼姑僧众有宁玛派和格鲁派共有两百多人众，两派都无正规诵经场所，也无完整的规章制度，面对如此松散、贫穷的尼姑僧众，活佛担此重担，发大愿心，着手建设，历经千辛万苦，历时十三年，建成了两座派系尼姑寺寺院，即格鲁派尼姑寺丹杰林与宁玛派尼姑寺拉森达杰林，拉卜楞庞大的僧尼群体纳入规范的国家民族宗教寺院体系，并制定寺院内部各项管理制度，建立了规范的寺院管理。两寺常住僧众各达到一百二十多人，两派僧尼有了各自的经堂，现如今香客施主络绎不绝，供养不断，众僧尼生活有了保障，寺院道风淳正，香火旺盛，寺院管理井然有序，管理规范，盛况空前 (Bskal bzang's Obituary 2013: 7).

ended peacefully for both sides, and the matter was resolved with her even-tempered reasoning.³⁹

Another passage details the prevalence of these disputes across Rgan gya and in the region:

Since the 1980s, the Gung ru Mkha' 'gro ma successfully mediated several grassland disputes, including a dispute in Bsang khog (Sangke 桑科) south of Bla brang and Mdo ba (Duowa 多哇) Township in Qinghai where two people were killed. One person died in fighting between Rgan gya Ri sngon (Renai 仁爱) and Qinghai Mgar rtse (Guaerze 瓜尔则). There was a dispute between Rgan gya Zhol skor (Xike 西科) and Phu di (Fudi 伏地) outside of Bla brang, but no one died. She mediated a dispute between Rgan gya and Hor tshang Mar dang (Madang 麻当), where one person died, and also many other disputes.⁴⁰

Furthermore, Bskal bzang's Obituary also elaborates her distinct role as a healer and benefactor in the greater Bla brang community and across Tibetan regions. For example, the Obituary shows how she helped care for those living in her native community of Rgyal bo (Jiawu 加吾), Reb gong, Qinghai and Ma gcig's home monastery of Zangs ri Mkhar dmar (Sangrikamasi 桑日卡玛寺) in southern Tibet. This shows how she not only strengthened her link to her home herding village, where in the early 1940s, at the age of seven, she was chosen as the 6th Gung ru, but how she also became a benefactor to Ma gcig's home monastery in southern Tibet. The audiences in these places welcomed Bskal bzang back after many years:

During the summers in 2002, 2007 and 2009, the Mkha' 'gro ma was invited three times to return to her homeland in Rgyal bo, Qinghai, a place she had left over 50 years ago. The Rgyal bo tribe's troops greeted

³⁹ 为了这片地区的安宁祥和，为了更好的牧民家庭不再失去孩子、丈夫、父亲，光日仓活佛发挥她在群众中的精神号召力，用一颗仁慈之心，积极、主动地参与甘加地区每件草场纠纷和矛盾的调解，向参与争端的双方晓之以理、动之以情，在她的循循善导和人格魅力的感召下，争端双方都心平气和、理性的接受调解，化解了事态 (Bskal bzang's Obituary 2013: 7-8).

⁴⁰ 自八十年代以来，光日仓活佛亲自参与调处成功的草场纠纷还有：甘肃桑科乡和青海多哇乡的草山纠纷（两条命案）、甘加仁和青海瓜尔则的草山纠纷（一条命案）、甘加西科和伏地的草山纠纷（无命案）、甘加乡和麻当乡的草山纠纷（一条命案）、还有诸多甘加乡内部纠纷、桑科乡内部纠纷、卡加道乡内部纠纷的调节并一一调和化解成功 (Bskal bzang's Obituary 2013: 8).

her with a grand welcome, and she went in person to greet every family.⁴¹

The following passage is about Bskal bzang at Zangs ri Mkhar dmar:

In 2010, the Mkha' 'gro ma raised money in Rgan gya and Rgyal bo and in the tenth month of the lunar calendar, representatives from these two places, the Mkha' 'gro ma herself and her son Bde dpon Bkra shis, and a disciple Sbyin pa accompanied the student Bstan pa rgya mtsho to Zangs ri mkhar dmar to make offerings and to teach and to spread *Gcod* teachings more broadly.⁴²

On top of her role as a benefactor and healer, Bskal bzang's Obituary shows that she was a teacher who helped monastics and others along the Buddhist path, even when her health failed toward the end of her life. Here is one example from the Obituary that describes how Bskal bzang, who was sick at the time, imparted her wisdom in her role as a teacher of the community at the *Gcod* festival held at her estate at Brag dkar in 2009. She even scolded her students as a teacher would discipline his/her students or as a mother might scold her own children:

[Bskal bzang] was propped up with a crutch under her arms, and she benevolently greeted every visitor who came to see her at the *Gcod* festival. As she became extremely fatigued during the festival, she only laid down after the last visitor left, and she showed up again the next day. While she lay on her couch, she did not resign from trying to solve the local grassland disputes, and she advised the monks, nuns, and the laity gathered there to not participate in politics. She told them not to instigate and induce any harmful activities, and the Mkha' 'gro ma admonished the monks and nuns that the benefits of Buddhism must, in turn, be of benefit to the people and that the goal of Buddhism is to benefit humanity. Buddhist figures must take it upon themselves to promote human happiness and to lead prayers for blessings for the prosperity and stability of the great masses.⁴³

⁴¹ 2002 夏季、2007 年夏季、2009 年夏季前后三次佛母应邀回归了阔别五十多年的故乡青海加吾，加吾部落盛大阵容迎接佛母，佛母亲临加吾部落每一个家庭 (Bskal bzang's Obituary 2013: 9).

⁴² 2010 年佛母在甘加和加吾部落筹集资金，十月委派两地民众数名和佛母次子德红扎西、门生金巴护送佛母高徒旦巴嘉措前往西藏桑日卡玛寺经行供养和圣地觉域法的普及 (Bskal bzang's Obituary 2013: 10).

⁴³ 又拄着腋下杖慈祥地为每人摸顶，一天下来佛母身体疲惫不堪，信众走完便一头躺下，次日又一如既往。卧榻期间，不辞幸劳的调节民间纠纷，集结信众和僧尼劝阻不要参与时政政治当中，不要被煽动和诱导所迷惑，实施不良举动，佛母告诫僧众

Finally, the author evocatively called on the mother metaphor as he represented an audience in Bla brang and Rgan gya who begged for Bskal bzang to remain and later mourned her passing. These concluding lines in verse, which resemble the *Lotus Vine* and most Tibetan *rnam thar* literature, demonstrate the local audience's devotion to their needed mother and the intimacy of their relationship in Rgan gya, in particular:

Mother, do not go! The daytime here will return as before. When our eyes are turned away from you, darkness pervades on all sides. The earth still needs the nourishment of the sun to illuminate each and every place.

Mother, do not go! The people here still need you to take care of them and show [them] the direction of the path and tell them to abstain from evil and to do all virtuous things.

Mother, do not go! The posterity of the grassland especially needs your blessing and empowerment so they [locals] can benefit all sentient beings and accomplish their merit.

Mother, you have not left! Your appearance and smiling face have already been engraved in the pupil of everyone's eye. Whenever the sun rises, we will think of You and recall your love. Our long life is like an endless river and there is always a ray of warm sunlight shining on us. That warm light is like gold cast in our heart that lingers from age to age.

Mother, you have not left! Every time the darkness falls, a bright moon lingers over the heads of our bed, and the love that you showed us for a century reappears in the light. In the same way that smoke [from guns] lingers [as] in the movies and television, your body image is like that of a Venerable Mother surrounded by bright light who lingers for a long time and descends slowly from the top of the cloud. You are the benefactor to whom we will sing our praises forever.

Mother, you have not left, listen! We can still hear your sweet-sounding chanting of *Gcod*, the sound of nature that cleanses our spirit, the wisdom of enlightenment that edifies us all!

Mother, you have not left! Nobody is able to obstruct your footsteps; you merely went on a long trip, letting us feel the difference between your existence and your departure. When a crow soars in the sky and down the wall of a rampart and arrives at Brag dkar, the snow turns

和僧尼：佛教的利益必须与人民的利益结合起来，佛教的宗旨是要造福人类，佛教人士当以人间和平和幸福为己任 (Bskal bzang's Obituary 2013: 10).

into rain, the sunshine glitters about, and the blue sky is all the more azure blue. The buds born in a soft shoot of a winter day slowly bloom, listening attentively as the voices of spring arrive. You (Mkha' 'gro ma) sit in the center of the lotus flower radiating in all directions. You are wearing bright golden clothes and dancing like a breeze moving softly like water and pure like snow. You must come back! Listen, from a distance, the sound of your footsteps has already been heard.⁴⁴

3. Conclusion

Despite a gap of over a century, Bskal bzang's Obituary extraordinarily exhibits the vital legitimating and narrative strategies that illustrate Bskal bzang's authority as a charismatic Buddhist mother—the strategies first established in the *Lotus Vine rnam thar* about the famous 4th Gung ru Rig 'dzin dpal mo. The *Lotus Vine* proved to be an important model or archetype for Bskal bzang's Obituary that now reflected a completely different temporality in A mdo after the Cultural Revolution. Strikingly, Bskal bzang's Obituary, like the *Lotus Vine* before it, presented Bskal bzang as the "Great Mother" Ma gcig and as a surrogate mother figure in a 21st-century context in Bla brang and Rgan gya. Therefore, motherhood, in addition to being connected to the performance of Buddhist doctrine, also signified heroism, unity, security, and reconciliation in an ever-changing socio-temporal dynamic.

Just as striking, however, today and going forward is what the Obituary does not discuss in detail—Bskal bzang's laicization in 1958 and her subsequent motherhood of four children. While the text does

⁴⁴ 佛母你别走，这里的白天依旧会到来，我们眼光背开了你时，四面都是黑暗，大地依旧需要太阳的滋润，光照每一片角落。佛母你别走，这里的人们任然需要你眷顾，指引人性的方向，让人们诸恶莫作，诸善奉。佛母你没走，您的音容笑貌已镌刻在每一个人的明眸中，每当太阳升起的时候我们会想您，想起佛母的爱，在我们生命的长河里始终有一缕灿烂的暖阳照耀，那暖阳象金子一样浇铸在我们的心头萦绕在我们心头生生世世。佛母你没走，每当夜幕降临，就会有一轮明月萦绕在我们的床头，那月光里会浮现出你一个世纪对我们的牵念，影视般的硝烟中你的身影像尊母身带光环伫立于云翔顶缓缓飘落的情景，你是我们永远歌颂不止的恩人。佛母你没走，听！那觉域法音声中我们任依稀听见你咏唱悦耳动听的声音佛音，天籁之音，荡涤心灵，启迪智慧，澄澈开悟。佛母你没走，没有人能阻挡你的脚步，你只是出了一趟远门，让人们感受下你的存在与离去的差异，当红嘴鸦翱翔于天空，白石崖半壁俯冲而至的时候，当雪已化雨，阳光灿烂晃眼，蓝天愈加湛蓝，那些萌生于冬日的嫩芽、花苞伸展着，倾听着，春天到来的声音之时，莲花中央的你闪耀万丈光芒，着阳光的金色羽衣，舞着清风般的灵秀凌波乘风，带着水的柔情，雪的洁莹，一定会到来，听，远远地，你的脚步声已踏响 (Bskal bzang's Obituary 2013: 11–12).

mention that she attended college in Gansu (1958–1961), joined the CPPPC in 1961 in Bla brang. That Brag dkar was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution when Bskal bzang worked as a farm laborer, the text glosses over Bskal bzang's laicization, i.e., what happened to her during this period.⁴⁵ Given the stakes of producing such a text, not to mention the political realities of bringing up such a sensitive story set in the period before and during the Cultural Revolution in the PRC and also likely the Tibetan aversion of mentioning actual mothers in texts about Buddhist figures, this omission is not overly surprising. At least two contemporary stories about Tibetan women, including the current Bsam sding Rdo rje phag mo female *sprul sku* lineage holder and the treasure revealer (*gter ston*) Ta re Lha mo in Mgo log, did not focus on having a family (or becoming a mother) or the perils and changes wrought by the Cultural Revolution. In Ta re Lha mo's case, she is portrayed in her *rnam thar* as a Buddhist heroine who, according to Holly Gayley's analysis, was "unscarred" by the chaos of this time.⁴⁶

Minimizing these details about Bskal bzang, which I take up in greater detail in my forthcoming larger project, helps elaborate the high stakes of sanctification in the Gung ru lineage via a text/*rnam thar*—if and when a *rnam thar* about Bskal bzang comes off the press. Yet, given the presence of Bskal bzang's well-written Obituary and the narrative model before that in the *Lotus Vine*, the authorizing figure of a universal charismatic mother will be at the apex of her story.

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⁴⁵ Bskal bzang's Obituary 2013: 7.

⁴⁶ Diemberger 2007: 299–312. Diemberger recounts the oral version of the life story of the current Bsam sding rdo rje *sprul sku* as told by the *sprul sku*'s sister. See Gayley's (2017: 78–83, 104–115) fascinating analysis about the details that Ta re Lha mo's *rnam thar* does not mention the hardships of the Maoist period before and during the Cultural Revolution.

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The Problem of Universals in Yogic Perception and Tsong kha pa's Solution

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The problem of universals is neither stranger to the West nor the East. In essence, it concerns the relationship between discrete objects and their properties. What, for example, is it that makes all discrete chairs belong to a singular class of things called "chair"? Do all chairs possess some chair-ness? That is, is there some essence that lurks in each chair and guarantees its membership in a more general class? Or is the property of being a chair a *post facto* conceptualization? That is, is there nothing in the chair that guarantees its being a chair other than our collective agreement that this group of otherwise discrete objects ought to be classified under a singular universal "chair"?

In Western philosophy, the former position is described as realist and the latter nominalist. In Indian philosophy, the former was championed by the Nyāya school, who argued that universals are robust entities that co-exist with (but independently from) the particulars that instantiate them. This was highly criticized by Buddhists, especially Dignāga in the 5th or 6th century CE, who subscribed to nominalism. According to Dignāga, the conceit of real universals was just another version of a false conceptual belief in an enduring Self (Skt. *ātman*, Tib. *bdag*) applied both to objects and persons. He considered reality itself, by contrast, to be populated with discrete particulars: momentary and infinitesimal particles that are only conceptually constructed into enduring objects, which are themselves further constructed into classes. While conceptualization (Skt. *vikalpa*, Tib. *rnam par rtog pa*) thus cognizes these false universals, real particulars are cognized nonconceptually (Skt. *nirvikalpa*, Tib. *rtog pa med pa*). These in turn are the respective objects of two distinct epistemic instruments (Skt. *pramāṇa*, Tib. *mtshad ma*), or ways of knowing the world: inference (Skt. *anumāna*, Tib. *rjes su dpag pa*) and perception (Skt. *pratyakṣa*, Tib. *mgnon sum*). According to Dignāga, these are the only two epistemic instruments.

Dignāga's nominalism creates a problem for the Buddhist soteriological project, however. Most Buddhist schools agree that

nonconceptual realization of the lack of Self is the *sine qua non* of spiritual advancement. This realization came to be understood as occurring through yogic perception (Skt. *yogipratyakṣa*, Tib. *rnal 'byor mngon sum*). As a type of perception, yogic perception should only perceive particulars. No-Self, however, is a type of universal, a property that is abstracted away from discrete particulars. How, then, can nonconceptual yogic perception perceive No-Self, a seeming universal dependent on conceptualization?

This paper explores Tsong kha pa's (1357–1419) unique solution to this conundrum. Tsong kha pa argues that universals are, in fact, not completely the product of mere conceptual concoction. Neither, however, does Tsong kha pa argue a robust realism for universals in a manner that abandons Buddhism's larger anti-realist agenda. Affording universals a quasi-real status, Tsong kha pa is able to salvage them from the deconstruction of conceptual superimposition, permitting their status as the object of nonconceptual yogic perception. This position fits squarely with Tsong kha pa and his Dge lugs school's wider realist ontological project.

1. Dharmakīrti and Dignāga: Imagined Concepts

The notion that yogins have special perceptual powers enjoys a long history among a myriad of Indian philosophical schools. In Buddhism, one of the earliest explicit terminological mentions of “yogic perception” may occur in the *Nyāyānusāra* by Saṅghabhadra (fl. 4th–5th century CE), Vasubandhu's main teacher. Therein, Saṅghabhadra tackles the ontological question of similarity. That is, if the Buddhist theory of momentariness necessitates that all phenomena are discrete momentary entities with distinct causes, how can two things ever be said to be similar in any real sense? Saṅghabhadra argues that homogeneity (Skt. *sabhāgatā*) is a causal property that inheres between any two similar things ensuring their common membership in a single class. Furthermore, homogeneity can be known both through inference as well as directly through yogic perception (Skt. **yogi-pratyakṣa*, Chin. *guan xing zhe xian zhen* 觀行者現證).¹

However, yogic perception's first formalization in Buddhism is most widely associated with Dignāga,² who, we will see, also employed it to explain the direct perception of a shared property, specifically, No-Self (Skt. *anātman*). Dignāga's interpretation of No-Self

¹ Saṅghabhadra 1995: 229–232. Saṅghabhadra's text is unfortunately lost in Sanskrit, but Collette Cox communicated to the author (April 2, 2019) that **yogi-pratyakṣa* or possibly **yogi-abhisamaya* is the most felicitous reconstruction from the Chinese.

² White 2012: 70–72. Pradeep Gokhale, personal communication, April 2019.

extends beyond the rejection of a reified personal Self (Skt. *pudgala*) superimposed on the five aggregates (Skt. *pañca-skandha*).³ In his interpretation, No-Self deconstructs the reification of *all* objects. While such objects appear as *res extensa*, they are, in fact, discrete particulars. Any universal projected onto these particulars—whether of an entity extended over its supposed parts or of a type extended over its supposed tokens—is the product of conceptual reification superimposed on a group of particulars. The superimposition of a personal Self on the aggregates is thus just one type of a much more pervasive tendency to reify real discrete particles and moments into objects with spatial and temporal extension. Belief in the Self—and based thereon, the existence of suffering in general—is predicated on this reification, with the realization of No-Self as its antidote, so Dignāga argues.

Understanding No-Self intellectually, however, is insufficient for liberation. The Buddhist path involves a process of converting the conceptual understanding of the Buddha's *teaching* that phenomena are without Self into a direct nonconceptual realization of that same truth afforded by yogic perception. Thus, Dignāga's *Compendium of Valid Cognition* (Skt. *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, Tib. *Tshad ma kun btus*) verse 1.6 states that "yogins see just the object, unmixed with the guru's instructions," denoting a type of nonconceptual understanding of No-Self.⁴ Indeed, to see No-Self otherwise—that is conceptually—is self-defeating. Since all conceptualization involves reification, even the concept of No-Self involves the superimposition of a type of Self. Through yogic perception, by contrast, the aspirant directly sees that all objects are selfless without this superimposition.

Dignāga's explanation, however, leaves his successors in somewhat of a thorny philosophical thicket. Saṅghabhadra can account for the perception of homogeneity, since it is a real property that extends over multiple objects. But on Dignāga's metaphysics, by contrast, No-Self cannot be said to really inhere in objects in the same fashion. Because No-Self is the absence of a fictional entity—the Self—it is a negative property and therefore a type of reification. It therefore must be a conceptual superimposition—a universal. Universals, however, are vitiated at the level of nonconceptual perception. It is unclear, therefore, how No-Self could be an object of *yogic perception*, which only perceives real positive entities and not abstract properties or universals like No-Self. Furthermore, a real positive particular would

³ Though, for the story of how he came to reject of the *pudgala* as well, see Eckel, Garfield, and Powers 2016: 4.

⁴ *yoginām guru-nirdeśa-avyavakīrṇa-artha-mātra-dṛk* || (Dignāga 2005: 3). I also consulted Dignāga 2008: 4: *rnal 'byor rnam kyī bla mas bstan* | *lma 'dres pa yi don tsaṃ mthong*/.

seem mutually exclusive with a negative property, such as the *lack* of Self. The two could theoretically co-exist, but it would seem strange to say they share an identity. How, then, can positive particulars cogently instantiate a negative property like No-Self—the foundational Buddhist truth?

In the *Commentary on Valid Cognition* (Skt. *Pramāṇavarttika*, Tib. *Tshad ma rnam 'grel*), Dharmakīrti (fl. 6th–7th century CE) hedges Dignāga's project in order to resolve the epistemological conundrum he inherited, relying on a psychology of mental images (Skt. *ākāra*, Tib. *rnam pa*) to negotiate between the conceptuality of Buddhism's negative truth⁵ and Dignāga's insistence that only positive particulars are real and perceptible. Mental images describe mental pictures or representations that always attend conceptual thinking and are positive particulars. Therefore, Dharmakīrti argues that even conceptualization has a nonconceptual component, since mental images arise in conjunction with conceptual superimposition.⁶ Simply by fixating on a concept in meditation, the conceptual overlay will eventually fall away, leaving only a nonconceptual perception of the attendant mental image. Quoting verse 3.284–285:⁷

Although considered unreal, meditative bases,
Like the ugliness [of the body], the earth, etc.,⁸
Can arise as a nonconceptual clear appearance
Constructed by the power of meditation.
Whether existing or non-existing,
Whatever one meditates upon intently
Will end up forming a nonconceptual cognition,
Once that meditation is perfected.⁹

Thus, meditation on any concept will eventually give way to a nonconceptual cognition, since every concept has a nonconceptual

⁵ All conceptualization is, in fact, negative on Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. This constitutes their *apoha* theory.

⁶ For a discussion of Dharmakīrti's combination of mental images and conceptualization, see Dunne 2004: 116–119.

⁷ For an excellent analysis on these verses, see Dunne 2007.

⁸ Ugliness is meditated upon in order to cultivate renunciation. The earth meditative base (*prthivī kṛtsna*) involves meditating on a disk of earth until the meditator can take control of the earth element. See Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa 1991: 111 and 118–264 respectively for a discussion of each.

⁹ *mi gtsang zad par sa la sogs/ /yang dag min pa'ang bsgoms pa yi/ /stobs kyis sprul pa rtog med dang/ /gsal bar snang ba can du mthong/ /de phyir yang dag yang dag min/ /gang gang shin tu bsgoms gyur pa/ /bsgom pa yongs su rdzogs pa na/ /de gsal mi rtog blo 'bras can/* (Dharmakīrti n.d.: 129a). Also consulted in Sanskrit: *aśubhā prthivī kṛtsna-ādy-abhūtam api varṇyate | spaṣṭa-abhaṃ nirvikalpaṃ ca bhāvanā-bala-nirmitam || tasmād bhūtam abhūtaṃ vā yad eva abhibhāvayate | bhāvanā-pariṇiṣpattau tat sphuṭa-akalpa-dhī-phalam ||* (Dharmakīrti 1972: verses 3.284–285).

mental image that attends it. If any concept—even those which represent “non-existing” things—can become vivid in this manner, then Dharmakīrti seems to suggest that meditation is a process of self-induced hallucination. Still, he seems to argue that not all hallucinations are equally fictitious. Specifically, meditation on the attendant mental image of the concept of No-Self must be a valid cognition (Skt. *pramāṇa*, Tib. *mtshad ma*) because that image is non-deceiving (Skt. *samvādin*, Tib. *mi bslu ba*) with respect to the goal of liberation.¹⁰ While that mental image does not represent a particular in the world—since although particulars do not have a Self, they do not instantiate No-Self as a property in a realist sense—it is still an authentic cause for enlightenment. When considering validity, the salvific capacity of the mental image of No-Self, thus trumps its failure to represent real particulars. This reading of Dharmakīrti aligns with his more general doctrine of causal efficacy (Skt. *arthakṛtīyā*, Tib. *don byed*), wherein valid cognition is marked by its ability to achieve desired ends more so than its capacity to accurately represent. Thus, if the mental image of No-Self helps one achieve enlightenment, it is irrelevant whether it truly corresponds with the world.¹¹

2. Tsong kha pa: Real Concepts

Even when restricting himself to the viewpoint of Dharmakīrti’s school, Tsong kha pa did not feel comfortable abandoning the epistemological framework of reference in favor of pure pragmatism. Tsong kha pa, therefore, is not only charged with explaining how it is that universals or meditation upon them lead to desired ends, but how those universals accurately map onto reality. Tsong kha pa’s project here was carried forward by his successors in the Dge lugs school. Georges Dreyfus thus calls their position “moderate realism,” given their insistence that universals are not purely fictional entities. Neither, however, do they argue—as the Naiyāyikas do—that universals exist independently from the particulars that instantiate them. Universals are moderately real, impossible to disentangle from the objects to which they belong, yet equally impossible to substantiate independent of those particulars.¹² Because objects can be said to instantiate

¹⁰ Tib. *de la sngar bshad dngos po bzhin/ /bslu ba med can gang yin de/ /bsgoms byung mngon sum tshad mar 'dod/ /lhag ma nye bar bslad pa yin/* Skt. *tatra pramāṇaṃ samvādi yat prāṇa nirmīta-vastu-vat | tad-bhāvanāyaṃ pratyakṣam iṣṭaṃ śeṣā upaplavāḥ | |* (Dharmakīrti n.d.: 129b and Dharmakīrti 1972: verse 3.286).

¹¹ See Dunne 2007. However, Dharmakīrti’s later commentators do not similarly eschew the issue of reference.

¹² Dreyfus 1997: 179–182.

universals in a robust sense, Tsong kha pa does not have to opt for Dharmakīrti's pragmatism, which affords universals a teleological role, but undermines their veridical correspondence with the world. This reformulation of universals has significant ramifications for Tsong kha pa's analysis of yogic perception.

The source for Tsong kha pa's view on yogic perception comes from his *Notes on the Perception Chapter* (Tib. *Mngon sum le'u'i brjed byang*), a commentary on the perception chapter of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavarttika* composed from notes that Rgyal tshab rje Dar ma rin chen (1364–1432) purportedly took from an oral teaching on the subject given by his teacher. The relevant section concerns the taxonomy of universals (*spyi mtshan*) and particulars (*rang mtshan*). Tsong kha pa argues that within Dharmakīrti's system, there is no possible third ontological category. An interlocutor argues that an illusion—in this case, a falling hair (*skra shad*), what today we call “eye floaters”—fits into neither of these two categories. Why? “When a falling hair appears clearly, it is not a particular, since it has no causal efficacy, nor is it a universal, since it appears clearly, and there is not some other type of clear appearance it could be.”¹³ Despite this, Tsong kha pa insists, “there is no necessity that [the falling hair] is some third type of object.” Tsong kha pa gives the following rationale:

The falling hair is not an object. If the falling hair were an object, then we would have to assert that an object exists however it appears (*snang*) as per its linguistic sign (*brda la byang*), and, similarly, there would be no need to establish its existence with reference to a conceived object (*zhen*). Therefore, while we deny that a falling hair appearing to a sense consciousness plagued with apparitions of falling hairs is an object, what about the knowledge of the *appearance* of a falling hair? We do not deny that the mental image of the appearance of a falling hair is an object.¹⁴

In other words, only an *existing* thing must be either a universal or a particular. Falling hairs, by contrast, are not objects, and thus there is no necessity they fit into either category. Tsong kha pa uses the novel Tibetan distinction between appearing object (*snang yul*) and conceived object (*zhen yul*) to substantiate why falling hairs are illusory

¹³ *skra shad sogs gsal bar snang ba'i tshé skra shad de nyid rang mtshan ma yin te/ don byed mi nus pa'i phyir ro/ spyi mtshan ma yin te/ gsal bar snang ba'i phyir dang/ gsal ba gzhan la rjes 'gro mi byed pa'i phyir/* (Tsong kha pa 1999a: 346).

¹⁴ *phung gsum du thal mi 'gyur ro/ skra shad de nyid yul ma yin te/ yul yin na brda la byang bas gang du snang ba de nyid du grub par mos shing zhen dgos pa la de ltar ma grub pa'i phyir/ 'dir ni skra shad 'dzag snang gi dbang shes la snang ba'i skra shad nyid yul yin pa 'gog pa yin gyi/ skra shad du snang ba shes sam/ skra shad du snang ba'i nam pa yul yin pa 'gog pa ma yin no/* (Ibid: 347).

and unreal. Namely, while their appearance *qua* a mental image exists, that appearance *qua* the conceived falling hairs themselves—that is, in reference to their actually being falling hairs—is false.¹⁵ We also see Tsong kha pa drawing on Dharmakīrti’s discussion of yogic perception, where he argued that there can be a clear appearance of an object, “whether existing or non-existing.” As Tsong kha pa notes, though a concept as designated by its linguistic sign may appear (*snang*), this appearance in and of itself is insufficient to substantiate the existence of its referent. If it were, any clear appearance of some linguistic object (*brda la byang*) would necessitate that object’s existence. While such appearances *qua* appearances exist, they fail to do so *qua* their conceived objects, which do not exist. It is this latter criterion of the conceived object that differentiates illusions from accurate cognitions.

In other words, Tsong kha pa, like Dharmakīrti, argues that clear appearances are not limited to existing or non-existing objects. The yogin, for example, can develop both.¹⁶ There is disagreement, however, about what it means for such an appearance to be accurate. While Dharmakīrti forgoes the question of whether appearances accurately refer, arguing that it is pragmatically irrelevant, Tsong kha pa avails himself of an explanatory framework foreign to Dharmakīrti in order to incorporate reference: the distinction between an appearing (*snang yul*) and conceived object (*zhen yul*).¹⁷ The introduction of these two concepts radically reformulates Dharmakīrti under a type of correspondence theory—that the truth of appearances is determined by the felicity of their representation of some conceived object, not merely their pragmatic efficacy in achieving desired ends.

Dharmakīrti, in fact, would argue that appearances invariably fail with respect to their conceived object, hallucination, or otherwise. On his theory of momentariness, cognition of an object never occurs simultaneously with the object itself, which (as momentary) has disappeared by the time it appears to consciousness. The object as conceived—that real object that is thought still to be “out there” when it appears—ceases to exist by the time it appears. This is why reference is irrelevant in light of causal efficacy: the real object has a causal relationship with cognition but can never be its object proper, and so cognition can never represent an existing object. Thus, differentiating the validity of cognitions in relation to their conceived object is

¹⁵ This statement is not uncontroversial. Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182–1251), by contrast, denies that invalid cognitions can have real appearances. See Stoltz 2006.

¹⁶ One famous story of a yogin meditating on an unreal object is found in Tā ra nā tha 1994: 113–114, where he meditated that he had horns on his head to the point that they were so convincing he could not fit out the entrance of his cave.

¹⁷ See Dreyfus 1997: 384–385 for a discussion.

vacuous, since all cognitions involve appearances of conceived objects that no longer exist.¹⁸ Even more than this, the conceived object is a conceptual entity and therefore unreal per Dharmakīrti. If we restrict the analysis to correspondence, falling hairs are not uniquely false with respect to a conceived object, since all objects so conceived fail to represent reality by virtue of being conceptual. The question for Dharmakīrti is whether such false concepts are effective.

According to Tsong kha pa, on the other hand, the conceived object is not a categorical representational fiction. Even though this conceived object is conceptual, concepts only misrepresent the *manner* in which an object exists—superimposing permanence and a Self. They can be valid to the degree they accurately correspond with *what* that object is—a chair, a table, etc. This accurate correspondence is in turn predicated on the existence of spatio-temporally extended objects which the conceived object correctly captures, albeit failing insofar as it makes such objects appear permanent and endowed with a Self.¹⁹ The falling hair, by contrast, is an illusion because its conceived object fails in a second regard: not only is it a reification, but it fails to correspond with any actual hairs. In other words, accurate conceptualization is nondeceptive (*mi bslu ba*) in a manner that conceiving of falling hairs is not, even though both involve a reification error (*'khrul pa*).

The introduction of appearing objects and conceived objects gives Tsong kha pa a method for differentiating false conceptual cognitions—like that of falling hairs—from veridical ones—that of chairs, etc. Again, this strategy relies on some notion of those cognitions accurately or failing to correspond with real spatio-temporally extended objects—correctly conceived real universals. But this strategy now creates a new issue for Tsong kha pa. Since it seems suspiciously like the falling hair, how can the universal perceived in yogic perception cogently be part of the world? Like the falling hair, it cannot be a causally effective particular, since it is a negative property. Nor, however, can it be a universal, because it too appears clearly in yogic perception. Unlike the falling hair, however, No-Self cannot be a non-object, since this would entail that the fundamental Buddhist truth does not exist. While Dharmakīrti bites the bullet on this, arguing whether No-Self is “real” is pragmatically irrelevant, Tsong kha pa’s reliance on correspondence to real universals precludes this dismissal.

Tsong kha pa actually gives two solutions, one from the perspective of the Cittamātra (Sems tsam pa) school and another from the Sautrantika (Mdo sde pa) perspective. He first sets up the problem.

¹⁸ See a convincing argument from Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507) on this point in Dreyfus 1997: 384–385.

¹⁹ See an explanation of Dge lugs pa realism in this regard in Ibid: 322–326.

Concerning whether this presentation of the two epistemic instruments [as having particulars and universals as their respective objects] is from the perspective of only the Sautrantika or is compatible with Cittamātra, it cannot be the first. From the lower [school (Sautrantika) on up], the reality of the two Emptinesses [of persons and phenomena] are thoroughly settled. Thus, [both schools] have to explain how the enumeration of the two epistemic instruments is encompassed by nonconceptual yogic perception. Furthermore, this must be the case, since [Cittamātra] does not give any alternate explanation, and the Unchanging Absolute (*'gyur med yongs grub*) [...] is definitive on its own.²⁰

Again, Tsong kha pa recapitulates the issue of universals and particulars concerning yogic perception. The Cittamātra and Sautrantika schools share a similar hurdle. Both are committed to the exclusivity of perception's apprehension of particulars and inference's apprehension of universals. Therefore, both must also explain how a seeming universal is the object of yogic perception, such that the knowledge produced by these two epistemic instruments is encompassed (*ya gyal du bsdus pa*) by yogic perception's insight.

Tsong kha pa next signals that he is addressing the issue from the side of Cittamātra by mentioning the "Unchanging Absolute" (*'gyur med yongs grub*). This hails from the doctrine of the three natures (Skt. *trisvabhāva*, Tib. *mtshan nyid gsum*). The last of these, the Absolute (Skt. *pariniṣpanna*, Tib. *yongs grub*), describes Emptiness²¹ in this school. As the object of yogic perception, the Absolute further exacerbates the problem, given that it is unchanging (*'gyur med*), which is antithetical to being a causally effective particular. How, then, can it be the object of yogic perception? Tsong kha pa raises this objection and offers a clarification:

Someone might object that while from the perspective common to both schools, the Unchanging Absolute has no causal efficacy, the Cittamātrin does not concur that it is a universal, and this is unreasonable. However, the Vijñāptimātrin²² does not agree that if something is unable to perform a function that it is necessarily a

²⁰ *gal te tshad ma gnyis kyi grangs nges bsgrub pa'i rnam gzhas 'di dag mdo sde pa kho na'i dbang du byas sam/ sems tsam pa dang thun mong ba'i dbang du byas pa yin/ dang po mi rigs tel 'og nas gnyis stong gi de kho na nyid rgyas par gtan la 'bebs pas de mngon sum du rtogs pa'i rnal 'byor mngon sum dbye ba'i ya gyal du bsdus pa'i tshad ma gnyis kyi grangs nges 'chad dgos shing/ de'ang skabs 'di ma gtogs gzhan du ma bshad pa'i phyir dang [...]* *'gyur med yongs grub la'ang nges par tshang ba'i phyir ro/* (Tsong kha pa 1999a: 346).

²¹ Emptiness (*stong pa nyid*) and No-Self (*bdag med dpa*) are both objects of yogic perception and as negative properties similarly problematic.

²² Cittamātrin (*sems tsam pa*) and Vijñāptimātrin (*rnam rig pa*) are synonymous here.

universal, nor that if it can, it is necessarily a particular. While [in the Vijñāptimātrin system] the Unchanging Absolute [...] is truly established, here we are concerned with the perspective of Sautrantika alone, and not the uncommon perspective of Vijñāptimātra.²³

In other words, someone might assume that the Cittamātrin's position is untenable, since they deny that an unchanging entity, like Emptiness, is a universal, and thus argue that it is a proper object of perception. However, in that school, that the Absolute is unchanging and unable to perform a function does *not* necessitate that it is a universal. In other words, despite being unchanging, the Absolute can still be a particular and an appropriate object of yogic perception.²⁴

Notice that Dharmakīrti can sidestep this issue entirely. If the *mental image* of the Absolute cultivated in yogic perception leads to liberation, then this is sufficient. There is no need for that image to correspond with any *actual* Absolute *qua* universal or particular, and indeed, due to momentariness, mental images will invariably fail to correspond. Other schools similarly eschew the issue of reference per the Absolute, arguing that a theory of mental images entails that ultimately the mind cognizes itself and that this self-cognition constitutes yogic perception of the Absolute.²⁵ But Tsong kha pa forgoes this strategy.²⁶ He wants to demonstrate that the Absolute *itself*—not just its mental image—is a particular, seemingly so that yogic perception—which, as a type of perception, can only cognize particulars—corresponds with a robust object. In fact, later Dge lugs pa scholars understood mental images not as mental pictures that *represent* objects, but (in the case of cognizing real objects) as the direct cognition of external objects

²³ *gnyis ka'i thun mong ba'i dbang du byas na'ang 'gyur med yongs grub don byed mi nus pa yin yang spyi mtshan du sems tsam pa khas mi len zhing mi rigs pa'i phyir zhe nal rnam rig pas don byed mi nus pa la spyi mtshan gyis khab pa dang/ rang mtshan la don byed nus pas khyab pa khas mi len zhing [...] 'gyur med yongs grub la'ang grub pa bden yang skabs 'dir ni mdo sde pa kho na'i dbang du byas pa yin gyi rnam rig pa'i thun mong ma yin pa'i lugs ston pa'i dbang du ma byas te/ (Tsong kha pa 1999a: 346).*

²⁴ I am grateful to Dge bshes Blo bzang tshul khriims at the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies who explained to me this unique feature in Tsong kha pa's understanding of the Cittamātra school (personal communication, December 12, 2019).

²⁵ Such a view is found among Sa skya and Bka' brgyud thinkers. See Dreyfus 1997: 412–415.

²⁶ The Dge lugs pa rejection of self-cognition (*rang rig*) in Prasaṅgika seems, thus, to bleed into the discussion here. But there are parallels to this debate even within Yogācāra, specifically between those who consider mental images unreal (Skt. *alīkākaravāda*, Tib. *rnam rdzun pa*) and real (Skt. *satyākāravāda*, Tib. *rnam ldan pa*) respectively. Namely, the issue is whether mental images are objects of consciousness, which is thus not *just* self-cognizant, or not, meaning all duality between mind and its object is illusory. See Kajiyama 1965: 31.

themselves.²⁷ Based on a similar understanding that mental images are transparent to external objects, Tsong kha pa forecloses an appeal to mental images as nonreferential entities. Otherwise, if mental images were not transparent to non-mental objects, their status as mental entities and their role in perception would be sufficient to establish yogic perception as a type of self-cognition. Instead, in the same way, Tsong kha pa differentiates illusions from accurate cognitions by way of their correspondence with a veritable conceived object, so too does he feel compelled to demonstrate yogic perception's accurate correspondence with an actual Absolute in order to substantiate its validity.

What, then, about the Sautrāntika perspective? Tsong kha pa continues:

From that [Sautrāntika] perspective, yogic perception encounters the Selflessness of persons (*gang zag gi bdag med*) implicitly and explicitly apprehends the causally effective particular. Therefore, it says [in Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya*] that "yogins see just the object, unmixed with the guru's instructions."²⁸ [...] The Unchanging Absolute realized by yogic perception, [by contrast], is an explicit realization and is *not* realized implicitly.²⁹

Here, the strategy is decisively different. Sautrāntika preserves the mutual entailment of causal efficacy and particular. Thus, the object of yogic perception must be a causally effective particular. Selflessness (*bdag med*), by contrast, is a negative entity, and so cannot be an object of perception. How, then, does yogic perception realize Selflessness? Tsong kha pa answers, "implicitly (*shugs rtogs*)." ³⁰ Through apprehending the particular free of reification, the yogin subsequently realizes that there can be no Self. But No-Self is not the direct object of yogic perception. Yogic perception takes No-Self as an object implicitly, since the recognition of particulars as ultimately real precludes attributions of Self. This introduction of implicit cognition into Dharmakīrti's system is likely a Tibetan invention.³¹ But in Tsong

²⁷ Dreyfus 1997: 408.

²⁸ See footnote 4.

²⁹ *de'i dbang du byas na gang zag gi bdag med 'jal ba'i rnal 'byor mngon sum gyis gang zag gi bdag med shugs rtogs dang/ dngos su dngos po rang mtshan gzung yul du byed pa yin te/ rnal 'byor rnam kyis bla mas bstan/ ma 'dres pa yi don tsam mthong/ zhes bshad pa dang [...]'gyur med yongs grub rtogs pa'i rnal 'byor mngon sum gyis ni dngos su rtogs pa yin gyi shugs la rtogs pa ma yin no/ (Tsong kha pa 1999a: 346).*

³⁰ See Dreyfus 1997: 370–373 for a lucid explanation of how Dge lugs uses the notion of implicit cognition to explain how perception perceives conceptual entities.

³¹ Rong ston (1367–1449), following Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182–1251), understands the notion of implicit cognition as a Tibetan invention. See Rong ston 2011: 202–207.

kha pa's formulation, it allows for yogic perception's not perceiving a universal, only the momentary particular.

However, even if this (somewhat dubiously) explains epistemologically how yogic perception can realize No-Self, an ontological question still remains. That is, even if yogic perception can implicitly realize a universal, in what sense does this universal exist? How is it that the cognition of universals—implicitly or otherwise—accurately represents reality? For this question, we turn to another of Tsong kha pa's works, his *Extensive Notes on Valid Cognition* (Tib. *Tshad ma'i brjed byang chen mo*). He first articulates the by-now-familiar problem with universals.

Firstly, though we regard universal and particular [...], positive and negative entities [...], etc., as mentally imputed [distinctions], if we thus similarly concede that if something is a universal it is necessarily imagined and permanent, then the common instrumental actions we necessarily engage in in order to achieve our aims and those very goals themselves on which our hearts are set—be it omniscience or whatever—would refer to nothing. If that were the case, then a host of problems occur [...]. Specifically, if we argue that the determinate objects of the conceptualization of a vase—[a negative entity]—and the determinate realization of all things in omniscience, etc.—[positive entities]—are both particulars, then, since those conceptualizations are no longer erring (*ma 'khrul pa*), all negative and positive entities would have to occur simultaneously [rather than in succession from perception to conceptualization]. If we deny that they are particulars, then it is difficult to explain how we engage with particulars at all.³²

Tsong kha pa rearticulates the problem of universals. That is, if they are actually real particulars, Dharmakīrti's system dissolves. It is integral to Dharmakīrti's epistemology that the inference of concepts occurs based on and thus after perception. This condition is even reflected in the etymologies of both the Sanskrit and Tibetan words for "inference"—*anumāna* and *rjes dpag*—where the prefix "*anu-*" and "*rjes*" both denote "after." If universals are particulars, they would be apprehended within and not after perception. On the other hand, if they are pure fictions, then they have no relationship with reality, e.g.,

³² *dang po ni/ spyi dang bye phrag dang [...] dgag pa dang/ sgrub pa [...] la sogs pa rnams rtogs pas sgras btas su bshad pa'ang mthong zhing/ spyi yin na sgro btas yin pas khyab pa dang de gzhin du rtogs sogs pa'ang khab nal/ 'bras bu don gnyer la nye bar mkho ba'i don byed nus pa phal pa rnams dang/ mngon por 'dod pa'i don gyi gtso bo kun mkhyen la sogs pa'i rnam gzhas bya sa med par 'gyur la/ de ltar na mi rung ba chen por 'gyur bas/ [...] khyed par du bum 'dzin rtog pa dang kun mkhyen nges pa'i rtogs pa la sogs pa'i nges yul rang mtshan du grub na rtog pa de dag ma 'khrul bar 'gyur bas dgag sgrub thams cad cig car bya dgos pa dang nges yul rang mtshan du grub pa bkag na rang mtshan de dag nges pa'i yul du 'jog tshul de dag shin tu dka' [...]* (Tsong kha pa 1975: 183–184).

real particulars, and all conceptual reasoning is delusional. The question is then how to keep universals and particulars sufficiently distinct per Dharmakīrti's system yet sufficiently related so that the former is based on the truth of the latter. Tsong kha pa notes that if we have no ability to ascertain particulars via universals, then we could not reason about the ultimate nature of things. The absurdum would result that "because grasping at a Self would not be in error, we would have to conclude liberation is not possible."³³

Tsong kha pa offers a somewhat mind-bending solution. In essence, though universals *themselves* are fictions, they still cogently refer to particulars.

Though all of conventional reality is mere conceptual imputation, it is assuredly epistemically warranted. All functional entities, [on the other hand], are established as particulars. *To deny this formulation of the two truths is to grasp as contradictory the fact that although the object of conceptualization is not a particular, the particular is an object of conceptualization* [emphasis added]. [...] In this [Pramāṇavāda] system, although being conceptually imputed necessitates not being a functional entity, if you believe that it also necessitates that it is not established by valid cognition, then this would fundamentally reject any means of ascertainment. Thus, the division of the two truths is to be explained in this manner [...]³⁴

Tom Tillemans identifies that Tsong kha pa's position here builds off an older Gsang phu tradition, in which although conceptual universals themselves are reifications, *the things that are those universals* are not necessarily reifications—*spyi sgro btags pa yin, spyi yin na sgro btags yin pas ma khyab*.³⁵ By employing this innovation, Tsong kha pa solves the ontological disconnect between No-Self as a universal and the real world as only populated by particulars. In his system, it is not contradictory that particulars robustly—not merely as a mental fabrication—instantiate universals, despite the fact that conceptual thinking itself fails to perceive beyond that universal to the particular. We could think of this almost like a one-way mirror. The particular has a transparent relationship to the universal. But when we use inference

³³ *gang zag gi bdag 'dzin yang blo ma 'khrul bar 'gyur bas thar pa thob pa'ang mi srid pa babs blang dgos so/* (See Rong ston 2011: 188).

³⁴ *kun rdzob mtha' dag rtog btags tsam du rang lugs la tshad mas legs par grub pa dang dngos po thams cad rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub par 'jog shes pa'i bden gnyis kyi rnam dbye 'jog shes pa'i gegs ni rtog pa'i yul rang mtshan ma yin pa dang rang mtshan rtog pa'i yul yin pa gnyis 'gal bar 'dzin pa nyid yin no [...] rigs pa 'di'i lugs la rtog btags tsam la don byed mi nus pas khyab kyang tshad mas ma grub pas khyab par bzung na rigs pa 'di nges pa'i gegs kyi gts'o po yin pas bden gnyis kyi nam dbye la mkhas par bya ste [...]* (Ibid: 188–189).

³⁵ Tillemans 1999: 215–216.

to conceptualize the universal, it occludes the particular. Thus, Tsong kha pa solves both the perceptual and ontological problems of yogic perception. Namely, although perception is only implicitly related to universals epistemologically, universals themselves have a robust ontological relationship to the real particulars of the world.

However, this is not to say that Tsong kha pa relegates his discussion of yogic perception only to the cultivation of appearances that appropriately refer. He also recognizes benefit in the vivid appearance of purely fictional entities, like that of the falling hair. The next and final section explores how Tsong kha pa argues that even the cultivation of hallucinations can have soteriological value.

3. *Tsong kha pa: Tantric Concepts*

Tsong kha pa does not reserve yogic perception purely for those perceptions that correctly refer, nor does he completely jettison the soteriological value of the cultivation of false appearances. In particular, he seems to afford them a role in his formulation of the tantric Creation Stage (Skt. *utpatti-krama*, Tib. *bskyed rim*). In his *Great Treatise on the Tantric Stages* (Tib. *Sngags rim chen mo*), Tsong kha pa heavily relies on the *Pramāṇavarttika* in his chapter on that topic and the utilization of yogic perception therein, specifically citing the same verses 3.284–285 we explored earlier. Commenting on the first verse, he writes:

Although the Sugatas say this in scripture, some heretics, who assert that renunciation and freedom are impossible, disavow any instance that demonstrates the feasibility of yogic perception. Since this objection is pervasive, there is also—for the sake of the opponent—an analysis of the fundamental proposition that people like *aryas*, etc., exist. Thus, [Dharmakīrti] intends the pursuit of mere habituation [when he says] that meditation on an object, whether veritable or false, will result in its clear appearance.³⁶

The “heretics” in this passage are most likely a reference to the *Mīmāṃsakas*, who (at least in the earliest strata) reject the possibility of meditative insight or liberation. Because they argue no authentic

³⁶ *zhes gsung rab las 'byung bar bshad pa'i bde bar gshegs pa'i gsung yang spangs par 'gyur zhing/ thar pa mi srid par 'dod pa'i phyi rol pa la rnal 'byor mngon sum 'byung rung du sgrub pa'i rtags kyi khab pa nges pa'i gzhir gyur pa'i dpe phyi rol pas kyang mi bsnyon pa la bsnyon bting bas gzhan sde la 'phags pa'i gang zag sogs yod par sgrub pa'i sgrub byed kyi rtsa ba bcad pa yang yin no/ des na goms yul la gsal snang 'ong ba la ni yang dag pa dang log pa'i don gang goms kyang 'dra ste goms pa tsam gyi rjes su byed pa la dgongs nas [...]* (Tsong kha pa 1999b: 548).

yogins exist—that only the *Vedas* and not any human can be an authoritative source of spiritual knowledge—the proof for yogic perception is purely hypothetical without an actual example, and thereby invalid. Tsong kha pa therefore subsequently offers a proof for yogins and their perceptions by extrapolating from verse 3.285 of the *Pramāṇavarttika*, explaining that the vivid appearance of an object can arise from its repeated conceptual mediation.

While Tsong kha pa's proof of yogins is fascinating in its own right, what concerns us here is how Tsong kha pa envisions the role of yogic perception in Creation Stage practice. Tsong kha pa makes its employment clear a little further on in the text, where he again quotes verse 3.285 of the *Pramāṇavarttika*, further elaborating:

I have already explained [...] that the mind will take on the mental image of whatever object to which it habituates. First, the beginner withdraws [the senses], and then, having amassed some familiarization, she grabs hold of [the meditative object: the deity]. While meditating to reinforce [this object], she visualizes each and every aspect in detail. [Then], outside of solely imagining that mental image [of the deity], she is to cultivate a powerful mental certainty [of being that deity], since both the clear mental image and divine pride are necessary.³⁷

Tsong kha pa therefore understands yogic perception as the means by which one accomplishes the Creation Stage. It is a meditative practice that culminates in the deity's appearing clearly, as if real. This is associated with the conviction that the meditator herself is also the deity, which is described as "divine pride" (*lha'i nga rgyal*).

However, while Tsong kha pa argued that yogic perception of the Unchanging Absolute constituted perception of a real object—i.e., that it was not *merely* a mental image—Tsong kha pa makes no such concession here. He first explains that the mental appearance of the deity in meditation is not the same as an actual sensorial one.

When one has steady Deity Yoga thorough intense habituation [and there is a clear appearance of the deity], there is no other appearance to visual consciousness, or to the rest [of the sense consciousnesses]. Because the mental consciousness needs to be fully engaged with its object, the power of the conditions [for meditation] is diminished as soon as the visual or other consciousnesses arise. Therefore, no other appearance, such as that of colors, etc., comes to mind [other than that

³⁷ [...] *yid dngos po gang dang gang la sbyar ba de dang de'i rnam par 'gyur ba* [...] *gsungs te sngar drangs zin to/ de la las dang po pas ni sbyor ba tshogs bsag nas bzung ste nye bar bsdu ba'i bar rnam sgom pa na re re nas zhib tu gsal btab nas sgom pa dang rnam pa shar ba tsam min par blo'i nges pa'i 'dzin stangs shugs can bskyed nas bya ste/ rnam pa gsal ba dang nga rgyal 'dzin pa gnyis ka dgos pa'i phyir rol* (Tsong kha pa 1999b: 582–583).

of the deity], since those [sense consciousnesses] are not operative at that time. However, this does not mean that the Creation Stage negates [those sensory] appearances.³⁸

In other words, cognition of sensory appearances hinders meditation, and so they cannot operate in tandem; mental consciousness alone apprehends the meditative object. Again, Tsong kha pa makes use of Dharmakīrti in making this point, citing *Pramāṇavarttika* verse 2.112cd: “Attached to another object, the mind has no power, because it can grasp nothing else.”³⁹ This is not just a minor point over which mental apparatus grasps a meditative object. Tsong kha pa notes that the fact that one cannot be aware of sensory appearances during meditation does not mean the Creation Stage negates the sensory world itself, which would be solipsistic indeed. As a corollary, he argues that because this meditative object is purely the domain of mental consciousness, and not of the sense consciousnesses, its actuality is precluded. He thus follows with:

Therefore, when one achieves the power to stop ordinary appearances at the level of mental consciousness through the exceptional appearances [of the deity], one gains what is necessary. *Although one will not have reached the deity in reality* [emphasis added], even when the uncontrived pride of the deity arises, one gains what is necessary thereby.⁴⁰

Tsong kha pa is therefore careful to distinguish the clear appearance of the deity to mental consciousness from having “reached the deity in reality.” The appearance of the deity is thus like the falling hair. It is real as an appearance and mental image to mental consciousness, but false in terms of its referent: an actual falling hair or actual deity, as corroborated by the sense consciousnesses. Although the appearance of the deity to mental consciousness is soteriologically effective toward eliminating ordinary appearances, it fails to represent reality, a reality that Tsong kha pa argues remains a fact of the matter despite

³⁸ *goms pa che bas lha'i rnal 'byor la mnyam par bzhag pa na mig gi shes pa la sogs pa'i snang ba gzhan mi 'char ba ni/ yid kyi shes pa don de la rjes su zhugs dgos pas mig la sogs pa'i shes pa skye ba'i de ma thag rkyen gyi nus pa nyams pas de dag re zhig ma skyes pas kha dog la sogs pa'i snang ba gzhan ma shar ba yin gyi snang ba de dag bskyed rim gyis bkag pa min tel* (Tsong kha pa 1999b: 574–575).

³⁹ *[rnam shes don gzhan chags pa yis/ /nus med don gzhan mi 'dzin phyir/* (Dharmakīrti n.d.: 111b).

⁴⁰ *des na khyad par can gyi snang bas yid shes kyi ngor tha mal pa'i snang ba 'gog pa'i nus pa thob na des dgos pa 'grub la dngos po la lhar ma song yang lha'i bcos min gyi nga rgyal skyes na'ang des dgos pa 'grub bo/* (Tsong kha pa 1999b: 575).

appearances.⁴¹

4. Back to Dharmakīrti: Dualistic Concepts

Tsong kha pa thus seems to afford two distinct roles for yogic perception: the first is to generate a clear and vivid appearance of meditational objects that actually exist—such as the Unchanging Absolute—and the second to cultivate other appearances that do not—like of oneself as a deity—both of which are soteriologically advantageous. Dharmakīrti himself, it seems, would be suspect of this distinction. The disparity between him and Tsong kha pa here is put all the more in relief by a glaring difference between the Tibetan and Sanskrit editions of the *Pramāṇavarttika*. While Tsong kha pa's citation of verse 2.112cd from the Tibetan is correctly attested in the Sde dge Bstan 'gyur and translated above—"Attached to another object, the mind has no power, because it can grasp nothing else"—the Sanskrit edition puts this hemistich closer to: "When consciousness is defiled with attachment to another object, it is because it grasps no other object [but itself]."⁴² Prajñākaragupta's (750–810) commentary confirms the reading:

By no means does seeing [the illusion of] a subject influenced by an object arise through some interceding, sudden [effect] other than conceptualizations, which are the mental impressions of an obstructed

⁴¹ Elsewhere, however, Tsong kha pa does argue that these exceptional appearances are definitively valid epistemic warrants (*tshad ma*) because they undo Self-grasping. See Tsong kha pa 1999b: 609–610. On the other hand, because they are valid with respect to hindering Self-grasping, it is not necessarily the case that they are also valid with respect to reference. In other words, as an inversion of conventional appearances, they may be correct per *how* things exist but not per *what* exists. Again, the representational content of appearances and their representation of that content's existence are distinct questions for Tsong kha pa.

⁴² *anya-artha-āsakti-vigūṇe jñāne anartha-antara-grahāt* || (Dharmakīrti 1972: verse 2.112). Also consulted Prajñākaragupta 1998: verse 2.113. The discrepancy with the Tibetan (see note 39) is somewhat bewildering. "Āsakti" may have been misrendered "aśakti" in the Tibetan *nus med*, but does seem correctly translated as *chags pa*. If so, then *nus med* may be *vigūṇa*, which is a slightly strange translation choice, since *yon tan med pa* or some variant would be more standard. The Tibetan phrase *don gzhan mi 'dzin phyir* would be more appropriately *artha-antara-agrahāt* in Sanskrit, as in, "it does not grasp another object," but *anartha-antara-grahāt* more felicitously means "it grasps something which is not another object." Finally, the Tibetan trades the locative *jñāne*, which denotes a conditional, for an instrumental, also significantly changing the meaning.

consciousness. Thus, [subject and object] come from consciousness alone.⁴³

In other words, Dharmakīrti does not simply mean that mental and sensory appearances cannot be simultaneous, but that the very notion that some appearances represent external sensory objects is false. The disparity between the Sanskrit and Tibetan here serendipitously traces Tsong kha pa's deviation from Dharmakīrti's thought. Tsong kha pa understands this verse to mean that sensory and mental appearances are mutually exclusive only with respect to consciousness; it is not the case that "that the Creation Stage negates appearances" in the world writ large. Their mutual exclusivity is epistemological, not ontological. This is consistent with Tsong kha pa's larger framework that differentiates appearances and their referents. The cessation of certain appearances' presence in consciousness does not necessitate the elimination of their referents, no more than the appearance of oneself as a deity necessitates actually being a deity.

The Sanskrit reflects Dharmakīrti's rejection of representationalism. That is, the notion that there is some referent to appearances is a confusion, since the mind is actually grasping itself when it thinks it apprehends an external object. On this understanding, the question of what appearances accurately refer is simply ill-formed. As long as they are tainted with conceptualization, appearances *never* accurately represent the world. Appearances thus categorically fail as an ontology, and the distinction between valid and invalid appearances based on reference is vacuous. One wonders what Dharmakīrti would have to say about Creation Stage practice in general.

The issue of appearances and the degree to which there is a distinct reality that they represent accords with the larger theme of this paper: universals and the degree to which they correspond with the world. Dharmakīrti argues that conceptual universals and even their attendant mental image particulars are not accurate representations. Nonetheless, the appearance of certain mental images in yogic perception can have a powerful soteriological effect. Tsong kha pa, on the other hand, wants a more robustly true object for yogic perception. Universals, including Buddhist truths, are thus part and parcel of reality. There is no need for pragmatist apologetics to justify their being objects of yogic perception.

⁴³ *na khalu vyavahita-vijñāna-vāsanā-vikalpānām anyena avāntara-upanipātīnā śakti-
viśaya-*viśayena** udayas drśyate | tatas vijñānāt ekakam vā [...]* (Prajñākaragupta 1998:
verse 2.113). *The edition gives the genitive *viśayiṇaḥ* as another reading, which
seems more accurate here.

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Resurrecting an Old Advice: Funerary Teachings in the Bka' brgyad Cycle of Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192)

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 As I was translating the fourth chapter of the *Rig 'dzin 'dus pa'i rgyud* (*Assembly of the Knowledge Holders' Tantra*), an early Rnying ma tantric scripture of Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer which belongs to his Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa (The Eight Instructions: Assembly of the Ones Gone to Bliss) cycle, I encountered a peculiar manual "hidden" just after the section on the history of transmission that Nyang ral provided. This sub-section contains different components of funerary teachings such as the *Bardo* teachings (*Bar do*), Transference of Consciousness into another Body ('*Pho ba grong 'jug*), "Deceiving" Death ('*Chi bsu*), and others. Kar ma gling pa's (1326–1386) *Bar do thos grol* (*Liberation Through Hearing During the Intermediate State*) is the culmination of the funerary practices and the most complete manual for these teachings. However, it was a progression over several centuries until the formulation of such a work, and its ensuing standardization was completed by the 18th century. Nyang ral seems to be one of the links between the early tantras containing such practices and the later traditions. In this article, I will introduce these teachings and Nyang ral's role in spreading them, thus demonstrating parts of the "syncretism," which occurred between the early Bka' brgyud and Rnying ma factions.

For this article, I have examined ten manuscripts of the *Rig 'dzin 'dus pa'i rgyud*. Seven of them are found in the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* (*The Hundred Thousand Tantras of the Rnying ma School*) in the editions of Sde dge, Dgra med rtse, Sgang steng (both the plain and the illustrated one), Mtshams brag, Gting skyes, and Rig 'dzin tshe dbang nor bu. In addition to that, I used three manuscripts from different individual collections, which I named Ms. A, Ms. B, and Ms. C, respectively. While Ms. A¹ does not contain annotations,² both Ms.

¹ Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1977–1978: 359–396.

Guy Grizman, "Resurrecting an Old Advice: Funerary Teachings in the Bka' brgyad Cycle of Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192)," *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*, no. 55, Juillet 2020, pp. 182–196.

B³ and Ms. C⁴ do, as well as the Sde dge edition. The annotations in Ms. C follow the text of the *Rig 'dzin 'dus pa'i rgyud* from the beginning to the end.

The more surprising part, however, is that the versions in the Sde dge edition and Ms. B are annotated only on the funerary part of Nyang ral's work. It is not entirely clear who the different annotators were. Perhaps, it was the Rnying ma master and a disciple of Sog bzlog pa blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624), Gong ra lo chen gzhan phan rdo rje (1594–1654), who was behind the annotations of Ms. C. However, there is no decisive indication. It is clear that the annotator of Ms. C often tries to insert the Great Perfection (Rdzogs chen)-based concepts into the Mahāyoga descriptions. The two other annotators entirely follow the Mahāyoga framework.⁵ Here I provide a part of my critical edition, which summarizes Nyang ral's funerary teachings:

If one desires to quickly attain [the level of] Vidyādhara⁶ and has not yet realized the suchness upon reaching the moment of death, by diagnosing the special signs in the body, one will know for certain [if one is about to die]. Additionally, by analyzing dreams, body and speech, heaven and earth, the signs which appear in the mind, [one should first apply] the examination of the time duration of these signs, [then apply the practice of] *Ransoming* [death], [then try] *Averting* [it] and [then apply the practice of] *Merging*. [If neither worked,] one should *Transfer* [one's consciousness to another] body before the power [of life] is exhausted.

In the *Dharmatā*,⁷ birth and death are worldly appearances and

² Two types of annotations in these manuscripts are scribal corrections and gloss insertions. The latter constitutes the majority of annotations and there one finds handwritten inserted explanations for the text, below or above the original text.

³ Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978: 431–472.

⁴ Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1979–1980: 447–498.

⁵ This work by Nyang ral is designated as a Mahāyoga tantra, the seventh *yāna* (vehicle) according to the Rnying ma Nine Yānas scheme (Tib. *theg pa dgu*). In these passages the annotations of Ms. C include an ongoing emphasis on the concept of *lhun grub* (spontaneous presence) as being the pinnacle of three levels that can be attained by three types of practitioners. The two other annotated manuscripts do not contain these concepts. The term *lhun grub* (one of the two main aspects of Rdzogs chen teaching, the ninth *yāna*) itself is absent from the entire main text as well.

⁶ Vidyādhara (Tib. *rig 'dzin*) is an elusive term and can carry several meanings. As a Pan-Asian term it often depicts a “spell-caster” or a supernatural being such as a sorcerer. Thus, Vidyādhara could mean the mastery of these crafts. The Rnying ma school, however, prescribes four levels of Vidyādhara as the ultimate spiritual attainments of the Mahāyoga practice. For a detailed discussion on the different meanings of Vidyādhara, see Wangchuk 2009 and Grafe 2001.

⁷ *Dharmatā* (Tib. *chos nyid*) is the intrinsic nature of reality or the unconditioned truth, suchness.

conceptually constructed phenomena. The essence of the mind is free from elaborations. *Transference* and *Transmigration* are completely not established. The Vidyādhara is self-originated.⁸

In the following part of the *Rig 'dzin 'dus pa'i rgyud*, there are instructions for how one should transfer his consciousness into a dead body with the help of a qualified friend. Apparently, a successful attempt should lead to Vidyādhara-hood. The next stanzas deal with the case when the transference of one's consciousness was not successful, and one has to face the intermediate state between death and rebirth. It is there where we find a short explanation of the *bardo* stages and one's experiences.

The categories of funerary practices in Nyang ral's text can be summed up as:

1. "Signs of Death Diagnosis" (*'Chi ba'i mtshan rtags pa*).
2. "Ransoming from Death" / "Deceiving Death" (*'Chi bslu*).
3. "Averting Death" (*'Chi ba bzlog pa*).
4. "Merging" (*Sbyor ba*).
5. "Transference of Consciousness into Another Body" (*'Pho ba grong 'jug*).
6. "Bardo Instructions" (*Bar do'i gdam ngag*).

1. Works on Funerary Teachings

One of the early sources for these funerary teachings and perhaps the most probable source for Nyang ral's scheme is the *Tantra of the Great Secret Union of the Sun and the Moon* (Tib. *Nyi ma dang zla kha sbyor*), which belongs to the *Seventeen Tantras* (Tib. *Man ngag sde'i rgyud bcu bdun*) of the Great Perfection Man ngag cycle, most likely dating from the 11th century. In this tantra, either the Buddha Vajradhāra or Vajrasattva explain the contents of the teachings to a bodhisattva called *Mi tog thub pa*. The second section of the *Tantra of the Great Secret Union of the Sun and the Moon* deals with the signs of death and the instructions on how to overcome death. As in Nyang ral's text,

⁸ *de yi dus su rig pa 'dzin/ myur du thob par 'dod pa yis/ 'chi ba'i dus la sleb kyang bla'i/ gal te de nyid ma rtogs na/ rten 'brel gzugs la brtags pa yis/ nges pa can du shes par 'gyur/ gzhan yang rmi lam brtag pa dang/ lus ngag gnam sa brtag pa dang/ sems la snang ba'i ltas rnam ni/ ring thung bsam pa'i yul dag gis/ bslu dang bzlog dang sbyor ba yis/ nus pa ma rdzogs rten 'pho ste/ mtshan ma med pa'i skye 'chi sogs/ rnam rtog 'jig rten snang bas brtags/ sems kyi snying po spros bral la/ 'pho dang 'gro ba yongs ma grub/ rang byung rig pa 'dzin pa'o/.* For the complete critical edition, see Grizman, "Unearthing the Herukas: A Study of the *Rig 'dzin 'dus pa'i rgyud*," Ph.D. diss., Universität Hamburg (forthcoming).

this part also ends with the *bardo* instructions, if all other attempts to avoid dying fell short.

As David Germano showed, many Great Perfection tantras were dedicated to funerary rites and concepts, especially by the time of the *Seventeen Tantras*.⁹ Two other important sources which predate Nyang ral's work, and address similar topics are *The Tantra on Eliminating All Evil Rebirths* (Skt. *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana-tantra*) and the *Precious Self-Presencing of the Intermediate State of Rebirth* (Tib. *Rin po che srid pa bar do rang snang ba'i rgyud*). The first belongs to the class of Yoga Tantra, which focuses on different sets of rituals to ensure a better rebirth for the deceased. This tantra is found in the Bka' 'gyur. The translators of this tantra from Sanskrit to Tibetan are known as Śāntigarbha (dates uncertain, most probably 8th century) and Jayarākṣita (8th or 9th century).¹⁰ Śāntigarbha had a leading role in Nyang ral's Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa as one of the eight Vidyādhara (Tib. *rig 'dzin*) who received the eight caskets.¹¹ He was the one to receive the casket of *Drag sngags*, that of *Fierce Mantras*. In the 13th century, another Sanskrit version was translated into Tibetan by the Indian Devendradeva (dates uncertain) and the Tibetan translator Chag lo tsā ba chos rje dpal¹² (1197–1263), the nephew of Chag lo tsā ba dgra bcom (1153–1216), who according to Nyang ral's son, was in charge of his father's funeral.¹³

The *Precious Self-Presenting of the Intermediate State of Rebirth Tantra* can be found in both the *Bai ro'i rgyud 'bum* (*The Hundred Thousand Tantras of Vairocana*) and the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*. This particular tantra represents one of the earliest Tibetan sources describing the Buddhist "intermediate state" or *bardo* period, which comes after death. It includes brief discussions on a number of topics directly relevant to the subject of *bardo*, such as the methods for reading the

⁹ Germano 2005: 9–28.

¹⁰ Skorupski 1983: 1–9.

¹¹ The caskets consist of eight cycles or sets of praxis-oriented Mahāyoga teachings associated with a constellation of eight Tantric deities (e.g. Vajrakīlaya, Yāmataka, and so on) and the following eight Vidyādhara: (1) Mañjuśrīmitra, the Vidyādhara of Body (Tib. *sku'i rig 'dzin*), (2) Nāgārjuna, the Vidyādhara of Speech (Tib. *gsung gi rig 'dzin*), (3) Hūmkara, the Vidyādhara of Mind (Tib. *thugs kyi rig 'dzin*), (4) Vimalamitra, the Vidyādhara of Qualities (Tib. *yon tan gyi rig 'dzin*), (5) Prabhāhasti, the Vidyādhara of Activities (Tib. *'phrin las kyi rig 'dzin*), (6) Dhanasamkrāta, the Vidyādhara of Sphere (Tib. *dbyings kyi rig 'dzin*), (7) Rom bu Guhyacandra, the Vidyādhara of Intimidation (Tib. *mngon spyod kyi rig 'dzin*), and (8) Śāntigarbha, Vidyādhara of Fierce Mantras (Tib. *drag sngags kyi rig 'dzin*). Each cycle of teachings from the Bka' brgyad constellation seems to be seen as complete and self-sufficient in and by itself in achieving one's soterical goal, namely, the Buddhahood.

¹² Skorupski 1983: 8.

¹³ Hirshberg 2016: 205–208.

omens of death correctly, the internal and external signs of the dying process, advice on how to take control of the *bardo* experience, and techniques for avoiding an unpleasant rebirth.¹⁴

Additional early manuals on death rituals can be found in the Bstan 'gyur. These are related to the "New School" (Gsar ma) of translation. One of the death manuals was authored by Tathāgatarakṣita (11th century) and was translated by Ba ri lo tsā ba rin chen grags (1040–1111) in the 11th century and is called '*Chi ba bslu ba* (*Deceiving Death*). Another is called '*Chi ba blu ba'i man ngag* (*Esoteric Instructions of Deceiving Death*) and is supposedly based on early translations of Atiśa (982–1054) and Rin chen bzang po (958–1055) in the 10th to 11th centuries. As Irmgard Mengele showed in her work dedicated to the rituals for Deceiving Death, these two death manuals seem to derive from the *Mṛtyuvañcana* (*Death Cheater*) written by Vāgīśvarikīrti (dates uncertain) from the same period.¹⁵ From that period in Tibet, we see evidence that, to some degree, all Tibetan Buddhist schools had their own set of funerary teachings.

Now I would like to focus on each of the categories of funerary practices found in the *Rig 'dzin 'dus pa'i rgyud*.

2. The Funerary Practices according to the *Rig 'dzin 'dus pa'i rgyud*

2.1. Identifying the Signs of Death

In the *Tantra of the Great Secret Union of the Sun and the Moon*, we find explanations of how one can check his own signs of death or assist others in figuring out these signs. It involves checking almost every bodily organ and sense faculty, paying attention to changes in colors or angles, one's shadow, and other characteristics. Reading the signs of death correctly is the key to the successful practice of the rituals which are supposed to prevent death from approaching.¹⁶

¹⁴ Germano 2005: 15.

¹⁵ Mengele 2010: 105–106.

¹⁶ Glen Mullin, in his translation of the *Self-Liberation by Knowing the Signs of Death* suggests that the study of the signs of death must be accompanied by a study of the longevity yogas and of the methods of consciousness transference for those cases when longevity cannot be achieved. It is further explained that "we humans face two kinds of death. Death by untimely conditions and death by the exhaustion of the natural lifespan. Untimely death can be turned away through the methods taught for achieving longevity. However, when the cause of death is the exhaustion of the natural lifespan, those methods will be of little value" (Karma gling pa 1998: 126–147).

2.2. Ransoming and Averting Death

The terms “ransoming” and “averting” in the funerary texts are sometimes used differently but at the same time often synonymously. Perhaps “averting” is just a more successful application of the ritual of “ransoming,” but this is not entirely clear.¹⁷

In general, many ritual texts on ransoming death contain the word “averting” or “reversing.” For example, a work by Zhu chen tshul khrim rin chen (1697–1774) is translated as *Bestowing the Bliss of Immortality: A Method to Avert Obstacles and Deceive Death Based Upon the White [Goddess] Flaming Mouth*.¹⁸ Another example is Bdud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje's (1904–1987) text translated as *Turning Away the Face of the Lord of Death: A Death Deceiving Ritual Connected with the Life Drop [of] Longevity [and] Immorality*.¹⁹

According to the *Tantra of the Great Secret Union of the Sun and the Moon*, it seems that averting is the successful result of ransoming. In short, ransoming or averting death is a ritual performed for a person facing an untimely death.²⁰ However, a person cannot avert death if the death has come due to the exhaustion of the natural lifespan.

2.3. Merging

The practice of merging of the “Body” and “Wisdom” could be best illustrated by a passage from the *Tantra of the Great Secret Union of the Sun and the Moon*:

After the elements started dissolving, one expresses the teachings of the master in one's own mental continuum [... and] the four winds gradually stop. At the moment when the great winds move, one is taught how to enter objects and how to unify the Body and Wisdom.²¹

¹⁷ In Giacomella Orofino's work (1999: 34–36), we find the following passage: “Now I will explain the magical rituals which ransom one from death, if the signs of death should appear. When one undertakes the ritual of ransom from death one begins by accumulating merit, particularly to the master and to the religious community. Then one draws a mandala of the five elements, confess one's sins. Then one makes an effigy (*ngar zan* or *ngar glud*) and tormas [...]. Then one throws everything into the middle of a river and without doubt one averts death.”

¹⁸ *Kha 'bar ma dkar mo la brten nas 'chi ba bslu zhing bar gcod bzlog pa'i thabs 'chi med bde ster* (Mengele 2010: 124).

¹⁹ *Tshe sgrub 'chi med srog thig dang 'brel bar 'chi ba bslu ba'i cho ga 'chi bdag gdong zlog* (Mengele 2010: 127).

²⁰ As Mengele (2010: 104) put it: “the aim of the ritual is to reverse impending death and to eventually restore health.”

²¹ Orofino 1999: 37.

The method for the unification of the Body with Wisdom is then explained:

Pure awareness is concentrated in a single point; the body takes the position of the sleeping lion. One directs the mind to the eyes, and in an instant, the space becomes the way. If the pure awareness and space are immobile, that person will not wander in the *bardo*, and will be illuminated instantaneously, in the original purity.²²

2.4. Transference of Consciousness into Another Body

Interestingly, Nyang ral is concentrating on the transference of consciousness into another body. This topic is more obscure and is not concerned much with what turned out to be the more widespread practice, the “Transference into a Pure Realm.” The *Tantra of the Great Secret Union of the Sun and the Moon* recommends putting into action the methods of the body: the transference and the reanimation of a dead body.²³ I am not aware of many Rnying ma accounts concerning this practice of *grong 'jug*, but it is certainly available in the accounts of the early Bka' brgyud.

In the *Blue Annals*, we find three references to this practice.²⁴ First, it mentions that Mar pa (1012–1097) performed the transference four times.²⁵ Further, 'Gos lo tsā ba recounts the story in which Grol sgom chos g.yung, a disciple of Sgam po pa (1103–1199), demonstrated the rite of entering into the corpse of a goose.²⁶ The last story is about a master called Ka ro pa, who taught this practice to his disciple Ni ru pa. Ni ru pa then went to Nepal and transferred his consciousness into the body of a dead Tibetan monk.²⁷

Another account can be found in Lha btsun rin chen nam rgyal's (1473–1557) biography of Ras chung pa (1083–1161), where Ras chung pa's disciple, Sangs rgyas ston pa, known as Yang dag dpal, re-animated a dead lamb by temporarily transferring his consciousness into it.²⁸ Perhaps the most well-known account of a failed attempt to apply the transference practice involves Ti pu pa, Mar pa's son, who, upon his death, transferred his consciousness into

²² Orofino 1999: 37–38.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ 'Gos lo tsā ba 1979: 404, 469, 853.

²⁵ Ibid: 404.

²⁶ Ibid: 469.

²⁷ Ibid: 853.

²⁸ See *Bka' brgyud pa'i skyes chen dam pa rnams kyi rnam thar* in Khams sprul don brgyud nyi ma 1972: 749.

a dead Indian youngster. The accounts mentioned above and some additional ones are also recorded in Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba's (1504–1566) *Chos 'byung khas pa'i dga' ston* (*Feast for Scholars*) and Gu ru Bkra shis' (18th century) *Dharma History* (*Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*). Furthermore, Daniel Berounský provides interesting accounts from a later period of such a practice being applied in the following centuries.²⁹

All of these accounts (except for the ones mentioned by Berounský) are connected to the transmissions associated with the Bka' brgyud, in the way they were established by, for example, Ti lo pa, Nā ro pa, and Maitrī pa. They all point out that the source of the transference teachings lies in the *Chaturpīṭha Tantra*³⁰ (*Tantra of the Four Seats*). In *Shes bya mdzod* (*Treasury Embracing All Knowledge*),³¹ 'Jam mgon kong sprul also points that out and asserts that this tantra belongs to the Yogini Tantra classification. Besides, a tantra with the same name can be found in the lists of the *Eighteen Mahāyoga Tantras* by Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340–1396) and by Sog bzlog pa blo gros rgyal mtshan's (1552–1624) *Chos 'byung dgag pa* (*A Refutation*).³² Nyang ral, in his *Chos 'byung me tog nying po sbrag rtsi'i bcud* (*Flower Nectar: The Essence of Honey*), underlines that Padmasambhava together with one of his 25 disciples, Cog ro klu'i rgyal mtshan, translated the *Chaturpīṭha Tantra*, alongside the other *Eighteen Mahāyoga Tantras* and supplementary texts.

2.5. Bardo Instructions

Nyang ral did not elaborate on the topic of *bardo* instructions in his work, and since it was previously well-studied, in this article, I will also refrain from going into detail.³³

One of the intriguing lists of transmissions of “*Bardo Instructions*” is illustrated by Yang dgon pa. Bryan Cuevas focused on this transmission list:

1. *Bardo Instructions of Mnga' bdag nyang ral pa can.*
2. *Three Distinct Bardo Systems of the Six Doctrines.*
3. *Father Lineage of Paṇḍita Mngon shes can.*
4. *Bardo Instructions of Btsun mo can.*

²⁹ Berounský 2010: 7–23.

³⁰ *Gdan bzhi*.

³¹ 'Jam mgon kong sprul 2008: 180.

³² Almogi 2014: 81.

³³ See Orofino 1999 and Germano 2005 for discussion of the different *bardo* stages and texts.

5. The Tradition of Jo mo lha rje ma:
 - a. Oral *Bardo* Lineage.
 - b. *Ḍākinī Bardo*.
 - c. Direct Perception *Bardo*.
6. *Bardo* Instructions of Shangs pa ri bo che.
7. Essential *Bardo* Explanations of Zhang rin po che.
8. *Bardo* of Dbyar ston dbu ma pa, *Nectar Vehicle Dispelling Illness*.³⁴

Yang dgon pa rgyal mtshan dpal, sometimes known as Lha gdong pa, the 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud master of the 13th century, listed eight different *bardo* lineages in his text called *Bar do 'phrang sgrol gyi lo rgyus tshe ring ma'i shun len* (*Responses to the Questions of Tshe ring ma, History of Deliverance from the Perilous Straits of the Bardo*). Cuevas was concerned mainly with the concept of the different stages of the *bardo*. However, it is unclear whether it is entirely limited to this category and cannot be extended to funerary teachings in the more general sense, as they are often interconnected.

The first item on the list refers to Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer, and he is the only one on the list who does not belong to the "New Translation" lineage. It is quite remarkable to find Nyang ral on this list as the sole representative of the Rnying ma school; however, I will later explain the possible reasons for this.

The second item on the list refers to the Six Yogas of Nā ro pa,³⁵ who had probably codified existing cycles of teachings received by his teacher, Ti lo pa, who, in turn, received them from La ba pa, Lalitavajra, and Sukkhasidhi, who is believed to have been a contemporary of Ni gu ma.³⁶

The third item refers to Rdo rje gdan pa, also known as Mngon shes can, while the fourth refers to the Bengali Paṇḍita Devākaraçandra, also known as Btsun mo can. These two masters taught the *Guhyasamāja-tantra* to Mgos khug pa lhas btsas, the 11th-century Bka' gdams master, who was a contemporary to Mar pa, Atiśa, and Rwa lo tsā ba. It seems that both of them represent the father tantras on this list, as *Guhyasamāja* is designated as one.³⁷

The fifth item refers to Ma gcig zha ma of the 11th century. She is

³⁴ 1. *Mnga' bdag nyang ral pa can gyi bar do gnad kyi gdam ngag*. 2. *Chos drug gi bar du[lo] lugs mi 'dra ba gsum*. 3. *Pha brgyud kyi gdam ngag paṇḍita mngon shes can*. 4. *Btsun mo can gyi bar do'i gdam ngag*. 5. *Jo mo lha rje rma: (a) Bar do snyan rgyud, (b) Bar do mkha' spyod, (c) Bar do mngon sum ma*. 6. *Shangs po ri bo che pa'i bar do'i gdam ngag*. 7. *Zhang rin po che'i bar do'i dmar khrid*. 8. *Dbyar ston dbu ma pa'i bar do nad sel bdud rtsi thegs pa* (Cuevas 2003: 46).

³⁵ *Na ro'i chos drug*.

³⁶ Cuevas 2003: 49.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

mostly known as a disciple and consort of Rma lo tsā ba, and later on of Pha dam pa sangs rgyas. Rma lo tsā ba himself was a disciple of Khyung po rnal 'byor, the sixth category on the list.³⁸

According to the *Blue Annals*, all of Ma gcig zha ma's brothers were disciples of great contemporary Buddhist masters of various traditions. The same source tells us that she preserved the Lam 'bras instructions of the Sa skya and that she was one of the teachers of Phag mo gru pa.³⁹

Item number six refers to Khyung po rnal 'byor (11th–12th centuries). In the list of teachers who taught Khyung po rnal 'byor, we find a nearly endless list of masters: Ni ru pa, Amoghavajra, disciples of Nā ro pa, Maitrī pa, and so on. However, the most significant encounters were first, the contact with Ni gu ma, who transmitted to him the Six Yogas, and the second, the encounter with Sukkhasiddhi, the disciple of Vi rū pa.⁴⁰

The seventh item refers to Bla ma Zhang of the 12th century. Being one of the most famous disciples of Rgwa lo tsā ba, he received many instructions and initiations from him, including the Six Yogas of Nā ro pa. Another teacher of Bla ma Zhang was Vairocanavajra, who himself was a disciple of Ba ri lo tsā ba rin chen grags, the translator of the death ritual text mentioned earlier in this article.⁴¹

Concerning the eighth item, I have not found a corresponding satisfactory explanation for it, and neither did Cuevas in his work. To get a better understanding of this list, a closer examination of Yang dgon pa's background is needed.

3. Reconstructing the Transmission Lineage

3.1. Yang dgon pa's Lineage

Yang dgon pa's lineage was made of several prominent masters. First, Rgod tshang pa mgon po rdo rje (1189–1258), the founder of the Upper 'Brug sub-school of 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud, a disciple of Gtsang pa Rgya ras ye shes rdo rje, the first 'Brug chen, who was a disciple of Bla ma Zhang.⁴²

Second, Ko brag pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan (1182–1261), who is known to have received the Ma gcig zha ma lineage from Zhang ston se mig pa, and teachings from the Kaśmīri Paṇḍita Śākyaśrībhadra.

³⁸ Cuevas 2003: 49.

³⁹ 'Gos lo tsā ba 1979: 220–226.

⁴⁰ Cuevas 2003: 50.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² 'Gos lo tsā ba 1979: 680–690.

Śākyaśrībhadrā was invited to oversee the funeral ceremony of Nyang ral, as described in his son's biography, which was in the end overseen instead by Śākyaśrībhadrā's disciple, Chag lo tsā ba dgra bcom.⁴³

The third would be Sphyan snga grags pa 'byung gnas (1175–1255), a 'Bri gung Bka' brgyud master, a disciple of 'Jig rten mgon po and one of Phag mo gru pa's disciples, Yel pa Ye shes brtseg (1134–1194).

The fourth master, Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182–1251), was the grandson of Sa chen kun dga' snying po, the nephew of Grags pa rgyal mtshan and a close disciple of Śākyaśrībhadrā.

The last on the list of Yang dgon pa's direct teachers is Mi bskyod rdo rje sangs rgyas brag (12th century). According to the *Blue Annals*, he was a Rnying ma lama who spread the Yang dgon pa Rdzogs chen teachings and the treasures of Nyang ral.⁴⁴

3.2. Nyang ral's Lineage

I have tried to reconstruct Nyang ral's attested primary lineage in order to track the possible points of connection between Nyang ral and Yang dgon pa. Thus Nyang ral's main teachers were Grub thob Dngos grub and Bla ma Ra shag (11th/12th century). His main direct disciples were his two sons, Nam mkha' 'od zer and Nam mkha' dpal (12th/13th century), and his prominent disciple Sman lung pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (12th century). His "spiritual heir" was Chos kyi dbang phyug (1212–1270).

Interestingly, we find another Mi bskyod rdo rje with a different title included in this list. Sman lung pa Mi bskyod rdo rje is the name attested in Nyang ral's chos 'byung.⁴⁵ This Mi bskyod rdo rje is known as the disciple of Nyang ral, and apparently of Gu ru chos dbang as well.⁴⁶ It may be the same person who transmitted and taught Yang dgon pa, but it is not certain.

Bla ma Ra shag and Grub thob dngos grub were the most important teachers in Nyang ral's career. They gave him transmissions of their revealed treasures (*gter ma*), which in turn resulted in his own treasure revealing activity. There are not many accounts about Nyang ral's treasures, and most of what we know is from his two early biographies: the *Dri ma med pa* (*Stainless One*) and the *Gsal ba'i me long* (*Clear Mirror*), which Dan Hirshberg worked on extensively. While still a disciple of Bla ma Ra shag, Nyang ral

⁴³ Stearns 1996: 142.

⁴⁴ 'Gos lo tsā ba 1979: 689–690.

⁴⁵ Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1998: 11.

⁴⁶ 'Jam mgon kong sprul 2012: 105.

discovered the Bka' brgyad teachings, and from him, he further received more of these teachings.⁴⁷ From Grub thob dngos grub, Nyang ral received the *Maṇi Bka' 'bum*⁴⁸ teachings, Zhi je,⁴⁹ and several Bka' brgyad treasures.⁵⁰ According to 'Jam mgon kong sprul, in *Gter ston brya rtsa'i rnam thar (One Hundred Biographies of Treasures-Revealers)*, Bla ma ra shag was responsible for transmitting at least two ransoming ritual texts: *The Matrikas Great Ransom Effigy of the Four Continents* (Tib. *Ma mo gling gzhi'i mdos chen*) and the *Ten Secret Ransom Effigies* (Tib. *Gsang ba mdos bcu*). 'Jam mgon kong sprul asserts that these instructions came down from Rje btsun mi la ras pa (1040–1123) in the context of his account with Tse ring ma and her four sisters.⁵¹

Since Nam mkha' 'od zer was not a prominent figure, I will focus on Nam mkha' dpal instead. Having been designated as Nyang ral's primary heir, Nam mkha' dpal became the abbot of Ma wo chog Monastery after his father's death in 1192. According to Hirshberg, "he neither continued the practice of treasure recovery nor taught extensively, but invited various lamas to teach at Ma wo chog and thus fostered an ecumenism where tantric transmissions from Gsar ma lineages such as the Bka' brgyud, which had been developing nearby, were bestowed there."⁵² He was one of the teachers of Gu ru chos dbang, who continued Nyang ral's line of treasure revelation.

Gu ru chos dbang received many teachings from the "Old" and the "New" traditions: his father also taught him Rdzogs chen, Mahāmudrā, Gcod, Zhi je, and the Six Yogas of Nā ro pa. It is said that he took the bodhisattva vows together with Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan. 'Jam mgon kong sprul mentions that Gu ru chos dbang "studied exhaustively even the *Great Treatise on Thread-Cross Ransom Rituals*,"⁵³ once again showing the importance of these kinds of rituals for the Nyan ral's lineage.

4. Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to show several things. First, to present a very early "Death Manual" and explain its contents. Second, to show

⁴⁷ Hirshberg 2016: 100.

⁴⁸ A collection of teachings and practices focused on Avalokiteśvara and attributed to the 7th-century Tibetan King Srong btsan sgam po.

⁴⁹ Pacification or Pacification of Suffering, a tradition that traces itself especially to the south Indian master Pha dam pa sangs rgyas.

⁵⁰ Hirshberg 2016: 102.

⁵¹ 'Jam mgon kong sprul 2012: 93.

⁵² Hirshberg 2013.

⁵³ 'Jam mgon kong sprul 2012: 102.

the connection between the different funerary teachings and transmissions. I have tried to situate Nyang ral's role in receiving and transmitting funerary instructions. As with other sets of tantric practices, it seems that both the "Old" and the "New" schools received similar teachings from different lines of transmission, and in Tibet, these lines of transmission started mixing together and adding local innovations. David Germano stated that Nyang ral's Great Perfection texts were devoid of funerary concepts, and he preferred keeping it for his Mahāyoga section.⁵⁴ The findings in the present article support this claim, but there is still a lot of work at hand to unravel what else is hiding in the Mahāyoga-based *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* cycle, and probably in the places, we would least expect.

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⁵⁴ Germano 2005: 21–24.

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Buddhist Tradition, Catalogued: Kingship and Nonsectarian Traces in an Early 18th-Century *Dkar chag* from Sde dge

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The late 17th and early 18th centuries marked a major turning point in the religious history of the eastern Tibetan region of Khams. The kingdom of Sde dge, long considered a cultural center of Khams, rose to political prominence and dominance during the latter half of the 17th century. It grew rapidly during the reigns of kings Byams pa phun tshogs (d.u.) and his nephew Sangs rgyas bstan pa (d. 1710). King Byams pa phun tshogs annexed and conquered a large swath of Khams after aiding Gushri Khan's (1582–1654) defeat of King Don yod rdo rje (d. 1640) of the nearby Be ri kingdom, thereby expanding the bounds of the kingdom. While Sde dge developed into a religious and political hub, a number of monastic institutions were established in the kingdom under its direction and patronage. Dpal yul Monastery was founded in 1665 by Rig 'dzin kun bzang shes rab (1636–1699) to the south of the Sde dge capital. In the 1660s, the Sde dge court incorporated the area of Kaḥ thog Monastery located near Dpal yul and installed the treasure revealer (*gter ston*) Klong gsal snying po (1625–1692) at the monastery's helm.¹ Rdzogs chen Monastery was founded in 1685 by Padma rig 'dzin (1625–1697) in the northern reaches of Sde dge. In 1690, the first Rab 'byams pa Bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1650–1704), who was a student and colleague of Padma rig 'dzin, founded Zhe chen Monastery just to the northeast of Rdzogs chen.²

These institutional establishments were made possible by the sponsorship of the Sde dge court. Notably, the sites just listed are all Rnying ma monasteries and are included in the category of the Six Mother Monasteries (*ma dgon drug*) or the Six Great Seats (*gdan sa*

¹ Ronis 2009: 56–84.

² 'Jigs med bsam grub 1995: 533. This was the first site of Zhe chen. In 1734–1735, the 2nd Rab 'byams pa, 'Gyur med kun bzang nam rgyal, expanded it via a new building nearby, which would go on to become the primary seat at Zhe chen.

chen mo drug) of that tradition.³ The royal court was the principal patron of the networks of Buddhist actors involved in the development of these Rnying ma institutions. As such, Sde dge was a primary driver in the eastward surge of the Rnying ma, a fifty-year timespan during which these four of the tradition's six largest institutional centers were founded.

It is not the case, however, that the royal court privileged only the Rnying ma tradition in Sde dge. In fact, from early on in its history, the Sde dge court was eclectic in its patronage of the many Buddhist institutions in the kingdom.⁴ It was predominantly affiliated with the Sa skya tradition via the main monastery, Lhun grub steng (also known as Sde dge dgon chen), which served as the seat of the Sde dge kings. In addition to Lhun grub steng's monks, lamas from Kaḥ thog, Rdzogs chen, Dpal yul, Dpal spung, and other monasteries had active roles in advising the court.

Moreover, while the late 17th and first decades of the 18th centuries saw large-scale support for Rnying ma monasteries from the Sde dge court, the Bka' brgyud also started to receive increasing patronage, beginning with King Bstan pa tshe ring (1678–1738). This is most evident in his close relationship with the Bka' brgyud polymath Si tu paṅ chen chos kyi 'byung gnas (1699–1774), to whom he donated land for the founding of Dpal spungs Monastery in 1727.⁵ The career of Si tu paṅ chen has been cited as a precursor to the nonsectarian (*ris med*) milieu of 19th-century Sde dge because of his broad endeavors to revive Buddhist learning in the region. These include his work on the editing of the Sde dge Bka' 'gyur and his writing on all manner of Buddhist doctrine, ritual, medicine, and arts.

Even though there is no evidence the Sde dge court patronized Dge lugs monasteries, there is also no proof from this period of an anti-Dge lugs sentiment, nor a Dge lugs-excluding *ris med* formation. In fact, Bstan pa tshe ring, who was the sponsor of the catalogue (*dkar chag*) I analyze in this article, gave refuge in Sde dge to the young 7th

³ As an analytical category, this grouping deserves further investigation. Recently, Bstan 'dzin lung rtogs nyi ma, in his index to the *Great History of the Early Transmission's Rdzogs Chen* (*Snga 'gyur rdzogs chen chos 'byung chen mo*), lists these six as: Dpal ri, Smin grol gling, Rdo rje brag, Kaḥ thog, Dpal yul, and Rdzogs chen. It also, however, notes that because of the decline of Dpal ri and the prospering of Zhe chen, the latter eventually replaced the former. See Deroche 2013.

⁴ While there is no extant survey from this time period, Blo gros phun tshogs' *Sde dge'i lo rgyus* states that in 1995 the total number of monasteries in Sde dge comprised: 69 Rnying ma, 41 Sa skya, 38 Bka' brgyud, 17 Dge lugs, and 15 Bon institutions (Blo gros phun tshogs 1995: 181–185).

⁵ For more on Si tu paṅ chen and Bstan pa tshe ring's relationship, see Chaix 2013 and Ronis 2013.

Dalai Lama, Skal bzang rgya mtsho (1708–1757), while the young boy was escaping Lha bzang khan's (r. 1697–1717) attempt to assassinate him in order to install his own chosen candidate as the Dalai Lama. This proved to be beneficial to the Sde dge court in garnering favor with central Tibet's Dge lugs-leaning Dga' ldan pho brang government.

Paralleling and immediately following the 17th-century-Rnying-ma boom noted above were the large-scale printing projects at Sde dge. Beginning in the first decade of the 18th century, the royal family began what would become one of the most expansive productions of xylographic blocks of the Buddhist canon in Tibetan history. The present article addresses this pivotal moment for the history of Sde dge, taking as an analytical focus the earliest available *dkar chag* of one of the first canonical printings there. I begin with an overview of the contents of this catalogue, and then move on to reflect on the functions, both documentary and worklike, of this complex and variant genre of Tibetan Buddhist literature. Considering the collected historical arcs linked together in the text, which range from the life of Buddha Śākyamuni up to the 17th- and 18th-century histories of the kingdom of Sde dge, I demonstrate that the narrative cataloguing of history mobilizes the construction of a nonsectarian or ecumenical Buddhist tradition.

Considering the above-mentioned pan-sectarian patterns of Sde dge royal support alongside the rhetoric of this early catalogue, the present article also aims to make sense of the nonsectarian language used to describe the Sde dge kingdom during the early 18th century. Drawing from an epistle sent to King Bstan pa tshe ring in the 1720s by Si tu paṅ chen, I suggest that the nonsectarian—*ris med*—ideal so often invoked in Sde dge's history is tied to the very patrons who made an ecumenical milieu possible. In addition to the catalogue's doctrinal dimension, its nonsectarian language suggests that *ris med* was a deliberate strategy of Buddhist kingship and governance in Sde dge.

1. *The 'Bum dkar chag: Its History and Contents*

The construction of the Sde dge printing house and the printing of the Sde dge editions of the Tibetan Buddhist canon, the Bka' 'gyur and the Bstan 'gyur, is usually dated to 1729.⁶ However, printing projects began at Sde dge sometime before then, namely in the very early 18th century. In 1703, King Sangs rgyas bstan pa sponsored the

⁶ See, for instance, Skal ldan tshe ring 1995: 43 and Karma rgyal mtshan 1994: 28.

printing of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (*Sher phyin brgyad stong pa*)⁷ and the following year, in 1704, he financed the printing of two texts on Tibetan grammar by Thon mi Sambhoṭa.⁸ These are the first datable canonical printings at Sde dge.

After Sangs rgyas bstan pa's death in 1710, his nephew Bstan pa tshe ring assumed the Sde dge throne in 1714. Three years later, the first printing at Sde dge during the reign of Bstan pa tshe ring was completed. The text was the massive *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (*Sher phyin stong phrag brgya pa*), known as the *Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Verses* and condensed in Tibetan to the 'Bum. The catalogue to this printing was entitled *Truly Joyful to Behold* (*Mthong na mngon par dga' ba*, hereafter 'Bum dkar chag). It states that the xylographic blocks for the 12 volumes of this sutra were completed, consecrated, and installed in early October 1717.⁹ The 'Bum dkar chag itself was written in February 1718 by U rgyan ye shes (d.u.), an important scribe (*smyug 'dzin*) at the court of Bstan pa tshe ring. In the text, U rgyan ye shes writes that the sutra's wood blocks were installed in the Great Printery (*par khang chen mo*) at the Sde dge capital's main assembly hall at Lhun grub steng.¹⁰ The printery to which U rgyan ye shes refers is probably not the same as the large structure known today as the "Sde dge Par khang." Nonetheless, given that he speaks of a "Great Printery" adjacent to the Sde dge court, the 'Bum dkar chag compels us to re-date the chronology of the founding and development of the Sde dge printing house.¹¹

The 'Bum dkar chag is presented in seven chapters, outlined as follows:

1. *A General Outline of the Dharma* (1a–7a)
2. *How the Teachings Spread in Tibet* (7b–9b)
3. *Detailed Explanation of Prajñāpāramitā* (10a–12b)
4. *On the Lineage of This Text's Sponsors* (12a–16b)
5. *The Need and Purpose of the Printing* (17a–19b)
6. *Explanation of the Time and Place of the Printing* (19b–21b)
7. *The Benefits of the Printing and Dedication* (22a–25a)

⁷ Nourse 2014: 129–130.

⁸ Ibid: 200–202.

⁹ U rgyan ye shes 1718: 21a–21b. The Tibetan date reads that it was in the "light" / first half (*dkar phyogs*) of the ninth month (*dbyug zla*). The 'Bum dkar chag was completed in the second month of the Earth-Dog Year (*sa khyi*), i.e. February 1718.

¹⁰ Ibid: 21b.

¹¹ Chaix 2016 discusses the complexities of this chronology.

As will be demonstrated in the second section of this article, the format and historical arcs of these assembled chapters of the *'Bum dkar chag* have a worklike dimension.¹² In positioning this sutra printing at Sde dge in direct line with ancient India and with key points in Tibetan Buddhism's past, U rgyan ye shes places his reader in direct reception of Buddhist history. I argue that in addition to documenting the histories that culminate in the production of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, this catalogue articulates a particular form of ecumenical Buddhist tradition.

Here, I detail in brief the contents of each of the *'Bum dkar chag*'s chapters.

1. *A General Outline of the Dharma*¹³

U rgyan ye shes begins the text in the distant past in Tuṣita Heaven with Śvetaketu, the bodhisattva who would take birth as Siddhārtha Gautama. From Tuṣita, he narrates the account of the Buddha's birth, rather at length, going on to overview the period of his renunciation and wandering. U rgyan ye shes proceeds to describe Siddhārtha's realizations during the three watches of the night during which he became a buddha and then describes all 12 of the great deeds of a buddha. The text explains Buddha Śākyamuni's three turnings of the wheel of dharma: the four noble truths preached at Varanasi, the teaching of signlessness (i.e. emptiness) atop the peak of Gṛdhra-kūṭa, and the teaching of definitive meaning. We also read about the teaching of the *kriyā*, *caryā*, *yoga*, and *anuttarayoga* tantras being taught on Mount Malaya and elsewhere, as well as the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras. This first chapter ends with a lengthy discussion of chronologies for calculating how long the Buddhadharma will last, and when it will disappear, based on various sutras and tantras.

2. *How the Teachings Spread in Tibet*¹⁴

The second chapter of the *'Bum dkar chag* presents a condensed outline of the arrival and development of Buddhism in Tibet. It chronicles the arrival of Buddhist texts at the palace of King Lha tho tho ri gnyan btsan, the sponsorship activities of King Srong btsan sgam po, and the development of the Tibetan alphabet by Thon mi sambho ṭa. U rgyan ye shes describes King Khri srong lde'u btsan's invitation of Padmasambhava, who installed his 25 disciples "on the

¹² I cite here specifically Dominick LaCapra's *Rethinking Intellectual History*. LaCapra juxtaposes the documentary dimensions of texts, which reveal information about the world, and the worklike dimensions, which encourage certain reactions and engagements from the reader. See LaCapra 1983: 23–71.

¹³ *chos spyi'i khog bub* (U rgyan ye shes 1718: 2a).

¹⁴ *bod du bstan pa dar ba'i thsul* (Ibid: 2a).

path of ripening and liberation, the dharma of the nine vehicles,"¹⁵ and then enumerates a number of Indian monks invited to Tibet to bring and translate Buddhist texts during the early dissemination (*snga dar*) at the time of the Spur rgyal dynasty (7th–9th centuries CE). After the period of the dharma's decline in the aftermath of King Glang dar ma, U rgyan ye shes then names the major actors involved in translation activities during the later dissemination (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism. These include King Ye shes 'od, the translator Rin chen bzang po and his teacher Śrāddhakaravarman, Atiśa, the Kashmiri Śākyaśrī, the translator Pa tshab nyi ma grags pa, and Nāropā, along with his disciple, Maitripa. U rgyan ye shes concludes the catalogue's second chapter with the familiar assertion that these later dissemination figures are the forbears of the Sa skya, Dge lugs, and Bka' brgyud traditions.

3. Detailed Explanation of Prajñāpāramitā¹⁶

In the *'Bum dkar chag*'s third chapter, U rgyan ye shes doubles back to India to describe and trace the origins of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* itself. Four hundred years after the passing of the Buddha, the *'Bum dkar chag*'s author writes, Nāgārjuna descended into the land of the *nāgas*, where he retrieved the text, after which the sutra's teaching flourished in India. In Tibet, it was translated six times.

The first translation was commissioned by King Khri srong lde'u btsan, who dispatched Rlangs kyi khams pa to India to retrieve the sutra. This first translation is claimed to have been written in ink mixed with the king's nasal blood and a white goat's milk.¹⁷ It therefore became known as the *Red Notes* (*Reg zig dmar po*).¹⁸

The second translation was known as the *Blue Notes* (*Reg zig sngon po*), as two translators, Nyang Indravaro and Sbas Mañjuśrī, retrieved the text from India and penned their translation in ink mixed with singed hair from the king's head and a white goat's milk.¹⁹ Because this second translation was funded by tax tributes levied by the king, it became known as the *Tribute 'Bum* (*Dpya 'bum*).

The *Red Notes* and the *Blue Notes* were abbreviated, and the translator Vairocana decided to revisit the Sanskrit original in order to produce an unabridged copy. This third translation, which totaled

¹⁵ *theg dgu'i chos kyi smin grol lam la bkod* (U rgyan ye shes 1718: 8b).

¹⁶ *bye brag sher phyin chos skor bshad* (Ibid: 2a).

¹⁷ *btsad po'i mtshal khrag ra dkar 'o ma la sbyar* (Ibid: 10b).

¹⁸ For more on Tibetan practices of blood printing, see Helman-Ważny 2014: 101 and Jackson 1996: 251.

¹⁹ *rje yi dbu skra'i gzhob nyid rams bsres te ra dkar 'o ma sbyar nas 'bri bar gngang* (U rgyan ye shes 1718: 10b).

six volumes, was known as the *Bat* (*pha wang can*) translation because a bat's nest apparently broke above the texts as they were being printed.

The fourth translation was made during the reign of King Khri lde srong btsan, Khri srong lde'u btsan's son. It was based on redactions made by the trio of translators comprising Ka ba dpal rtseg, Cog ro lu'i rgyal mtshan, and Ye shes sde of Zhing. This fourth translation was made into 12 volumes and had over 101,000 verses.

The fifth translation of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* in Tibet, according to the *'Bum dkar chag*, was by Rngog lo tsā ba blo ldan shes rab. He retrieved a Sanskrit copy in Nepal at the Pham thing Temple in Pharping. In addition to the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutra, that edition included other texts that he translated. These were Bhāvaviveka's *Prajñāpradīpa* (*Shes rab sgron me*) and the *Candrapradīpa Sūtra* (*Zla ba'i sgron me*).

The sixth translation was from Chinese, rendered into Tibetan by 'Gos chos grub (Chinese alias Facheng 法成), a Buddhist monk and translator active in Dunhuang during the 9th century.²⁰ These six "mother" translations became the bases for all of the printings of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* in Tibet.

4. On the Lineage of This Text's Sponsors²¹

In its fourth chapter, the *'Bum dkar chag* continues a historical narrative, moving from the history of *Prajñāpāramitā* to the history of the Sde dge kingdom where it was printed. The text recounts the genealogy of the Sde dge royal family, the sponsors of this project. It is important to note that the *'Bum dkar chag* served as a primary source for the authors of the most prominent texts about Sde dge's history. These include Si tu paṅ chen's *Sde dge'i bka' 'gyur gyi dkar chag*, Zhu chen tshul khri rin chen's (1697–1774) *Sde dge bstan 'gyur gyi dkar chag*, the Sde dge prince Tshe dbang rdo rje rig 'dzin's (b. 1786) *Royal Genealogy of Sde Dge* (*Sde dge rgyal rabs*),²² and the famous 18th-century Rnying ma historian Gu ru bkra shis' (d.u.) *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*. The overall history of the Sde dge royal family and its lineage spelled out in this catalogue is, therefore, virtually the same as in those texts. For instance, it begins by highlighting the Sde dge family's historical ties to the four primary clans of ancient Tibet.²³ It also describes the successive generations of leaders and kings, ending with King Bstan pa tshe ring, the sponsor of the *Śatasāhasrikā*

²⁰ See Demiéville 1970: 47–64.

²¹ *chos 'di'i sbyin bdag gdung rabs skor* (U rgyan ye shes 1718: 2a).

²² See Kolmaš 1968.

²³ The four primary ancient Tibetan clans are *sbra*, *'bru*, *dbra* and *gdong/sdong*. See van der Kuijp 1988: 1–3.

Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra's production.

While the history of Sde dge that U rgyan ye shes tells in this fourth chapter is overall very similar to later historical texts, there are nevertheless some notable descriptions that stand out against those other sources. For example, Dngu pa chos kyi rdo rje (d.u.),²⁴ an ancestor of the Sde dge royal family born in the 14th century, is listed as a Rnying ma lama, the first ever mentioned in Sde dge's history. Based on a prophecy after the death of his mother, he urged his younger brother Bde chen bsod noms bzang po (d.u.), who was then the Sde dge king, to move the capital to the north and expand their territory. Bde chen bsod noms bzang po soon thereafter did so, relocating the royal palace from Lcags ra, Sde dge's original capital, to its new site just north of Lcags ra, where Lhun grub steng Monastery and the Sde dge Par khang are located. The fulfilment of this prophecy is the origin story of the name "Sde dge," which is a gloss on the Buddhist categories of the four abundances (*phun tshogs sde bzhi*)²⁵ and the ten virtues (*dge ba bcu*). U rgyan ye shes describes this as the "miraculous opening" (*'phrul gyi sgo*) of Sde dge, its beginning. He thereby emphatically remarks that Sde dge's first famous Rnying ma lama is the original prophetic source of the inauguration of the Sde dge kingdom's glory.

In another brief instance of Rnying ma emphasis, U rgyan ye shes highlights that Kun dga' phun tshogs (d.u.), the first abbot of Sde dge's Lhun grub steng Monastery and the brother of King Sangs rgyas bstan pa, was a skilled practitioner of Rnying ma tantras. What is striking in this statement is that the abbot of Sde dge's capital monastery, a Sa skya institution which by virtue of its connection to the court enjoyed the unflagging support of the royal family, is celebrated as a Rnying ma pa, or at the very least an adept supporter of it. Tibetan Buddhists commonly meditate on deities or practice tantric and contemplative rites from traditions that are not their own. The singular description of Lhun grub steng Monastery's first abbot as a Rnying ma adept, however, is noteworthy, for it serves to construct the narrative of a long-standing relationship between the Sde dge royal elites and the Rnying ma. As Kun dga' phun tshogs was the head of a Sa skya institution, this inclusion suggests an ethos of ecumenism had been established early on at the Sde dge capital. It is the second nonsectarian signpost that U rgyan ye shes inserts in this chapter of the *'Bum dkar chag*.

Another such marker occurs in a section about King Bstan pa tshe ring, when he is described as adept in Rnying ma ritual and

²⁴ Elsewhere his name is found as Rngu pa chos kyi rdo rje.

²⁵ These are abundance in: spiritual teaching, wealth, enjoyment, and freedom.

contemplative practice. As noted above, Bstan pa tshe ring carried forth a nonsectarian practice and patronage platform, which had been advanced by his predecessors Byams pa phun tshogs and Sangs rgyas bstan pa during their reigns in the 17th century, when they funded the construction of numerous Rnying ma monasteries in Sde dge. Beyond his own interests vested in the Sa skya, Bstan pa tshe ring also supported Rnying ma and Bka' brgyud lamas and institutions.

5. *The Need and Purpose of the Printing*²⁶

The fifth chapter narrates the reasons for printing the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* at Sde dge. U rgyan ye shes avers that despite a longstanding tradition of translation and commentary on *Prajñāpāramitā* literature in Tibet, the printing of this particular sutra was quite rare. He writes that the print blocks for the sutra were constructed with the intent to preserve the text's doctrine as a means for ensuring that it would be continually read and studied, and so that its dharma might pervade the world. The printing additionally had a more mundane aim: "so that all kingdoms of the world, exemplified by these subjects [of Sde dge], enjoy perfect happiness."²⁷ In this way U rgyan ye shes characterizes Sde dge as a religious and moral exemplar for his reader.

The sources for the Sde dge printing of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* were manifold. The primary source was from the Bka' 'gyur created by the king of 'Jang sa tham to the southeast of Sde dge, which, as U rgyan ye shes notes, was from the Tshal pa line of the Tibetan canon. That particular version of the canon, we learn, was the fruit of numerous translators and redactors dating back centuries: Ba reg gzhon nu tshul khirms (b. 11th century), Rngog lo tsā ba blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109), Bag ston gzhon nu tshul khirms (d. 13th century), Bu ston rin chen grub (1290–1364), and many others. The manuscripts, in addition to the copy from the 'Jang sa tham Bka' 'gyur, on which the Sde dge redaction was based, included: a golden-ink copy that once belonged to Chos rgyal 'phags pa (1235–1280); one said to be the translator Vairocana's handwritten copy; a copy from the Rnying ma Dpal yul Monastery south of the Sde dge capital; and a copy belonging to a Sde dge royal ancestor, Sangs rgyas bzang po (d.u.).

The primary editors of this project were the Sde dge secretaries Phun tshogs grags pa (d.u.) and 'Jam dbyangs dga' ba'i blo gros

²⁶ *par du bzhengs pa'i dgos ched* (U rgyan ye shes 1718: 2a).

²⁷ *mnga' ris 'dis mtshon yangs pa'i rgyal khams rnams bde skyid rdzogs ldan dpal la spyod phyir* (Ibid: 18a).

(d.u.). The latter was a student of Lo chen dharma śrī (1654–1717), one of the founders of Smin grol gling, the largest Rnying ma monastery in Lhasa. This mention is the earliest evidence at Sde dge connecting its court to the Rnying ma institution in central Tibet.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Sde dge court hosted a steady stream of lamas from the Sa skya Ngor e waṃ Monastery to serve as chaplains. Two of these lamas, Bkra shis dbang phyug (d. 1727) and Mus pa chos rje kun dga' rgya mtsho (d.u.), also joined as primary editors of this printing project. All four of the above-mentioned editors were said to be well-versed in poetics, specifically Daṇḍin's system of poetics and *kāvya*. In total, an editorial team of ten took seven months for the editing and carving of this Sde dge edition of the sutra. This specific printing was given the title *The World's Unique Ornament* ('Dzam gling rgyan gcig).

6. *Explanation of the Time and Place of the Printing*²⁸

The topic of the sixth chapter of the '*Bum dkar chag* concerns the details of the printing itself. It meticulously overviews this printing project's place in the chronology of Buddhist history, drawing from the timeline set forth in the *White Lotus Oral Instructions* (*Pad ma dkar po zhal lung*) written by the 15th-century Dge lugs pa scholars Phug pa lhun grub rgya mtsho (d.u.) and Nor bzang rgya mtsho (1423–1513). U rgyan ye shes notes that when the final woodblock carving was finished on the 23rd of the eighth month (that is, September 28th) of 1717, it was precisely 2,596 years after the Buddha's passing into *parinirvāṇa*. A direct chronological arc is traced from the lifespan of the Buddha to the completion of this printing at Sde dge.

The work of xylographic printing took over 200 skilled smiths and carvers, the editing team of 10, and 250 local laborers. The text's 4,700 wood blocks—9,400 folia—in 12 volumes were completed at a cost of 20,300 bushels of barley. This cost represents roughly one tenth of what it cost to print the Sde dge Bstan 'gyur two decades later.²⁹ The '*Bum dkar chag* was a sizeable undertaking as a precursor to the later expansive productions of the Sde dge editions of the Tibetan canon.

In early October 1717, Kun dga' chos 'phel (d.u.),³⁰ a lama from Ngor Monastery who was staying at Sde dge, presided over consecration rituals when the *Satasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*'s wood blocks were installed in the printing house near the Sde dge capital and the first prints were made from them. The creation of the

²⁸ *bzhengs pa'i dus dang gnas bshad pa* (U rgyan ye shes 1718: 2a).

²⁹ Nourse 2014: 149–153. See also Chaix 2010.

³⁰ Heimbel 2017: 41 notes that Kun dga' chos 'phel was a Ngor pa lama, but he did not serve in an official capacity as court chaplain.

Sde dge print blocks for this sutra represents the first printing campaign sponsored by King Bstan pa tshe ring. It also marks the beginning of the momentum of textual production that culminated in the printing of the Sde dge Bka' 'gyur in the late 1720s. The *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* itself comprised over a tenth of that canon in total. Thus, based on this text, 1717 should be considered the year of the beginning of the “Great Printery” at Sde dge.

7. *The Benefits of the Printing and Dedication*³¹

The final, dedicatory section of the *'Bum dkar chag* is a lengthy and ornate poem that describes the merits of printing the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, the longest of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras. The last ten quatrains of the seventh chapter read:

May the nonsectarian doctrine, the wish-fulfilling victor
Which is the exalted summit, the banner of learning and
accomplishment,
And the luminosity of hearing, contemplating, and meditating
That completely uproots the darkness of degeneration, remain
unimpeded.

May the twice-drinkers, fortified by the three trainings,
Thoroughly beautified by the net of the three spheres of renunciation,
study, and work,
Un-weared by the weight of teaching the three vehicles,
Endeavor in the holy doctrine via the three gates.

May the Lord Pervading All Families,³²
Ascendant at the crown of the teaching and migrators, and the reality
of
Two hundred wisdoms comprehending the Lord of Speech,
Along with the doctrine and rule of the glorious Sa skya pervade the
ocean-clad world.

May this support, a gift of dharma, a canopy at the peak of existence
Ripened from the seed of the banyan tree of superior intention,
Through the elixir of exposition and study
Bring about the vitality and long-life of the Victor's teaching.

May the shining of the dharma, the sun of beings,
The companion that blossoms the hundred petals of teaching,
scripture, and reasoning,
And its great and intense luminosity,
Illumine the peak of existence and the darkness and foes struck by the

³¹ *zhengs tshul phan yon bsngo smon* (U rgyan ye shes 1718: 2a).

³² *rigs kun khyab bdag*, i.e. Vajradhara.

five degenerations.

May the treasury of doctrine, the profound expanse where past sages
have peacefully gone,
Completely filled by the inexhaustible treasure of the two collections,
Be a tree-bending cluster, the fruit of the two benefits,
Nourished by the continuous flow of precious enlightened activity
and objects of desire.

May the virtuous king who happily rules this great land,
The *deva* who increases the fortune and might of the two teachings,
Entrusted by the long-living heaven,³³
Remain unimpaired along with his retinue.

May this kinsman, the blossoming jasmine of the kingdom,
Born of the great ocean of excellent activity and merit,
Rising as the moon above beings,
Be luminously pervasive with his pure enlightened activity.

May his descendants and wise ministers,
Dutiful to the teachings and tradition like Indra,
Expansive like the sun in discrimination and vigor,
Cause the teachings and government to be glorious, expansive, and
lasting.

From this land outwards to the extent of the vast earth,
May the steel that opposes warfare, epidemics, and famine
Be refined by the excellent glory of the four perfections
And blaze in the golden realm made virtuous by the two
accumulations.³⁴

³³ *tshe ring gnam gyis bskos*. This is an appropriation of a terminology usually linked to the Chinese emperor, who had "Heaven's Mandate." The author clearly intends to indicate King Bstan pa tshe ring with this term. The *tshe ring gnam gyi bskos* construction appears in decrees written by the Kangxi emperor, whose rule from 1661 to 1722 coincided with the writing of this catalogue. See Kapstein 2000: 228n23.

³⁴ *ris bral bstan pa yid bzhin dbang gi rgyal/ bshad sgrub rgyal mtshan rtse mor mngon mtho zhing/ ma lus rgud pa'i mun pa drud 'byin ba'i/ thos bsam sgom pa'i 'od snang 'gog med shog/ bslab gsum lus stobs cher rgyas gnyis 'thung stel/ rnam gsum 'khor lo'i dra bas nyer mazes shing/ theg gsum bstan pa'i khur gyis mi ngal ba'i/ sgo gsum dam pa'i chos la brtson par shog/ ngag dbang mkhyen pa'i ye shes nyi brgya'i dngos/ bstan 'gro'i cod pañ rtse mor mngon mtho ba'i/ rigs kun khyab bdag dpal ldan sa skya pa'i/ bstan srid rgya mtsho'i gos can khyab par shog/ lhag bsam nya gro dhā shing sa bon las/ smin pa'i chos sbyin yal 'dab srid pa'i rtser/ snyegs 'dis 'chad nyan dngar ba'i ro bcud kyis/ thub bstan yun ring srog 'tsho'i rgyur gyur cig/ skye rgu'i mchod 'os chos kyi nyin mor byed/ lung rtogs bstan pa'i 'dab brgya bzhad pa'i gnyen/ lnga bdo'i mun smag gshed du ches dpa' ba'i/ 'od kyi snang ba srid rtser 'bar dang shog/ gong ma zhir gshegs zab klong chos kyi mdzod/ tshogs gnyis mi zad gter gyis yongs gang stel/ bzhed don phrin las dbyig gi char rgyun gyis/ don gnyis 'bras bzang snye ma g.yur za shog/ sa chen bde bar*

Even though U rgyan ye shes mentions an aspiration for the glory of the Sa skya, he continues with the tenor of the fifth chapter and frames the merits of printing the *'Bum dkar chag* here both in a nonsectarian rhetoric and as redounding to the glory of the Sde dge kingdom. These are exemplified in these above-quoted verses of the poem, which culminate in a praise of King Bstan pa tshe ring.

2. Dkar chag as Genre

2.1. *Buddhist Tradition Catalogued in the 'Bum dkar chag*

With respect to their generic qualities, Tibetan *dkar chags*, translated here as “catalogues,” are incredibly diverse. They can be as simple as a few folia at the beginning or end of a collected works volume that comprise a mere list of titles. As the overview of the *'Bum dkar chag* above evidences, they can also be expansive and exhaustive.³⁵ This text quite literally spans the history of the Buddhist tradition. As a documentary source, it provides a valuable lens into the religious and political world of Sde dge in the early 18th century. As a form of Buddhist historical literature, it serves to bring its reader into the process of transmitting the Buddhist tradition itself.

In a documentary sense, catalogues such as the *'Bum dkar chag* offer a wealth of information about the worlds in which Tibetan texts are produced. Much more than lists of texts and names,³⁶ they are windows into histories. These include histories of Tibetan localities,

skyong ba dge ba'i rgyal/ bstan gnyis mnga' thang 'byor ba cher rgyas pa'i/ tshe ring gnam gyis bskos pa mi'i lha/ zhabs zung 'khor lo'i mu khyud nyams med shog/ legs byas bsod nams chu gter che las 'khrungs/ lus can mtshan mo'i mgon por yongs shar ba'i/ dbang phyogs rgyal khams kun+da bshad pa'i gnyen/ phrin las dkar po'i 'od snang mtha' khyab shog/ snying rtobs rnam dpyod mig stong bgrad pa yi/ lugs zung bstan pa legs bris dbang po lta'i/dbon dang 'phrul blon ci bgyis bka' nyan tshogs/ bstan srid dpal du dar rgyas rtag par shog/ jongs 'dir mtshon te yangs pa'i sa chen khyon/ mtshon 'khrug nad rims skya pham mi mthun lcags/rdzogs ldan sde bzhi'i dpal 'byor bzang po'i rtsis/ tshogs gnyis dge ba'i gser khams 'bar bar shog (U rgyan ye shes 1718: 24b–25a).

³⁵ Another example of a lengthy and rich *dkar chag* is Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's (1653–1705) catalogue for the 5th Dalai Lama's tomb, also entitled *The World's Unique Ornament*, which in 766 folios outlines numerous dimensions of the construction of the Dalai Lama's reliquary. Those include its cosmological and spatial significance, its material composition, the sacred contents contained within it, the rituals that consecrated it, and the merits of its production. See Martin 1996: 501–502.

³⁶ Martin 1996: 501. Martin's seminal article about *dkar chags* as a genre argues that they warrant serious attention as historical sources. See also Vostrikov 1970: 217–232.

of the rulers of those places, of received Buddhist traditions, and of canons, statues, and other worshipped materials. Catalogues document the sacred objects—the three supports (*rten gsum*) of texts, images, and statues that as relics sanctify a Buddhist site—installed at specific institutions and describe when, by whom, and for what purposes they were created. They moreover highlight the merits of the actors, named and unnamed, who aided in the production of public objects of reverence, such as the Buddhist canon. As documents of religious and textual tradition, catalogues are rich sources of history.

As forms of history writing, beyond their documentary quality texts like the *'Bum dkar chag* also have a worklike function. They suture together the macro-level history of the Buddhist tradition, tracing back to the biography of the Buddha, with micro-level details of how the Buddhist doctrine came to be instantiated there, in the catalogue itself. In that way, *dkar chags* such as the *'Bum dkar chag* invite their reader into an intimacy with the specificities of how the text came to them. They invite participation in the transmission of that text through the very act of reading.

For example, in the *'Bum dkar chag* U rgyan ye shes assembles together a number of historical and narrative arcs into a kind of bricolage. He weaves together the biography of the Buddha Siddhārtha, the Buddha's preaching of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, the history of Buddhism in India and in Tibet, the many translations and redactions of *Prajñāpāramitā* literature in Tibet, as well as the local history of the royal sponsors of printing the *'Bum* at Sde dge. This organizational format is echoed in the other canonical catalogues printed at Sde dge in the 18th century: Si tu paṅ chen's *Sde dge'i bka' gyur gyi dkar chag* and Zhu chen tshul khrims' *Sde dge'i bstan gyur gyi dkar chag*.³⁷ Each of these texts relied on the *'Bum dkar chag* as a source.

Canonical catalogues employ a specialized logic of authority and legitimation. The *'Bum dkar chag* places its reader firmly in, and in direct reception of, Buddhist history. It dialogically charts out the life of the Buddha and the many sutras and tantras he voiced—those texts' translation, publication, and dissemination in Tibet, as well as their eventual reception and reproduction at Sde dge in the eastern Tibetan region of Kham. In that way, the catalogue constructs an unbroken lineage, meticulously tracing the words of the text being catalogued back to its source: the Buddha. Beginning in Tuṣita heaven in the distant past, where the Buddha-to-be awaited his birth to Queen Māyā, and ending with a microhistory of the Sde dge

³⁷ Nourse 2014: 37–55. See also Nourse 2016.

kingdom in the early 18th century, the *'Bum dkar chag* links the production of the text directly to the voice of the Buddha who spoke it.

Fusing together biography, critical textual history, and social history, in the *'Bum dkar chag* U rgyan ye shes makes the Buddhist cosmos immanent to his reader. Through that immanence, the catalogue breathes life—from the mouth of the Buddha, no less—into the act of reading. In a relatively short fifty folia, U rgyan ye shes' catalogue connects the Sde dge printing of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* to both its doctrinal and redaction histories. The catalogue documents the capillary end of this Buddhist tradition, at the religious and political conjuncture of Sde dge in 1718. In the meeting of these intersecting histories, a Buddhist tradition is thereby catalogued.

This cataloguing of Buddhist tradition takes several forms in the *'Bum dkar chag*. In one valence, there are echoes of the Rnying ma boom that occurred in Sde dge. From the 1660s through the early 18th century, four major Rnying ma monasteries grew under the patronage of the Sde dge court: Kaḥ thog, Dpal yul, Rdzogs chen, and Zhe chen. These four later came to be included in the list of six “mother” Rnying ma monasteries.³⁸ Lamas from those four institutions had an increasing authority in the Sde dge kingdom and at its court.³⁹ Moreover, copies of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* that belonged to lamas from Kaḥ thog and Dpal yul monasteries were integral to its redaction and printing at Sde dge. Rnying ma figures therefore had a significant influence on King Bstan pa tshe ring's inaugural textual production. The catalogue also makes special mention of Sde dge abbots and kings being connected to Rnying ma tantras and practice. Thus, from a religious and social historical vantage point, the *'Bum dkar chag* catalogues the growing influence of the Rnying ma in Sde dge.

The mention in the text's fifth chapter of Lo chen dharma śrī, who was the brother of Smin grol gling Monastery's founder, Gter bdag gling pa (1646–1714), also stands out in U rgyan ye shes' catalogue. The question arises as to why, precisely, his name appears. Just a few months before this catalogue was written in 1718, Lo chen dharma śrī was killed during the Dzungar Mongolian invasions that swept through central Tibet from 1717 until 1720. It is possible that U rgyan ye shes is subtly memorializing this Rnying ma adept and scholar, whose recent death together with the widespread persecution of the Rnying ma in Dbus and Gtsang, would have been a shock in eastern

³⁸ The other two were Smin grol gling and Dpal ri, both in central Tibet.

³⁹ Ronis 2009.

Tibet. This citation is also a testament to transregional Rnying ma networks at the time. These connections between central and eastern Tibet eventuated in the institutionalization of Rnying ma ritual performances throughout Khams and A mdo, which were inaugurated at Smin grol gling by Lo chen dharma śrī and his brother.⁴⁰ While these ritual transmissions would not fully take form until the latter part of the 18th century, the murmurs here indicate that Sde dge and its court was a prominent hub within that vast Rnying ma network at the turn of the 18th century.

2.2. Nonsectarian Traces in the 'Bum dkar chag

In an article that scrutinizes the categories of “canon” and “catalogue,” Jonathan Z. Smith has reflected that “the catalogue, in principle, is open. But an account of why the items have been brought together can be given, transmitted, and learned.”⁴¹ This is precisely what this article has aimed to consider. By assembling the respective histories of the Buddhist doctrine in India and Tibet, of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, of the Sde dge kingdom, and of this particular printing of the sutra, U rgyan ye shes produces in this *dkar chag* a discrete formulation of Buddhist tradition. These enumerative gestures—listing, for instance, the Sde dge’s royal generations, the six versions of the sutra, the successive periods of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist history—place the text’s reader at the forefront of Buddhist canonical transmission. The work of the catalogue is, in effect, the creation of a particular, long tradition—a *ring lugs*, as it would be in Tibetan—tied specifically to Sde dge.

In addition to imbuing Sde dge’s history with the aforementioned connection to the Rnying ma, the *'Bum dkar chag* also registers a notably nonsectarian ethic and lexicon. The conclusion to the text, translated above, extolls the buddhadharma as bereft of sectarian divides (*ris bral bstan pa*) and exemplifies one of the many instances of nonsectarian—*ris med*—rhetoric in this text. Other terms suggestive of impartiality that U rgyan ye shes employs in the text include *ris bral* (“without bias”),⁴² *phyogs lhung med* (“not falling to any side”),⁴³ and *ris grol* (“free from bias”).⁴⁴ For example, in the opening lines of the *'Bum dkar chag*, U rgyan ye shes writes:

⁴⁰ Dalton 2016: 251 and Dalton 2006: 100.

⁴¹ J. Z. Smith 1998: 304.

⁴² U rgyan ye shes 1718: 24b.

⁴³ Ibid: 7a.

⁴⁴ Ibid: 2a, 19b.

Filling the reaches of the sky with virtuous and excellent luminosity,
 Emanating the cool nectar of scripture and reasoning,
 Beautiful deer whose hearing and contemplation is complete in
 practice and virtue—
 I bow to the monastic community liberated from partisanship.⁴⁵

Here, the author begins the catalogue on an ecumenical note, highlighting that the monastic community, the field of merit for the Sde dge court, was free from partisanship. In another instance, the opening verses of the catalogue's sixth chapter, which dates the printing of the sutra at Sde dge with respect to the time since the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, elevates ecumenical qualities to the divine. U rgyan ye shes writes:

Homage to the divine denizens of the higher realms who, liberated from partisanship, perpetually sound the melody of the sacred doctrine of the three vehicles.⁴⁶

This statement grounds the quality of being without bias, expressed in this *dkar chag* as being without or free from *ris*, as not only an exalted human one, but a godly one as well.

It will come as no surprise to the reader familiar with Sde dge's history that such nonsectarian terminology appears. In one of his landmark essays, E. Gene Smith remarked that the *Royal Genealogy of Sde dge* was "in many ways the first document of the nonsectarian movement" because of its advocacy for pan-sectarian patronage.⁴⁷ Whether or not there was an ecumenical "movement" in the 18th century,⁴⁸ the influence of the Sde dge court and its royal family on the religious milieu of the 18th and 19th centuries is undeniable. From what U rgyan ye shes relays in the *'Bum dkar chag*, the late 17th and early 18th centuries should be considered inflection points in Sde dge's and in Khams' religious history. It was during this period that pan-sectarian patronage and canonical printing projects were underway as the Sde dge Buddhist kingdom rose to prominence. And the two—support for diverse Buddhist lamas and institutions and the production of Buddhist texts—were intertwined.

It has recently been highlighted that trans-sectarian ordination

⁴⁵ *sbyang yon cha rdzogs thos bsam ri dags kyil nyer mdzes lung rig bsil dngar 'bum spro ba'i/ dge legs 'od snang dkar pos nam mkha'i mthar/ khyab mdzad ris grol dge 'dun sde la 'dud* (U rgyan ye shes 1718: 2a).

⁴⁶ *theg gsum dam chos glu dbyangs rtag rol pa'i ris grol mtho ris dbang po'i sde rnam bsngags* (Ibid: 19b).

⁴⁷ E. G. Smith 2001: 25.

⁴⁸ Gardner 2019: 348–351 questions whether or not the activities in and around Sde dge during this period could be called a "movement."

campaigns initiated by Si tu paṅ chen in the 1720s, in which the famed Bka' brgyud master traveled throughout Sde dge conducting monastic ordination rituals for Rnying ma lamas, likely formed a foundation of the so-called nonsectarian milieu of the 19th century.⁴⁹ Beyond the doctrinal usage, it should be added that part and parcel of nonsectarian or *ris med* rhetoric in the eastern Tibetan context is predicated on the role of the Sde dge court. With a view to the context surrounding the *'Bum dkar chag*, which is the earliest available source written about the kingdom, pan-sectarian sponsorship and ritual exchange are also attributable to the political expansions happening there. Most of the development of Rnying ma and Bka' brgyud monasteries, along with the territorial growth of Sde dge, occurred under kings Byams pa phun tshogs, Sangs rgyas bstan pa, and Bstan pa tshe ring, each of whom could be thus described as "*ris med*." Their offices were offices of dharma kings (*chos rgyal*) first and foremost. In their cases, nonsectarianism was a means of statecraft as much as it was an ecumenical religious doxa.⁵⁰

The final dedication of the *'Bum dkar chag* invites us to consider another means by which we can make sense of nonsectarian ideals that occur throughout Sde dge's history. As demonstrated in the above-mentioned citation from the catalogue's seventh chapter, U rgyan ye shes proclaims that the Buddha's doctrine is fundamentally non-partisan. Yet, in a kind of soft hierarchy, that statement is immediately followed by a wish for the ascendancy and pervasive rule of the Sa skya tradition. This soft hierarchy is a useful heuristic for considering the relationship of the Sde dge court to its *ris med* patronage ethos. Whereas its capital was housed within a Sa skya monastery, the maintenance of good relationships with Bka' brgyud and especially Rnying ma lamas, and their institutions, in Sde dge was vital.

3. Concluding Remarks

In the autumn of 1729, just over a decade after U rgyan ye shes wrote the *'Bum dkar chag*, Si tu paṅ chen composed a poem of advice to King Bstan pa tshe ring. It was delivered when the editing and block carving of the Sde dge Bka' 'gyur began. That work counseled the king on a number of matters both mundane and transcendent, ranging from taxation and corvée labor to religious tradition and completion stage meditation. Si tu paṅ chen's verses are apt for

⁴⁹ Ronis 2013: 71–72.

⁵⁰ See especially Ronis 2009: 56–70.

interpreting and making sense of U rgyan ye shes's text, which was written a decade prior. The conclusion to Si tu paṅ chen's poem reads:

The excellent dharmas expounded by the Buddha
 And the collected instructions on those in Tibet—
 Mahāmudrā, Rdzogs chen, Pacification and Cutting, Path and Result,
 The Six Yogas, and so forth—⁵¹
 All are the doctrine's essential points for taming your mind.
 Therefore, reverence for them all is essential.
 Practicing one is sufficient and does not contradict the rest.
 Supplicate your root lama as indivisible from
 The embodiment of all refuges, Padmasambhava.
 Conducting yourself like that, you will come to enjoy an ocean of
 prosperity,
 Be virtuous in every respect,
 And swiftly attain the state of immortality.⁵²

Here, Si tu paṅ chen's advice to Bstan pa tshe ring situates sectarian inclusiveness—"reverence for them all"—as a conduit for the king's prosperity and virtue. His success as king depends upon a nonsectarian form of governance, wherein all traditions are equally suited for taming the mind, one no more privileged than another.

A century and a half after Si tu paṅ chen's poem, the great Rnying ma master Mi pham rgya mtsho (1846–1912) wrote a much longer *nītiśāstra*⁵³ text counseling another young Sde dge prince. Writing to Ngag dbang 'jam dpal rin chen (d.u.), Mi pham made an assertion that echoes both U rgyan ye shes and Si tu paṅ chen. The good and just king, he claims, "properly protects any ancient religious systems, each with its own traditions, that may exist within his kingdom" and while "[n]either creating a pastiche out of them, nor inciting mutual conflict, he cares for them individually so that they do not degenerate." It is thus that his subjects will "rejoice and say, 'This ruler is truly impartial.'"⁵⁴

To conclude, for the rulers at the Sde dge court, to be a Buddhist

⁵¹ These are included in the list of the "eight vehicles that are lineages of attainment" (*sgrub brgyud shing rta chen po brgyad*), a paradigm for categorizing the Buddhist teachings in Tibet. See Kapstein 1996 and Deroche 2009.

⁵² *des na rgyal bas dam chos bstan kun dang/ bod du de dag gdams ngag sgril ba/ phyag rdzogs zhi byed gcod yul lam 'bras dang/ sbyor drug la sogs ji snyed mchis pa kun/ rang sems 'dul phyir bstan pa'i gnad gcig pas/ kun la gus bya kun gyi snying po yin/ kun dang 'gal med gcig chog nyams su blangs/ skyabs gnas kun 'dus pad+ma 'byung gnas dang/ rtsa ba'i bla ma dbyer med gsol ba thob/ de ltar mādā pas rnam kun dge legs kyi/ dpal 'byor rya mtsho nyid la longs spyad pas/ myur du 'chi med rtag pa'i gnas thob 'gyur (A.U. 1791: 134b–135a).*

⁵³ *A Treatise on Ethics for Kings: An Ornament for Rulers (Rgyal po lugs kyi bstan bcos sa gzhi skyong ba'i rgyan)*. See Cabezón 2017.

⁵⁴ Cabezón 2017: 117–118.

king was to be a *ris med* king, an impartial and inclusive king. In his introduction to *Kongtrul's Encyclopaedia of Indo-Tibetan Culture*, E. Gene Smith remarked that the *Royal Genealogy of Sde dge* affirmed that the Sde dge court's commitment to religious tolerance and pan-sectarian patronage "should be the basis of the religious policy of Sde dge and, by implication, any well-governed state."⁵⁵ By the 19th century, when the *Royal Genealogy* was written, "*ris med*" as a term signified a quality of the ideal Buddhist ruler, at Sde dge and beyond. It was a strategy for governance and for religious institutional sponsorship that could serve as the basis of the polity's prosperity and welfare. Mi pham rgya mtsho's treatise on ethical kingship, written to the Sde dge king on the verge of the 20th century, is redolent of such an ideal.

In the much-earlier *'Bum dkar chag*, which has been the focus of this article, U rgyan ye shes refers to Sde dge in the early 1700s as "the great gathering place of the hundred traditions,"⁵⁶ a nexus of religious traditions and lineages. He also promotes Sde dge and its government's capital as the central axis of an explicitly nonsectarian Buddhist world, referring to the kingdom as comprising "hundreds of nonsectarian monasteries."⁵⁷ This is a dimension of the Sde dge kingdom's religious and political patronage that carried forth into the 19th century. With respect to the early 18th century, this catalogue to the printing of the *Satasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* registers the growing influence of Rnying ma institutions in Sde dge and marks the beginning of the printing campaigns sponsored by King Bstan pa tshe ring. The ecumenical rhetoric it employs speaks to the importance of understanding *ris med* not merely as a form of doctrinal outlook but also as a dimension of Buddhist kingship in early modern Tibet.

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⁵⁵ E. G. Smith 1970: 25.

⁵⁶ *lugs brgya'i 'dun sa chen po* (U rgyan ye shes 1718: passim).

⁵⁷ *ris med chos kyi sde brgya rtsa* (Ibid: 15b).

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The Origins of Tibetan Law: Some Notes on Intertextuality and the Reception History of Tibetan Legal Texts¹

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ow did law in Tibet originate? Works of various genres of Tibetan literature start off explaining the origins of the topic they discuss. This is no different in the rarely studied genre of Tibetan legal texts. By examining the way in which they present the history, place, purpose, and legacy of law in Tibet, we gain access to some important clues regarding the law's position and functioning in society. What is the relationship between Buddhism and law? How have views of the law changed over several centuries? In this article, I use a number of, previously largely unstudied, Tibetan legal works, which include—but are not limited to—variations of the *zhal lce* (“pronouncements”). By placing the development of legal ideology not just in the context of the political history of Tibet but also in the context of the changes and continuities of Tibetan Buddhism, this article intends to shed light on the multiple dimensions of the well-known concept “religion and politics combined” (*chos srid zung 'brel*).

1. Introduction

Where does law as a concept come from, according to Tibetan sources? “Where” can, of course, mean two things here: the geographical “where” but also the more figurative “where”—the origins of law and justice.² Various types of Tibetan genres of literature—be they written

¹ The research that went into this article was made possible by a VENI grant from the NWO (Dutch Ministry of Education and Science) for the project “The Interaction between Religion and the Law in Tibet.” I am grateful for the corrections, suggestions and remarks made by the anonymous peer reviewers and Jonathan Silk.

² The geographical “where” is not dealt with directly here, but is represented in some of the legal texts and pertains to the directionality and spatiality of law and its origins in Tibet. See my article “Tibetan Legal Geography: Situating Legal Texts, Situating Tibet” (forthcoming, PIATS 2019, edited by L. Galli and Ch. Ramble).

or oral— start by addressing the origins and the (mythical) history of the topic, even when the topic is not necessarily a historical one.³ Of relevance here is that many Tibetan legal texts contain some kind of preamble that discusses the “history of law.” The narratives located therein are often similar to those found among the genre of historiography (*rgyal rabs/ chos 'byung*).⁴

Tibetan legal texts are notoriously difficult to date, in particular, because they are often “composite” texts (on which more below), while the physical manuscripts and versions that are currently available to us are never older than the 17th or even the 18th century. Although it would indeed be interesting to place these legal works in their political and social contexts, because they are difficult to date and because they are heavily intertextual, doing so would risk making ahistorical conjectures. For this reason, I refrain from any such attempt here.

In this article, I highlight a number of these texts and discuss their gloss on the “history of law.” First, it is necessary to discuss the narratives connected to the establishment of law in Tibet in more general terms, which requires looking at mainly historiographical texts composed a few centuries prior to these legal works. They convey the continuity of Tibetan notions of law. Furthermore, these shared stories found in historiographical works help define and solidify sociocultural relationships in Tibetan society throughout the centuries.⁵

As Pirie has noted, while the Tibetan tradition claims that law emerged on the basis of Buddhist notions, when Buddhism was adopted as the state religion in the 8th century, laws during this time seem not to have had a direct basis in Buddhist sentiments. Rather, it appears that a juridical system was already in place during the height of the Tibetan empire.⁶ According to Uray, the introduction of Buddhism did promote the development of (new) legal codes, meaning that the legal code of the empire did, in fact, reflect the influence of Buddhism. In these imperial era legal codes, four fundamental laws are given, prohibiting murder, thievery, lechery, and the bearing of false witness. The ten non-virtuous acts (*mi dge ba bcu*), “an obvious reference to the basic Buddhist ethical framework,” are also referred to in these imperial law codes. In other words, “Buddhism contributed to the substance of Tibetan laws, as well as

³ See, for example, Jackson (1984) for an elaborate preamble to a royal history. In oral traditions, such as wedding recitations, similarly the origins of the object used in the wedding ritual are described before they are employed. Here such “explanations” are called *bshad pa*, see Jansen 2010.

⁴ For an overview of this genre, see van der Kuijp 1996.

⁵ On the static nature of “history as myth” in Tibet, see Schwieger 2000.

⁶ Pirie 2017a: 409–410. Also see van der Kuijp 1999. For an exploration of those laws, see Dotson 2006.

providing their formal framework.”⁷ Schuh, conversely, claims that the legal texts that were subsequently produced (the *zhal lce*) were *not* based on these non-virtuous acts or on the 16 pure human rules (*mi chos gtsang ma bcu drug*).⁸ Rather, he argues that the influence of Buddhism was a “retrospective, purely fictitious, ideological construct.”⁹ Van der Kuijp has also noted “the total absence of anything that might remotely be construed as Buddhist, except for their propagandistic introductions written for the purposes of legitimation and authority.”¹⁰ While the introductions of the various extant *zhal lce* indeed serve to legitimate the author’s or compiler’s laws, one of the aims of this article is to demonstrate that they also contain much more information on legal ideology than has been previously presumed, and thus they should not simply be dismissed as “propaganda.” Furthermore, the “history of Tibetan law” itself is emically related in these introductions, of which this article is a preliminary reception-historical study.

2. *The Beginnings of Law According to Tibetan Historiographies* (Chos ’byung, Rgyal rabs, etc.)

While it is, of course, unthinkable that there was no law whatsoever before the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet, it is very plausible indeed that the new, more universally applicable religion had some influence on the law-making that followed its introduction. For the current purpose, however, we are largely concerned not with what actually was, but with the *ex post facto* presentation of the beginnings of law by Tibetan authors. From the point of view of reception history, then, we are concerned with the history of the ways in which these texts have “influenced communities and cultures down the centuries.”¹¹ This way of studying (Tibetan) literature, in which the texts themselves are scrutinized for meaning alongside an examination of the legacy and reception of these texts, has the potential to fuse historical-critical and literary-critical approaches.¹²

⁷ Dreyfus 1999: 120. See also Uray 1972.

⁸ While these sets are nowadays seen as unproblematically Buddhist, it appears that they were closer to being codes of morality, containing considerable convergences with Chinese Confucian principles. See Uray 1972; Yamaguchi 1987; Roesler 2017.

⁹ Schuh 1984: 299–300.

¹⁰ van der Kuijp 1999: 288. Also see Pirie 2014: 170.

¹¹ Sawyer 1999: 2.

¹² For an insightful article on how this is conceived of in the field of Bible Studies, see Beal 2011.

Tibetan literary sources, generally speaking, tend to connect the broad concept of “*khriims*” (law, rules, *mores*, customs, etc.)¹³ with the introduction of a Tibetan script, an innovation which in turn is portrayed as the catalyst for all things to do with “civilization”: religion, statecraft, and law.¹⁴

Srong btsan sgam po (569–649?), as goes the well-known narrative of the introduction of the Tibetan written language, wanting to introduce Buddhism into Tibet, sends a number of Tibetans to India to develop a script. Only Thon mi Sambhoṭa (7th century) ends up succeeding. Was the Tibetan script then immediately used for the purpose of statecraft, and were laws written with it? Or did it initially serve solely as a way to introduce the Buddha-dharma? At this point, the early religious histories and other sources that deal with the imperial period diverge.

Before discussing these divergences, it is necessary to mention the different types of *khriims* or laws that we are dealing with. From the imperial sources onward, we come across three types: the laws of the ten virtues (*dge ba bcu'i khriims*), the royal law (*rgyal khriims*), and religious law, or simply Buddhism (*chos khriims*).¹⁵ The three emerged—again, according to the general narrative—roughly around the same time that the script was introduced. Which “set of laws” then was perceived to have come first? Interestingly, when we look at the Tibetan sources themselves, we see different ideas on which “system” influenced which.¹⁶

In Mkhas pa'i lde'u's *Religious History of China and Tibet* (*Rgya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa*) and Lde'u jo sras' *Great Religious History: A Victory Banner of the Teachings* (*Chos 'byung chen po bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*), both of which were written mid- to late 13th century, Srong

¹³ This word has both secular and religious connotations, see, for example, *khriims* — *lha chos sam mi chos dang mthun pa'i lugs* [*khriims*: way[s] that accord either with Buddhist or with human governance] (Zhang 1993: 283). Clearly, *khriims* is also often used as an equivalent to *tshul khriims*—moral discipline, often specifically referring to monastic discipline. Throughout this article, *khriims* is mostly translated as “law”—partly for convenience's sake. It should be kept in mind that when referring to “religious law” in the Tibetan context, we refer to some sort of moral discipline, which could be monastic discipline or simply universally applicable ethical conduct. On the distinction between religious and secular law in early Tibet, see Pirie 2017b.

¹⁴ For a good overview of early Tibetan works that deal with the Dharma-king and the law, see Stein 2010: 215–220.

¹⁵ Stein 2010: 216.

¹⁶ The following presentation has benefited from various excerpts and translations of relevant passages by Pirie and Manson, available on <http://tibetanlaw.org/texts/histories>. The translations here, however, are my own. For a discussion on “Buddhist law” in early Tibetan sources, see Pirie 2017a.

btsan sgam po is said to have created royal laws in his youth, but religious laws in his old age.¹⁷

In other words, according to these narratives, royal laws existed *before* the introduction of Buddhism. In a similar way, Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192) writes in his *Religious History* (*Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud*) about Srong btsan sgam po: “Then, because the 'Tshal ris minister of Tibet did not change anything, the king thought: ‘As I have established and taught the law I will thereby establish a tradition of the true Dharma.’”¹⁸ The text then goes on to describe the king's thought process: “As sentient beings now are able to be tamed by means of the Dharma, I shall develop religious laws, methods for virtuous actions, and the Dharma.”¹⁹ Clearly, Buddhism and morality here are presented as civilizing forces, ways to make subjects more naturally law-abiding. Also apparent is that royal law is presented as having been created first and religion, or morality, second.

Many other later sources that deal with the Tibetan imperial era have it the other way around. In those texts, the suggestion is made that “just law” (as opposed to “evil law”: *sdig khrims*) can only be instated when it is based either on the laws of the ten virtues or the religious law or both. For example, in the 12th-century work *Entering the Gate of Dharma* (*Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo*) by Bsod nams rtse mo (1142–1182), it is said that Srong btsan sgam po “created the laws based on the ten virtues.”²⁰ Very similarly, the *Ma ni bka' 'bum*, put to writing in c. 1200, notes that in order to establish Buddhism in Tibet, Srong btsan sgam po “established the law (*khrims*) based on the *Sutra of the Ten Virtues*.”²¹ From the context, we can glean that this *khrims* here means royal law.

At the same time, this text signals the precarious equilibrium between religious and royal law. Srong btsan sgam po is reported to have asked his chief minister for help: “In this kingdom, the royal law

¹⁷ Mkhas pa'i lde'u: 4; *de nas rgyal pos tshes smad la chos kyi rgyal po'i sa bzung nas chos khrims kyi srol bstod de* (Lde'u jo sras: 115; Uebach 1992: 824; Dotson 2006: 75). According to Uebach, the *chos khrims* here deals with “the king's activities to promote the spread of Buddhism” (1992: 825).

¹⁸ *de nas bod kyi blon po 'tshal ris de nas tsam yang ma bsgyur bas rgyal po'i thugs la/ ngas khrims bcas pa yang btsan par gyur pas/ de yis dam pa'i chos kyi srol gtod do zhes grags* [read: *bsgrags*] so (*Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud*: 175).

¹⁹ *da ni chos kyi sems can rnams 'dul du btub par 'dug pas/ chos khrims dge ba'i las stabs dang chos bya snyam mo* (Ibid).

²⁰ *dge ba bcu las brtsams te khrims bcas* (Bsod nams rtse mo 1167: 343). Also see Stein 2010: 217.

²¹ *dge ba bcu'i mdo la brten nas khrims bcas te* (*Ma ni bka' 'bum*: 266). Also see Stein 2010: 218; Ishihama 2004: 17–18.

has been turned into religious law. Help my offspring to also make sure that royal law is in accord with religious law."²²

In the *Mirror Clarifying the Royal Genealogies* (*Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*), attributed to Bla ma dam pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan (1312–1375), the king is also said to have based the royal law on the ten virtues.²³ But this royal law is then the basis on which Buddhism can be introduced in Tibet. In the *Feast for Scholars* (*Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*), composed by Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba (1504–1566), it is also suggested that virtuous behavior, which must be the basis for more formal religious practice, is warranted by the presence of royal law. In other words, royal law protects people from doing bad things. Srong btsan sgam po is reported to have said:

Now, I must make the great royal laws. Formerly, because there were no laws, the small polities were left to their own devices. If there is still no law, bad conduct will spread, and my subjects will suffer, so laws must be established.²⁴

Bu ston rin chen grub (1290–1364) more ambiguously states that Srong btsan sgam po had created the law of the ten virtues.²⁵ Stein, however, notes that “[y]et elsewhere Bu ston poses as a general rule that the ‘religious laws’ appear to be based on the ‘royal laws’” (Stein’s citation of Bu ston lacks any reference, but the source is Bu ston’s *Ship to Enter the Ocean of Yoga Tantra* (*Rnal 'byor rgyud kyi rgya mtshor 'jug pa'i gru gzings*), an extensive introduction to the Yoga Tantras).²⁶

Another author, the 3rd Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), suggests that a third option is possible, but that still both royal law and religious law (*chos khrims*), which may here refer to monastic discipline, come forth out of something religious. He writes that: “These Nine Vehicles of Ancient Secret Mantra were completely and perfectly translated from beginning to end, blending into one the royal

²² *blon po sna chen po la zhal bstan spyang gziags nas zhang blon chen po kha ba can gyi rgyal khamis 'dir rgyal khrims chos khrims su bsgyur ba yin no/ nga'i dbon sras la yang rgyal khrims chos khrims dang bstun du chug cig* (*Ma ni bka' 'bum*: 266). This translation has benefitted but differs from that of Ishihama (2004: 18).

²³ *dge ba bcu la brten pa'i rgyal khrims 'cha' ba*, and: *dge ba bcu la bstun pa'i rgyal khrims bcas* (*Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* 1373: chapter 10; Uray 1972: 54–55).

²⁴ *da ni ngas rgyal khrims chen po bca' dgos/ sngon yang khrims med pas rgyal phran rnams so sor 'khyar ba yin/ da dung khrims med na nyes byed dar zhing nga'i 'bangs rnams sdug bsngal bar 'gyur bas khrims bca' bar bya'o gsungs nas cas skad* (Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba: 184). For more on this work and how it portrays the king as legislator, see Uray 1972.

²⁵ Stein 2010: 219. *dge ba bcu'i khrims bcas* (Bu ston rin chen grub 1326: 182/ 119a).

²⁶ *spyir rgyal khrims la brten nas chos khrims byung ste* (*Rnal 'byor rgyud kyi rgya mtshor 'jug pa'i gru gzings*: 68a). This text is discussed in Weinberger 2010.

law and the religious law."²⁷ This notion of blending the two, royal and religious rule, is, of course, well known throughout Tibetan history, in particular from the time of the Sa skya hegemony onwards. Throughout history, we see this two-fold structure—or dyarchy—phrased and glossed in various ways: two systems (*lugs gnyis*), two laws or legal systems (*khriims gnyis*), the two ways (*tshul gnyis*), two “traditions” (*gtsug lag gnyis*),²⁸ the two: patron and priest (*mchod yon gnyis*), and the union of Dharma and politics (*chos srid zung 'brel*). While they do not necessarily mean the same thing in all contexts, the ubiquity of these types of phrases is striking.²⁹ Tibetan traditional history writing makes much of Srong btsan sgam po’s part in introducing Buddhism to Tibet, in addition to this role as a legislator. While this is likely to be overstating matters, to say the least,³⁰ there are early sources that point to his role in formalizing law in Central Tibet. We find a reference to this in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, which can be dated sometime between the second half of the 9th century and the 10th century, in which Srong btsan sgam po is accredited with establishing writing and along with it:

the great government and legal systems of Tibet, the ministerial ranks, the levels of power, the awards for good service and the punishments for criminals, the contracts for grazing, tilling, and irrigation rights for farmers and nomads, the systems of weights and measures.³¹

Taking into account the above-cited early historiographical sources that deal with the beginnings of law in Tibet, which are by no means intended to be exhaustive, we can see that they display an ambiguity with regard to which laws are based on which, and that they also clearly demonstrate that Buddhism is always in the foreground when it comes to the origins of law. The question then arises how the legal texts themselves present the history of Tibetan law, a question to which we now shall turn.

²⁷ *sangs sngags rmying ma'i bka' theg pa pa dgu po 'di / rgyal khriims dang chos khriims gnyis gcig tu sdebs nas dbu zhabs su tshangs par rdzogs par bsgyur zhing* (Rang byung rdo rje: 330). Stein 2010: 185.

²⁸ This concept is famously difficult to translate and means different things in different contexts. See Stein 1985.

²⁹ See Ruegg & Cüppers 2004: 9.

³⁰ This discrepancy is discussed in Uray 1972; Kapstein 2000: 56–57; Wangdu 2002; Dotson 2006: 13–14; Dalton 2013: 99–101.

³¹ Dalton 2011: 100; Pt1287: l. 451–455.

3. *The Beginnings of Law According to Legal Texts*

When we look at where, or more precisely, with whom law begins according to the legal texts themselves, an equally ambiguous picture emerges. Clearly, for Tibet, there can be no doubt that, narratively speaking, law / *khrim*s started with Srong btsan sgam po. He is seen as the archetypal lawmaker, and most legal texts refer to him and claim that their laws are based on his legacy. Tibetan legal materials, fortunately, tend to provide a bit more information on relative chronology. Some works contain detailed historical accounts and others but brief overviews, more often than not inspired by or directly based on the narratives found in the historiographical narratives.³² They are telling not just in what they contain but also in what they omit. For the current purpose, I here discuss the preambles of a number of legal texts and the ways in which they present the history and origins of Tibetan law.

The first text is presumed to be earlier than the other works presented below. While the year and author are not given in the work itself, Pirie tentatively dates it to the 14th or 15th century. *The Mirror of the Two Laws*, as it appears in a compilation of Tibetan legal texts in the keep of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (*Tibetan Legal Materials, Bod khrim*s *yig gi skor*, henceforth TLM), has been translated in full by Pirie and Manson.³³ This text is interesting because its historical narrative is perhaps the most extensive of all Tibetan legal texts. While this article is not the place to enter into much philological detail, the intertextual entanglements of the genre of legal texts naturally come to the fore in any discussion of more than one of these Tibetan law texts. Here, it must be noted that there exists another version of one section of this text embedded in a larger compilation, which has previously gone unnoticed, called *Various Important [Texts] Such as the Legal Work in 16 Pronouncements of the Gtsang Commissioner and the Dga' ldan pho brang's 12 Pronouncements* (*Sde pa gtsang pa'i khrim*s *yig zhal lce 16 dang dga' ldan pho brang ba'i zhal lce 12 sogs nyer mkho sna tshogs*, henceforth DTK).³⁴ In this latter work, the anonymous compiler and author of the brief introduction to the collection of legal texts calls

³² Such a detailed account can be found in translation in Ehrhard 2015. The text contains, in addition to a law code, a genealogy of the Gtsang dynasty, down to Karma bstan skyong dbang po (1606–1642).

³³ <http://tibetanlaw.org/texts/mirror>. Also see Pirie 2019. The full name of the text is *Khrim*s *gnyis lta ba'i me long*, elsewhere also referred to as *Zhal lce bco lnga*, “the 15 Pronouncements.”

³⁴ This version of one section of this text can be found in *Sde pa gtsang pa'i khrim*s *yig zhal lce 16 dang dga' ldan pho brang ba'i zhal lce 12 sogs nyer mkho sna tshogs*, BDRC 24038: 3a–14a. The version that is more similar to the one in TLM is found in *Bod kyi snga rabs khrim*s *srol yig cha bdams bsgrigs* 1989: 46–81.

it a compilation of several original written legal texts, “which are useful and famous, written in Tibet itself.”³⁵ The relevant section that is presented in the DTK and also found in *The Mirror of the Two Laws* is the third and final part, which discusses the history of law and enumerates the 15 “pronouncements.”³⁶ It starts as follows:³⁷

As for the explanation of the time when the royal law came about in Tibet: in an earlier time, in this Tibet, which was like a land of darkness, the 12 petty kingdoms had established laws. All house-dwellers lived in mountain-huts, hunted for a living, and ate meat, and drank blood for their sustenance. For clothing, they wore skins. In order for them to distinguish good from bad, the emanated Dharmarāja Srong btsan sgam po himself established, in order to lead the Tibetan people to happiness, the royal laws based on the Dharma of the ten virtues; he increased material wealth and brought everybody profit. In order to lead his subjects towards the True Dharma’s instructions and because there was no writing in Tibet, he sent seven clever ministers to India to learn writing.³⁸

We see here that this text clearly borrows from the *Mirror Clarifying Royal Genealogies*, and Pirie makes a case for dating *The Mirror of the Two Laws* to the late 14th century or early 15th century.³⁹ If indeed my

³⁵ *gangs ri'i phreng ba dkar pos khor yug tu bris pa'i sman ljong 'di nyid du mkho shing grags che ba'i bka' khrims kyi yig tshang khungs thub 'ga' zhiig phyogs sgrigs kyi bkod pa la/* (DTK: 4a).

³⁶ Because the *Mirror of the Two Laws* contains several parts, which are indicated as such, and because the work contains multiple “historical” preambles—albeit but one enumeration of the pronouncements—and because the last part features in its entirety in another text, I find it likely that the *Mirror* itself is also a compilation, making it hard—if not impossible—to date.

³⁷ This translation has benefitted from, but is not based on, that by Pirie and Manson.

³⁸ The last few lines are in all likelihood adapted from the *Mirror Clarifying Royal Genealogies*. The underlined sections correspond almost exactly. *rgyal pos dge ba bcu'i khrims bcas pa'i skor/ de nas chos dge ba bcu la brten pa'i rgyal khrims 'cha' ba/ 'dod yon lnga spel ba/ phan tshun du skyes bskur ba/ mgna' 'og gi 'bangs rnam la chos kyi bka' bsgo ba la/ bod na yi ge med pas/ blon po dbang po rno ba bdun rgya gar du yi ge slob tu btang bas* (Bla ma dam pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan: 66). *bod du rgyal khrims nam gyi dus su byung bshad pa ni / sngon gyis dus na bod yul mun pa'i 8. rnag rum dang 'dra ba 'dir / rgyal phran bcu gnyis kyi khrims bcas so / khang pa thams cad ri khyim la brten nas / las su rgon pa byed / zas su sha za khrag 'thung / gos su lpag pa gyon / dge sdig ngos 9. shes pa la / sprul pa'i chos rgyal srong btsan sgam po de nyid kyi bod 'bangs bde la bkod pa'i phyir / chos dge ba bcu la brten pa'i rgyal khrims bca' ba / 'dod yon lnga spel ba / phan tshun du 13. 1. skyes bskur ba / mnga' 'og gi 'bangs rnam la dam pa'i chos kyi bka' bsgo ba la / bod na yi ge med pas / blon po dbang po rno ba bdun rgya gar la yi ge slob tu btang bas /* (*Khrims gnyis lta ba'i me long*: 12–13). The DTK has some variant spellings and punctuation, enough to suggest they have been copied from different sources.

³⁹ Pirie 2019. In the same article, Pirie also notes the “close correspondences” to this text, but deduces from this that the text must have been written by someone in the same religio-cultural milieu as the historiography’s author, Bsod nams rgyal mtshan (i.e., Phag mo gru): 614.

supposition is correct and this law text paraphrases the *Mirror Clarifying Royal Genealogies* written in 1373, this would mean that the textual adaptation from historiography to legal text took place rather soon after the former work was authored, which seems unlikely. While I do not propose an alternative date or time period, we should perhaps err on the side of caution and dismiss the late 14th century as a likely possibility, while putting the text's *terminus post quem* at 1373 for this legal work. In any case, it is clear that this work copies the order of origination from the *Mirror Clarifying Royal Genealogies*, discussed above: the ten virtues were first created, then the royal laws, and lastly the Dharma.

The next legal work looks at the very earliest beginnings of law and royal lineages. Again, different versions of this text circulate. Cüppers has published one that has been photographed in the context of The Nepalese-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project (NGMCP), called the *Great Gtsang Legal Text* (*Gtsang khrims yig chen mo*).⁴⁰ The title suggests it was composed during the Gtsang dynasty (1565–1642), but Cüppers convincingly argues that the usage of a particular type of administrative language conveys that it was written, edited, or completed during the Dga' ldan pho brang period.⁴¹ This legal work presents the law in 12 pronouncements. Interestingly, this text shows many correspondences to the *Legal Text of Gtsang pa sde srid karma bstan skyong* (*Gtsang pa sde srid karma bstan skyong dbang po'i khrims yig*) found in the aforementioned compilation TLM.⁴² While the spelling is on occasion different, and sometimes words are added or missing, there are many sections that correspond. The two texts do not follow the same sequence, various sections of the *Great Gtsang Legal Text* are scattered throughout the *Legal Text of Gtsang pa sde srid karma bstan skyong*, making up about 70 percent of its total content. Another (partial) version of the *Great Gtsang Legal Text* can be found as part of another bundle of legal texts referred to earlier, DTK.⁴³

The compilation contains many longer and shorter texts that have some relations to Tibetan law. The text itself is nameless, which is perhaps why it has gone unnoticed so far.⁴⁴ While the *Great Gtsang Legal Text* was not dated, this text is: the year given is the Female-Iron-Sheep Year, and it was written on the day of the full moon of the tenth

⁴⁰ See Cüppers 2012; 2013; 2015.

⁴¹ Cüppers 2015: 2.

⁴² TLM: 96–112.

⁴³ This work is available on BDRC. According to this catalogue's description the text is found within "a collection of legal texts on the codes governing Tibet during the 16th and 17th centuries," and it was "reproduced from a new copy of an ancient manuscript from Sog tsan-dan dgon near Nag-chu-kha." Republished: Dolanji, Ochghat, Himachal Pradesh: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Community, 1985.

⁴⁴ DTK: 180–213.

month.⁴⁵ Assuming that at least most parts of the text were written during the Dga' ldan pho brang period (i.e., after 1642), this means that the *terminus post quem* for this text is the Iron-Sheep Year of 1691.⁴⁶ The *Great Gtsang Legal Text* knows yet another version, again unnamed, found in a compilation of legal texts.

This manuscript, written in the cursive script (*dbu med*), was Charles Bell's and is now housed in the Liverpool Museum.⁴⁷ The cover page reads in English: "This contains an abridgment of the 13 codes of law made since the establishment of the Ga-den Po-trang (Lhasa Government) and a list of fines that may be inflicted." A more recent copy in *dbu chen* script of this can be found in the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC).⁴⁸ While by no means a one on one copy, this version gives the same year as the corresponding nameless text in the DTK.⁴⁹ A part of the *Great Gtsang Legal Text* was, according to Cüppers, compiled later than the rest of the work (lines 361–378 of the NGMCP version), on account of there not being any parallels elsewhere.⁵⁰ Both of the other versions indeed do not contain this last section, which appears consistent with this claim. On the whole, we can assume that this text—like many of the other Tibetan legal texts, is a composite, borrowing and incorporating various sections from other works.

One section in *Legal Text of Gtsang pa sde srid karma bstan skyong*, not found in the *Great Gtsang Legal Text* analyzed by Cüppers, relates the very beginning of "society" and how the creation of law was a necessity due to the degeneration of time. Further, during the *Kṛtayuga* (the "perfect age"), humans naturally practiced the ten virtues, effortless and without paying attention to the laws of the king. Later on, when behavior became a bit more violent,⁵¹ the great kings, who were inspired by the compassion of Avalokiteśvara, established a system of laws.⁵²

In the precious sutras, it is extensively taught that the happiness or suffering of the world depends on whether the royal laws are in accord with the Dharma or not. In particular, in the *Suvarṇa[pra]bhāṣottama*

⁴⁵ *skye* [read: *skyes*] *bdag ces pa lcogs* [read: *lcags*] *mo lug gi lo/ smin drug gi nya ba'i dkar po'i phyogs kyi dga' ba dang po'i tshe* (DTK: 212).

⁴⁶ It could also have been written in 1751, 1811, 1871, or even 1931.

⁴⁷ Manuscript number 50–31–113a. Also see Meisezahl 1973: 240–243.

⁴⁸ The compilation is called *Khrims yig zhal lce bcu gsum* (henceforth, KZC). The copy was made available through the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. BDRC: W1KG5097. The relevant text pagination is 1a–19b. A badly legible copy of the Liverpool text can also be found on BDRC: W1CZ855.

⁴⁹ *skyes bdag lcags mo lug gi lo dga' ba da sngo'i tshe la bris pas* (KZC: 19b).

⁵⁰ Cüppers 2015: 4.

⁵¹ *brlang pa* (Skt. *paruṣa*), meaning rugged, harsh, violent, etc.

⁵² *rnam thos kyi khrims lugs bca' ba*: "created the system of laws of Vaiśravaṇa" (cf. KZC: 4a).

Sūtra, it is extensively taught that someone who has merit is blessed by the lord of gods [Indra],⁵³ and enters the womb of his mother.⁵⁴ As he becomes the king of men, it is correct to call him “god,” and it is taught that thereby a system of laws based on the ten virtues can spread. In numerous other sutras, tantras, and *śāstras*, there are many presentations of the way of the kings (*rājanīti*).⁵⁵

The reference to this sutra is striking, not because its contents do not match the message, but because—as far as I am aware—the *Suvarṇabhāṣottama Sūtra* tended not to be used by authors in Tibet trying to justify the king’s rule by portraying him as divine—whereas it was of course extensively used for that very purpose in East Asia and Mongolia.⁵⁶ More to the point, this section of the text goes back to a mythical perfect time long before the Dharma-king Srong btsan sgam po, and we see royalty portrayed as semi-divine. We can see that this text conceives of the ten virtues existing in the very beginning as natural phenomena. The Dharma, probably here referring more to a just system than to any sort of religion, only becomes necessary when the times change—due to which the royal laws, again, based on the Dharma, are created to uphold the Dharma and the ten virtues.

⁵³ *lha yi rgyal por byin gyis brlabs*: “is blessed as the king of gods” (cf. KZC: 4a).

⁵⁴ D555, a translation from the Chinese in 31 chapters, D556 a translation from the Sanskrit in 29 chapters, D557 a translation from the Sanskrit in 21 chapters. This reference to the *Suvarṇabhāṣottama Sūtra* roughly corresponds to chapter 12 of D556 and D557, in which Brahma is shown to explain the divinity of human kings, there named Rājaśāstra (*lugs kyi bstan bcos*). *mi yi gnas su skyes pa ni/ rgyal po rnams kyi skye ba dang / rgyu gang gis na yul rnams su/ rgyal por gyur pa bshad par byal/ lha dbang rnams kyi byin brlabs kyi/ lma yi rum du 'jug 'gyur te/ lha yis sngar ni byin brlabs nas/ lphyi nas mngal du 'jug par 'gyur/ lmi yi 'jig rten skyes kyang ni/ lmi yi dbang por gyur pa yin/ lha las skyes par gyur pas na/ de ni lha yi sras zhes byal* (D557: 248a). The corresponding chapter 21 of the translation from the Chinese is quite different and uses different vocabulary. *sngon gyi las kyi mthu yis ni/ lhar skyes rgyal por gyur pa yin/ lgal te mi nang gnas gyur nas/ dbang sdud mi yi bdag po byed/ lha rnams lhan cig byin brlabs nas/ de 'og ma yi mngal du 'jug lma yi mngal na gnas pa na/ lha rnams kyi ni srung bar byed/ lmi yi 'jig rten skyes gyur kyang / lgtso mchog gyur phyir lha zhes byal/ lha rnams kyi ni bsrungs pas na/ lha yi bu zhes brjod pa yin/* (D555: 120a).

⁵⁵ *de yang rdzogs ldan gyi 4. dus rgyal po'i khrims dang gzhan gyi 'bad rtsol la ma ltos par / mi rnams rang rang gis dge ba bcu la spyod de rjes su cung zad spyod pa brlang par gyur pa na / 5. 'phags pa'i thugs rje zhugs pa'i rgyal po chen po rnams kyi khrims lugs bcas so / spyir mdo sde rin po che rnams las / 'jig rten gyi bde sdug 6. rgyal khrims chos dang mthun par bskyangs ma bskyangs la rag las pa rgyas par gsungs / khyad par gser 'od dam pa mdo dbang po'i rgyal po las / bsod 7. nams dang ldan pa zhig lha'i dbang pos byin gyis rlabs nas ma'i lhums su 'jug cing / de mi'i rgyal por gyur pa la lha zhes rjod rigs pa dang / des dge 8. ba bcu dang mthun pa'i khrims lugs bca' ba'i tshul rgyas par gsungs shing / mdo rgyud bstan bcos gzhan du ma las kyang rgyal po'i lugs kyi rnam par 9. bzhag pa du ma gsung /* (TLM: 97). The underlined part roughly corresponds to KZC: 3a–4a. KZC then jumps to TLM: 98.7.

⁵⁶ See Gummer 2015: 256–258.

The Tibetan legal text, *The Mirror of the Two Laws*, discussed earlier, interestingly does not discuss the origins of the various laws, but the primacy of laws and states the following:

Therefore, even though the two, the religious law and the royal law, contradict each other in terms of names given and who does the abandoning, in terms of the object of abandonment, the proper royal laws exist only within the religious laws.⁵⁷

Here the text establishes the primacy of religious law, which is to say that when there is religious law, royal law can thrive—or simply function. This sentiment is in alignment with, among others, *The Mirror Clarifying the Royal Genealogies*, a historiographical work which is clearly one of the sources of inspiration of this legal text.

4. The Intertextuality of Legal Texts

Through an examination of the various versions of histories of law, rule, and royalty in these legal texts, it becomes possible to establish some level of intertextuality and borrowing. This delivers evidence that confirms my hypothesis that most, if not of all, of these texts are composites in nature. While some examples have already been given, the sample of material offered below reveals both borrowing and editing. The earlier mentioned *Legal Text of Gtsang pa sde srid Karma bstan skyong*, which is in many parts very similar to *Great Gtsang Legal Text*, contains a section that does not appear in the latter text:

In particular, due to the virtue that I have gathered previously, the trunk of the powerful elephant has extended and [I am] the one who brings about happiness and support in this world: because I have been empowered from [my] crown [on] by the golden vase of the finest gold filled with the ambrosia of merit, then when the great earth up until the oceans is covered with the umbrella of laws, the precious teachings of the Buddha can be preserved, and all can make offerings [...]⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *des na chos khrims dang rgyal khrims gnyis ming 'dags dang spong byed sgo nas 'gal kyang / spang bya'i sgo nas mi 'gal bas rgyal khrims rnam dag cig chos khrims kho nar 'dug gol* (TLM: 11). Pirie has previously translated this section as: "Even though the religious and royal laws are contrary (different) in terms of their names and means of abandoning [non-virtue], because they are not contrary in terms of what ought to be abandoned, the proper royal laws are exactly like the religious laws" (2019: 607). This gives a very different gloss to the work. The Tibetan syntax, however, is in my opinion far from ambiguous here.

⁵⁸ *khyad par du nged rang sngon bsags dge ba'i stobs kyis glang chen dbang po rna zhags bskyangs pas 'jig rten 'dir l.A. phen bde bskrun pa'i byed por / dzam bu na da'i gser gyi bum pa bsod nams gyi bdud rtsis yongs su gang ba'i spyi bo nas dbang bskur bas 'khor yug*

Striking here is the first person and the very Indic portrayal of royalty. We see strong similarities when we compare this to a legal text that has presumably been written by Rdo ring tha'i ji (also known as Gung Paṇḍita or Rdo ring Paṇḍita, 1721–1792). Meisezahl has referred to and cited parts from this text, but oddly he dates what he calls a new edition (*Neufassung*) of the 13 Pronouncements to 1867.⁵⁹ The year is given as Fire-Hare (*me yos*), which in combination with the author's name in the colophon and the knowledge that for a brief period he was acting administrator of Tibet in 1750–1751, makes it very reasonable to date the work to an earlier Fire-Hare Year, namely 1747. In addition, while there may have been numerous Rdo ring tha'i ji-s, I have located a reference to what might be this text in the autobiography of Mdo mkhar ba Tshe ring dbang rgyal (1697–1763), where it is noted that Rdo ring Paṇḍita wrote a text in 13 points.⁶⁰ If this is indeed the legal work under discussion here, this reference puts the *terminus ante quem* to 1750, making 1747 the likely correct year.

The text, authored by Rdo ring tha'i ji, is called *The Seed-Essence of the Law in Two Systems: The Sword Deciding on the Legal Texts of the Pronouncements in 13 Parts* (*Lugs gnyis khrims kyi sa bon snying po/ khrims yig zhal lce gcod pa'i ral gri yan lag bcu gsum zhes bya ba dran 'dzin lcag kyu kun lde'i* [read: *bde'i*] *a darsha zhes bya ba bzhugs pa'i dbu phyogs lags so*, henceforth LKS). Until recently, only one version appeared to be extant, namely in the Charles Bell collection of the Liverpool Museum,⁶¹ which may be a copy created for him specifically. I am grateful to Xaver Erhard for discovering—and notifying me of—another version in the NGMCP, which differs somewhat in orthography but is otherwise almost identical.⁶² This text is significant for a number of reasons, but in the interests of space, I omit further discussion here. Rather, I cite only the following:

rgya mtsho'i l.5. bar gyi sa chen po bka' khrims kyi gdugs dkar gcig gi khyab par gyur pa na / sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa rin po che de 'dzin dang bcas pa mtha' dag mchod l.6. pa dang / (TLM: 99). TLM's 69 l.9–100 l.4 are not found in the Great Gtsang Legal Text, but this section corresponds to KZC: 4a–4b.

⁵⁹ Meisezahl 1973: 243.

⁶⁰ *don tshan bcu gsum 'khod pa dang* [...] (Mdo mkhar ba Tshe ring dbang rgyal: 118). Schaeffer *et al.* (2013: 564) translate this as: “Duke Paṇḍita set down the Thirteen Points [of Administration] [...]” In the light of this text, we probably should emend “Administration” to “Law.” See Hartley 2011 for this aristocrat's autobiography.

⁶¹ Bell 19, Nr. 5o.31.113b.

⁶² This work is catalogued in the NGMCP catalogue as E 2979/18 and simply called *Khrims yig zhal lce bcu gsum*. I am grateful to Christoph Cüppers for retrieving and sending me the scans of this version. Cüppers and I are working on an annotated translation and critical edition of this very interesting legal text.

In particular, due to the presentation of the three ancestral Dharmarājas,⁶³ the trunk of the elephant has been extended. And therefore, the one who brings about happiness and support in this world: because he has been empowered from the crown [on] by the golden vase of the finest gold filled with the ambrosia of merit. And pervading the great earth up until the oceans as if they were one, then with regard to the feelings and views of all sentient beings, they will have the correct view which is without mistakes—those are the designations (*tha snyed*) of the king Mahāsammata.⁶⁴

What can we make of this? There can be no doubt that the LKS was inspired by the older legal text cited earlier. A notable difference is, of course, that the author of the second text does not place himself at the center of attention, but ascribes the royal power to previous rulers. The author of the first text appears to see himself as a consecrated king in the Indian style. In terms of the language employed, Rdo ring Paṇḍita's Tibetan appears rather garbled, as though earlier copyists have misread and left out certain parts. Corrupted though the text may be, we find that this is one example in which an author actively adapted a previous legal work to suit a different purpose.⁶⁵

As I have pointed out above, the texts under examination all, either explicitly or implicitly, address the issue of which came first, or which should take the most prominent place: royal law or religious law?

Regarding this particular issue, toward the end of the “legal history” part of the LKS, we find these words, which seem—in terms of chronology—quite out of place:

The great Ācārya [Padmasambhava] said from the Mang yul Gung thang pass to the prince Mu khri btsan po: “Listen, you should impose the royal laws in an honest way. In that case, when wrong-doers are punished by the royal laws, it is obvious that you can, later on, purify

⁶³ This could refer to Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's work *Chos rgyal mes dbon rnam gsum gyi rnam thar rin po che'i phreng ba*.

⁶⁴ *bye brag tu chos rgyal mes dbon rnam gsum kyi rnam bzhag stobs kyi glang po che yi sna zhag brkiyangs tel 'jig rten 'dir phan bdes bskrun pa'i byed po 'dzam bu na da'i gser gyi bum pa/ bsod nams kyi bdud rtsi'i yongs su gtam pas spyi bo nas dbang bskur ba'i* (LKS: w5b) *'khor yug rgya mtsho'i bar sa chen po dum bu gcig tu khyab pas/ [sems can] [thams cad] tshor ba dang lta ba'i dbang gi 'khrul pa med pa yangs dag pa'i blta ba la/ mang pos bskur ba'i rgyal po zhes pa'i tha snyed de dag go/* (LKS: 6a). In Indian mythology, Rāja Mahāsammata (*mang pos bskur ba'i rgyal po*: the king chosen by consensus) was the first king of the world. For this myth see, for example, Davidson 2019: 57–58.

⁶⁵ As part of my current project on Buddhism and law in 17th and 18th century Tibet, I am in the process of researching this phenomenon of adaptation and intertextuality.

[the evil deeds]. Conversely, if you take sides for the sake of flattery or sustenance, you will go to hell.”⁶⁶

This famous discourse, given by Padmasambhava on the Gung thang pass to Khri srong lde btsan's son Mu khri btsan po, is meant to have been his last before leaving Tibet. What we see addressed here is the problem faced by religiously minded rulers: that passing judgment on people so that they receive their due punishment is connected to the accumulation of negative karma.⁶⁷ Here Padmasambhava puts the prince at ease: it is better, to be honest, but strict than to be too lenient and malleable—the negative karma can always be purified later on. This passage appears just before the actual “pronouncements” begin, which means that it is perhaps an appeal for the intended audience of the text—presumably judges and other practitioners of the law—to be unbiased.

While I have not (yet) been able to trace the above as a direct citation or paraphrase of another work, this specific episode is well-known in Tibetan historiography.⁶⁸ In my search for parallels, I came across the same narrative—not set on the Gung thang pass—in which Padmasambhava gives Mu khri bstan po advice on how to rule, in the *Prayer in Seven Chapters* (*Le'u bdun ma*), a treasure text (*gter ma*) revealed by Sprul sku Bzang po grags pa in the 14th century:

You nourish the royal law with religious law. Since it is the degenerate age, finish off irreligious ones, idiots, frauds, and swindlers, and install the religious law. By acting in accord with Dharma, [your] kingdom will be happy. If your life is in danger or your royal power gets taken away, or if the king is downgraded to the rank of a commoner, you should prevent this from happening, taking the gods and demons as your witnesses!⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *slob dpon chen pos mang yul gung thang la nas lha sras mu khri btsan po la bka' rtsal pa/ nyon cig khyed kyis rgyal khrims 'di drangs por 'dzin cig/ des na nyes byas rgyal khrims kyis bcad na phyi la sbyangs zla mi dgos so/ de las zlog pa'i ngo [srung] zas phyir phyogs lhung byas na khyed rang dmyal bar 'gro'o/ zhes gsungs/* (LKS: 6a).

⁶⁷ A fair amount has been written on this conundrum in the Buddhist context, see, for example, Zimmermann 2006.

⁶⁸ A similar narrative can be found in the biography of Padmasambhava attributed to Ye shes mtsho rgyal but revealed by Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (the *Zangs gling ma*), with more elaborate advice—not set in Mang yul Gung thang here—for the king, his ministers, and his queens, to rule Tibet. See *The Lotus-Born* (Kunsang tr.): 155–157. For an examination of various recensions of this work, see Doney 2014.

⁶⁹ *rgyal khrims chos kyi khrims kyis 'tsho bar mdzod/ chos med dred po zol zog g.yo sgyu can/ snyigs dus 'byung bas tshar chod chos khrims tshugs/ chos bzhin spyod pas rgyal kham bde bar 'gyur/ sku srog nyen zhing mnga' thang 'phrog pa dang/ rgyal po dmangs su 'bebs pa'i gal byung na/ lha srin dpang du tshugs la bzlog pa mdzod/* (O rgyan gu ru padma 'byung gnas kyi rdo rje'i gsung 'khrul pa med pa'i gsol 'debs le'u bdun ma lo rgyus dang bcas pa (*Le'u bdun ma*): 608). According to Solmsdorf (2014: 13), this collection of

The message here is as above—being a just and religious king means being strict, decisive, and required the maintenance of existing hierarchies. All in all, when we review the narratives that regard the history of law in Tibet, we find that they generally are consistent with existent histories written by Tibetans and that they contain many references to Indic themes and texts.⁷⁰ It becomes clear that it is beneficial to read law texts in conjunction with Tibetan historiographies, with an appreciation of the Indic materials they may refer to. Even if the reader is not convinced that these legal texts are “Buddhist,” it can nonetheless be argued that without a thorough understanding of “Indo-Tibetan culture,” they cannot be fully understood. To dismiss these sometimes overly ornamental introductions to legal texts as Buddhist propaganda is to ignore the legal and Buddhist ideologies held by their authors.

5. Concluding Remarks

It is important to reiterate that for the current purpose, the actual history of law in Tibet is of hardly any importance. This article is primarily concerned with how the concept of law and its origins was formulated, how it developed over time, and particularly how Tibetan authors formulated the relationship between religious and royal law. Perhaps not surprisingly, when comparing, for example, earlier historiographical narratives of law to those from the Dga’ ldan pho brang era, we find that views of law, the role of the ruler, the notion of hierarchy and the chthonic effects of justice or injustice have remained largely the same. We find some significant differences, however, which need further examination.

By looking at legal treatises in a comparative and intertextual way, we start to see the beginnings of answers to questions that scholars previously have asked about these documents, but also to the questions that we have so far neglected to ask of these legal works. These do not necessarily deal with the history of law in Tibet, but have

eight treasure-texts—and in particular the here cited section, widely known as the *Gsol ’debs bsam pa lhun grub ma*—addresses the rulers of this area and played a decisive role in tying Padmasambhava to the later royal house of Gung thang, since the king of Gung thang (16th century) was supposed to have been an incarnation of Mu khri btsan po.

⁷⁰ Van der Kuijp supposes that the proverbs common in the Tibetan legal texts (*zhal lce*) are inspired by or derived from *nītiśāstra* materials (*lugs kyi bstan bcos*) (1999: 280). There are indications that the influence of this genre of texts on the Tibetan legal texts is even greater than previously assumed—something I intend to elaborate on in future publications.

to do with the reception history of the legal texts. For example, why were there no block prints of the Tibetan legal texts? Why do most of these works lack an author signature or any kind of colophon, even when they were meant to have been written in an era in which this was common practice? It is my hypothesis that author signatures and the creation of block prints would “finalize” these documents. In the eyes of Tibetan legal specialists, this may have been neither necessary nor desirable. If legal texts were conceptualized as flexible documents—from which one can pick and mix—authorship and a fixed print would counter that very flexibility. This further explains the intertextuality of the works—borrowing and paraphrasing without reference must have been entirely acceptable—perhaps even more so than in other Tibetan genres of literature. This also means that we have to start paying better attention to when the texts deviate from the general narrative. These deviations may provide us clues as to by whom and what for these texts were (newly) composed (here, in the literal sense of putting things together).

Returning to the original question of this paper—which came first, secular law or religious rules—I want to point out that this touches on a larger issue with which philosophers of law, such as Sandel,⁷¹ have grappled, namely the question of whether a just society necessarily promotes the virtue of that society, or even whether justice is required as a basis to promote virtue. Rawls, a prominent political thinker, argues that a modern just society should promote freedom, not virtue.⁷²

However, when considering the evidence presented here, I think it is safe to say that most Tibetan rulers and authors of legal texts in premodern times saw “royal laws” as prerequisites to virtue (in the broadest sense of the word) and subsequently to social order. Social order and virtue, in turn, were viewed as essential to the practice of religion.

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⁷¹ Sandel 2009: 9.

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Reincarnation at Work: A Case Study of the Incarnation Lineage of Sum pa mkhan po

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There were some shameless, deceitful, and cunning women who became pregnant and insisted to all directions like the wind that it was none other than a rebirth of the deceased lama in a false way, as I mentioned above. To this, even their husbands became confident. However, they gave birth to daughters eventually.¹

After the death of the previous Jebtsundamba *kātuktu*, the queen of the Tüsiyetü Khan became pregnant. It was proclaimed to all that this would be the reincarnation of the Jebtsundamba. However, when the time arrived, a daughter was born. This affair was laughable. As a result the Mongols came to be disdained.²

In the Fire-Snake Year of the twelfth *rab byung* (1737 CE), the Amdo monk-scholar Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor (1704–1788) was invited to the capital city of the Qing dynasty for an audience with the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735–1796). As it had been only two years since Qianlong ascended to the throne, Sum pa mkhan po was also a relatively young religious figure, only having finished his studies in Central Tibet a few years previously. It seems that both were not impressed with each other at their first meeting, since the court did not host this religious figure for long. They had little contact after that occasion,³ but we can find a striking similarity when both took up the matter of the incarnation institution in the last years of their lives, as witnessed in the two accounts cited above.

While the first account is taken from the concluding remarks of Sum pa mkhan po's critique of the incarnation institution in his autobio-

¹ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 4b.

² From Qianlong emperor's *Lama shuo*. I followed the English translation of Oidtmann 2018: 241.

³ Sum pa mkhan po had another meeting with the Qianlong emperor during his second trip to the capital city in the Water-Dog Year (1742), but this was much shorter than the previous occasion due to the former's sudden illness. For this trip, see Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 101a–101b.

graphy completed in 1788,⁴ the second is from the Qianlong emperor's famous *Lama shuo* 喇嘛說 ("Discourse on Lamas"), penned in 1792.⁵ From their common misogynist stance at the end of the account, Sum pa mkhan po and the Qianlong emperor both revealed the same concerns regarding the abuse of the incarnation institution by the Mongols by retelling exactly the same anecdote. This coincidence indicates that the two must have shared the similar sense of crisis about the same issue, although they adopted different social and religious stances.

This essay will address a lesser-known aspect of this historical issue in 18th-century Inner Asia. While the background and implications of Qianlong's writing of *Lama shuo* have attracted much scholarly attention and are well known,⁶ Sum pa mkhan po's opinion and role in the incarnation institution has received almost no attention. I will first provide an analytic comparison of perspectives on the incarnation institution from opposite poles of the empire, and then offer a case study of further details of Sum pa mkhan po's involvement in the development of the incarnation institution in order to shed light on the lesser-known, but more emic, side of the topic.

1. Diverging Discourses on Incarnation

It is commonly known that Qianlong's *Lama shuo* was motivated by the Sino-Nepalese War (1788–1792), the origin of which, as the emperor concluded, was a property dispute among incarnate lamas of sibling relationship from the family of the recently deceased 6th Panchen Lama Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes (1738–1780). Bearing a grudge for the deprivation of his inheritance right of the late Panchen Lama's property, the 10th Zhwa dmar Chos grub rgya mtsho (1742–1792) entered Nepal and incited the Gurkha's invasion of Tibet, which was driven back by the Qing military. Among the many measures taken in the aftermath, the Qianlong emperor decided to mend what he thought was a corrupt system of the incarnation institution. *Lama shuo* was the emperor's proclamation for this amendment. Additionally, when we read the whole text of *Lama shuo* carefully, it reveals deeper layers of the emperor's opinion regarding Tibetan Buddhism.

⁴ For the completion year for Sum pa mkhan po's autobiography, see Kim 2018: 11–12.

⁵ For examining *Lama shuo*, I used Zhang 1988: 339–343, Beijing tushuguan jinshizu 1997: 37–40, and Oidtmann 2018: 239–243.

⁶ For a few exemplary studies of the subject, see Lessing 1942, Hevia 1993, and Oidtmann 2018.

The Qianlong emperor's opinion centered on two main topics when he authored *Lama shuo*. The first one is his refutation of criticism that he was too much inclined to worshipping and favoring Tibetan Buddhism and its hierarchs. The emperor invoked several comparisons with the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) to emphasize how differently and practically he used Tibetan Buddhism in his regime. Since the Yuan rulers revered Tibetan lamas, a variety of abuses had been perpetrated by these religious figures. By enumerating cases of abuse one by one, the emperor showed that he understood the bad effects of excessive worshipping and demonstrated that he knew what he was doing when it came to Tibetan Buddhism.

The second topic was why and how he attempted to systematize the process of selecting new incarnate lamas in Tibet and Mongolia. Although the self-interest of an individual lama or clan dominating the institution was the primary problem, the emperor also pointed out that any prospective conflict between Tibetans and Mongols over the selection results was to be pre-empted by taking appropriate measures. The result was an introduction of "the golden urn selection."⁷ In addition, an equally important position assumed by the emperor was that he did not intend to replace the original tradition of the selection process of incarnate lamas in its entirety. Instead, the emperor proposed that he would improve the problematic system by adding the method of "the golden urn selection" to the final stage, while the beginning stage of consulting oracles for finding new incarnates remained intact.⁸ In doing so, the ultimate goal of the emperor was a peaceful *status quo* in the outer regions, namely, Tibet and Mongolia.

On the other hand, Sum pa mkhan po's critique of the incarnation institution originated in his humble refusal to accept being an incarnate lama.⁹ In the opening part of his autobiography, Sum pa mkhan po discusses the topic of incarnation, including his own eligibility. He gives a succinct but interesting overview of incarnation as follows:

1. There is no doubt that great sages from Śākyamuni to Tsong kha pa's two disciples¹⁰ have reincarnated in a continuous

⁷ For recent discussions of the origin, implementation, and use of "the golden urn," see Sperling 2012 and Oidtmann 2018.

⁸ The emperor quoted a relevant maxim from a Chinese classic of *The Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) for the principle he adopted. See Oidtmann 2018: 243.

⁹ Such a sense of self-humiliation is common in Tibetan autobiographical literature. For a discussion on the subject, see Roesler 2020. I owe this reference to the anonymous reviewer of this article.

¹⁰ Between Śākyamuni to Tsong kha pa's disciples, Sum pa mkhan po enumerates such sages: in India, "Six Ornaments and Two Supreme Ones (i.e., Nāgārjuna,

sequence;

2. Originally, there was no custom of incarnation in Tibet, but sages were intentionally born in Tibet to disseminate Buddha's teachings;

3. In later times, incarnation became popular in Central Tibet, Kham, Amdo, and Mongolia, and incarnate lamas became "as many as the number of ears in a good harvest";

4. However, authentic incarnations that are attended by unmistakably miraculous signs and have memories of their former lives are so rare that only a few exist in Tibet;¹¹

5. Therefore, those who were selected as incarnations should make every effort to generate faith in both Buddhists and non-Buddhists and not to lose face before their disciples.¹²

Problems arose in the system from this stage. In Sum pa mkhan po's opinion, the main problem with the incarnation institution was twofold. The first issue was that the incarnation institution was regionally limited. He emphasized that he had never heard of so-called incarnations being reborn in the same area where they had been born in their previous life. Originally, no such concept of incarnation existed in Tibet, and incarnations intentionally appeared in non-native areas in order to disseminate the Buddha's teachings more broadly. But many influential people began to appropriate the system, and the number of incarnate lamas grew to be too many in number and became fixed as a local custom.¹³

This corrupted state of affairs is connected to the institution's second problem. The incarnation institution was increasingly being monopolized by the rich families during Sum pa mkhan po's lifetime, and there appeared false incarnations. There were even cases where parents lied about the dates of their children's births to present them closer to the time of death of deceased lamas, or concocted omens or other evidence of their children being incarnations. In the end, these impostors made ordinary people doubt the Buddha's teachings *per se*.¹⁴

The two discourses by the Qianlong emperor and Sum pa mkhan po appear similar in their criticism, but there are some key differences

Āryadeva, Aśaṅga, Vasubandhu, Dignāga, and Dharmakīrti; Guṇaprabha and Śākyaprabha)" and 84 mahāsiddhas; in Kashmir and Nepal, many siddhas and paṇḍitas; in Tibet, Mar pa, Mi la ras pa, and Bu ston Rin chen grub, as those who were incarnated.

¹¹ An interlinear note here says: "[only] such as Dalai and Panchen Lamas and Lcang skya [are authentic incarnations] in Tibet."

¹² Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 3a–3b.

¹³ As indicated above, the regional limitedness and monopoly by powerful clans of the incarnation institution was mentioned by the Qianlong emperor too.

¹⁴ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 4a–4b.

between the critiques. Most significantly, their main concerns were totally different: while Qianlong was worried about any harmful effect on the administration of the Qing, especially in its outer regions, what mattered most to Sum pa mkhan po was any possible degeneration of the public opinion on Buddhist teachings. Another important difference was that Sum pa mkhan po was an insider in the institution and was in a traditional position to participate in the actual course of development of the incarnation institution, but the Qianlong emperor was a meddling outsider, at best, whose attempted efforts to add his authority to the system could have been easily seen as interference in the eyes of many Tibetan Buddhists.

2. *Sum pa mkhan po's Involvement in the Incarnation Institution*

Given the capacity of being an insider of the system, it would be significant to elucidate Sum pa mkhan po's experience of and involvement in the incarnation institution. Fortunately, his autobiography provides the details of such information and what follows is a reconstruction based mainly on the accounts about his lineage and himself from the autobiography.

2.1. *Beginning of the Sum pa*

The Sum pa has been known as one of major incarnation lineages at Dgon lung Monastery (Chin. Youningsi 佑寧寺, established in 1704), a large-scale Tibetan monastic complex located in present-day Huzhu 互助 county in eastern Qinghai province of China.¹⁵ Among the major incarnations, Lcang skya, Thu'u bkwan, and Sum pa were regarded as the three preeminent lineages.¹⁶ In fact, the significance of the Sum pa incarnation lineage should be recognized especially in its relation to Dgon lung's early history, in which the Sum pa were a local clan community that had a strong connection with Dgon lung's establishment, rather than an incarnation institution *per se*.

"Sum pa" is regarded to be the name of a clan mentioned in accounts of the Tibetan Empire (7th–9th centuries). Sum pa mkhan po himself also indicated that "it is probable that [our] clan is the Sum pa [listed] among the 18 great clans of [imperial] Tibet."¹⁷ Sum pa mkhan po's "Sum pa" is sometimes rendered "Sum bha," which suggests

¹⁵ For a recent full-scale study of Dgon lung Monastery, see Sullivan 2013.

¹⁶ Han 1982: 390–415.

¹⁷ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 7a. For "the great eighteen clans" (Tib. *rus chen bco brgyad*), see Haarh 1969: 259, 282.

another possible etymology for the name.¹⁸ In any case, it seems that there is no clear evidence that ties the current Sum pa clan to the Sum pa clan mentioned in ancient accounts.

In his autobiography, Sum pa mkhan po identifies the current Sum pa clan with great specificity. According to him, the Sum pas were called “Be’i kya,” most likely in Chinese.¹⁹ In a modern list of Tibetan clan names in Huzhu county and adjacent Tianzhu 天祝 county in Gansu, we can find a “Baizha’er 白扎尔 (or Beizha’er 北札尔)” clan that may be closely associated with the “Be’i kya.”²⁰ The Sum pa also had a connection to a Chinese polity. An anecdote from Sum pa mkhan po’s autobiography indicates that a Sum pa ancestor took care of one of 13 temples built along the Sino-Tibetan border under the auspices of the mother of Ming emperor Wanli 萬曆 (r. 1573–1620).²¹ Regardless of how long these Sum pas lived before Sum pa mkhan po, the significance of Sum pa mkhan po’s work with respect to the subsequent history of the Sum pas has to do with Dgon lung Monastery.

The Sum pas were certainly already an important clan in the area when Dgon lung was founded. The first abbot (Tib. *khri pa*) of Dgon lung came from this clan, and it seems that his appointment was not simply a fortuitous one. The first abbot, Sum pa *slob dpon che ba* (“greater master”) Dam chos rgya mtsho (d.u.), had earned his reputation as a scholar even before Dgon lung was established. Born in Amdo, young Dam chos rgya mtsho traveled to Central Tibet for his studies. He was given the epithet *slob dpon pa* (“master”) by the 3rd Phags pa lha Mthong ba don ldan (1567–1604) when he was invited to Chab mdo in Kham before returning to Amdo.²² He was likely chosen as an abbot not only because of his scholarly achievements but because of his father’s important role in the building of Dgon lung. According to Sum pa mkhan po’s account, Dam chos rgya mtsho’s

¹⁸ This different rendering is especially seen in accounts of later generations. In the woodblock printings of Sum pa mkhan po’s works (produced no later than the end of the 18th century) “Sum bha” was not in use. However, the mid-19th-century accounts such as *Deb ther rgya mtsho* have both Sum pa and Sum bha. A very recent account by Per Nyi ma ’dzin uses “Sum bha” for all the lineage (2007: 81–98).

¹⁹ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 7a.

²⁰ Chen Qingying *et al.* 1990: 335–340.

²¹ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 7a. The emperor’s mother allegedly had people build the temples after she completed the project of producing and disseminating 100 copies of the golden *Bka’ ’gyur*. This account is repeated in *Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas* 1982: 63. I have been unable to find any evidence from Chinese historical sources on this enterprise sponsored by Wanli’s mother, Empress Dowager Xiaoding 孝定 (1544–1614), who is known as a devout Buddhist.

²² Thu’u bkwan 03 Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma 1988: 27–28. Phags pa lha is an incarnation lineage of Dga’ ldan byams pa gling in Chab mdo, Kham.

father, Sum pa Don grub (d.u.), received a written permission from the Lanzhou *zongdu* 蘭州總督 to use the land to build Dgon lung.²³ This story suggests that the Sum pas played a key role in the establishment of Dgon lung.

Sum pa mkhan po mentions another aspect in which the Sum pa were important in establishing the monastic community. When Sum pa Dam chos rgya mtsho returned to his hometown from Chab mdo, he helped Rgyal sras Don yod chos kyi rgya mtsho (d. ca. 1637), the founder of Dgon lung, to establish a “stream of monks” (Tib. *grwa rgyun*) for the new monastery. He provided young monks by “buying many boys” (Tib. *bu chung mang po nyos nas*) from their families with horses and other types of wealth.²⁴ The property that Dam chos rgya mtsho used to accomplish this purpose does not seem to have been his personal property; it is very likely that he used the wealth of his father Sum pa Don grub or that of the clan as a whole. When Dam chos rgya mtsho stayed for many years in Central Tibet and Kham, Sum pa Don grub, or at least the Sum pa clan, played a key role in establishing Dgon lung by procuring its estate. Later, when he had returned, they continued their relationship with the monastery by helping to provide its initial population of monks.

After they had provided the monastery with land and personnel, the Sum pas were entrusted with the creation of its systems of discipline and curriculum. The founder of Dgon lung Monastery, Rgyal sras Don yod chos kyi rgya mtsho, bestowed the authority over the monastery on Sum pa Dam chos rgya mtsho and then left for Central Tibet for good. Dam chos rgya mtsho twice assumed the *khri pa* position; he held office as the 1st *khri pa* (1609–1612) and again as the 4th *khri pa* (1621–1627). During his tenures, Dam chos rgya mtsho taught topics on Buddhist studies and as a result nurtured many prominent disciples such as the 1st Lcang skya Grags pa 'od zer (d. 1641). He also established a salary system to promote the monks' studies.²⁵ As his epithet “*slob dpon che ba*” indicates, he earned enough of a reputation that when he passed away, his disciples sought his rebirth. However, this lineage was not maintained under the name of Sum pa for several reasons that will be discussed below.

²³ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 7b. In the early 17th century, the Ming government installed *sanbian zongdu* 三邊總督 (i.e., a governor-general of three border areas) whose jurisdiction covered the Gansu area. However, Sum pa mkhan po might have used the term *zongdu* not as an exact position but just as referring to a highest authority in Lanzhou, i.e., *lan gru mkhar gyi dpon* (a ruler of the Lanzhou governor's office).

²⁴ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 7b.

²⁵ Thu'u bkwan 03 Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma 1988: 29–30.

The comparative epithet *slob dpon che ba* (“greater master”) implies that there was “*slob dpon chung ba*,” a lesser master of Sum pa, too. Dam chos rgya mtsho’s younger brother, Dam chos rgyal mtshan (d.u.), was the Sum pa *slob dpon chung ba*. He helped his brother solidify the foundations of the newly established monastery. Dam chos rgyal mtshan served as Dgon lung’s 7th *khri pa* from 1633 to 1637. He was also known as an instrumental figure in protecting Xining 西寧 and Dgon lung against Chinese rebel forces led by Li Zicheng 李自成 when they approached the area in 1644.²⁶ Dam chos rgyal mtshan established connections with Te’i thung Monastery and Se ra lung Monastery in Tianzhu County, which were maintained up to Sum pa mkhan po’s time.²⁷ Thus, Sum pa *slob dpon chung ba* Dam chos rgyal mtshan, like his elder brother, was a significant figure in the early history of Dgon lung Monastery.

Since these two bothers played a significant role in the founding and early development of Dgon lung, titles of “greater” Sum pa and “lesser” Sum pa have remained as vestiges of their contributions. There have been attempts to connect these two titles to the Sum pa incarnation lineage of later generations. Han Rulin has suggested that there existed two incarnation lineages for Sum pa,²⁸ but only the incarnation lineage of the “lesser” Sum pa brother has survived.

2.2. The Sum pa Bifurcation

Although there is no indication that the system of incarnate lamas was in full swing in early 17th-century Amdo, there is some evidence that the system did already exist in the region by that time.²⁹ If the Sum pas

²⁶ In Tibetan, the name of the rebel leader is given as “lu’u zi” or “lu’u ci.” Some sources explain it as a Tibetan transliteration of Chinese *Li zei* 李賊 (“Li [zicheng]’s bandits”) but this is highly doubtful. In the last years of the Ming dynasty, there was a rebel leader Lu Wenbin 魯文彬, who was subordinate to Li zicheng and active around the Xining area. His family name seems to be closer to “lu’u.” However, more research is needed to know how Li Zicheng’s rebellion was understood by the Amdo—especially Tibetan speaking—people at that time.

²⁷ For these two monasteries, see *Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Tianzhu zangzu zizhixian weiyuanhui* 2000: 25–56; 165–70. For Sum pa mkhan po’s relationship with these monasteries, see Kim 2018: 235–254. Rong bo Skal ldan rgya mtsho (1607–1677) also mentioned activities of these monasteries in a relation to Dgon lung Monastery (Sullivan 2013: 47).

²⁸ Han 1982: 409.

²⁹ For the first incarnation in Amdo, see Tuttle 2011, and Sullivan 2013: 32n102. Also see Sullivan’s description of the incarnation system in Sde pa *chos rje* Bstan ’dzin blo bzang rgya mtsho’s time (1593–1638): “This suggests that the phenomenon of recognizing the rebirths of lamas was still unfamiliar in Amdo at this time” (Sullivan 2013: 112).

may have attempted to use the incarnation system to keep their influence intact, it seems that they developed their system in a very clumsy way, probably because the institution was very new to them. It may be that maintaining the power of the bloodline was not the only motive for attempting to find an incarnation of Sum pa Dam chos rgya mtsho. Religious and spiritual elements must have played a role as well, given his attainment of the status of master in Chab mdo and his contribution to the scholarly foundations of Dgon lung's early history. Such secular and religious motives must have mingled in a complex fashion as his retinue searched for his incarnation.

The attempt to create an incarnation lineage for Dam chos rgya mtsho seems to have developed along an unintended path and only survived as a vestige in later generations of the Sum pas. Sum pa mkhan po emphasized the meaning of Dam chos rgya mtsho's being an incarnate lama:

Specifically, everyone knows that *khri chen* La mo ba Blo gros rgya mtsho himself, who was the next incarnation of the one known as Sum pa *slob dpon che ba* [Dam chos rgya mtsho], was prophesized to be the one who would appear as a *dga' ldan khri pa*, an emanation of Tsong kha pa himself, [as recorded] in *the Book of Tsong kha pa's Emanations*. The former Lcang skya also said so. This *khri chen* sprul sku (i.e. *khri chen* La mo ba, a.k.a. Galdan Siregetü qutuytu) also admitted it, and when the Mañjuśrī Great Emperor (i.e., Kangxi 康熙) asked him [regarding] his life lineage he answered like that. [Thus] the lineage of Sum pa lamas is known to be blessed.³⁰

It is noteworthy that *khri chen* La mo ba Blo gros rgya mtsho (1635–1688) was identified as the next incarnation of Sum pa Dam chos rgya mtsho. *Khri chen* La mo ba Blo gros rgya mtsho was the 44th holder of the position of *Dga' ldan khri pa*, the most prestigious position in the whole Dge lug pa hierarchy. Born in Amdo, he spent some time in Mongolia during his childhood. After traveling to Central Tibet for studies, he became an accomplished scholar, ultimately ascending to the *Dga' ldan khri pa* position in 1682. When conflict broke out between Oirat and Khalkha in 1686, he was dispatched by the *Dga' ldan pho brang* government to reconcile them. After that, he visited Beijing at the invitation of the Kangxi emperor. On his way back to Tibet, Blo gros rgya mtsho passed away somewhere in Amdo. He was also known by the title Galdan Siregetü qutuytu.³¹ The suggestion that Sum pa Dam chos rgya mtsho had been the preceding incarnation of this prominent figure was only partially successful, as indicated in this

³⁰ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 7a.

³¹ For more about Galdan Siregetü qutuytu and his lineage, see Kim 2019: 89–94.

passage from an 18th-century record of the Galdan Siregetü qutuγtu authored by the 7th Dalai Lama (1708–1757):

It has been said that he was then born in the area of Dgon lung in Mdo smad as Sum pa Dam chos rgya mtsho, a realized master who would nourish the Teachings and beings in that area. But since I have neither seen nor heard the story of his full biography, I am unable to write such [things] here.³²

This statement indicates that Sum pa Dam chos rgya mtsho was once placed in the line of incarnations that 18th-century figures like Sum pa mkhan po or the 7th Dalai Lama Bskal bzang rgya mtsho knew as Galdan Siregetü qutuγtu, but his place in that lineage did not go unquestioned. The 3rd Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737–1802) also wrote:

It is widely known that his (i.e., Sum pa's) subsequent incarnation was none other than La mo *khri chen* Blo gros rgya mtsho. Yet despite that being widely known, [he] is not included in *Khri sprul sku blo bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma'i 'khrungs rabs gsol 'debs* composed by Panchen Rinpoche.³³

The belief in Sum pa's subsequent incarnation as *khri chen* was still in circulation in the mid–19th century. It is mentioned briefly in this passage from Brag dgon pa's *Deb ther rgya mtsho*: "It is known that the subsequent incarnation in the line was *khri chen* [Ngag dbang] blo gros rgya mtsho."³⁴

However, in more recent sources, there is an increased certainty of his place in the Galdan Siregetü qutuγtu lineage, rather than in Sum pa's own lineage. Gser tog Blo bzang tshul khriims rgya mtsho (1845–1915) gives a description of the "Dga' ldan gser khri" lineage when providing an account of the 67th abbot of Sku 'bum Monastery, Blo bzang thub bstan rgya mtsho (1847–1902), who was considered an incarnation of Galdan Siregetü qutuγtu.³⁵ In this account, the Galdan Siregetü qutuγtu lineage is reformed and Sum pa Dam chos rgya mtsho is described as a member of that line. More recently, the 5th Shing bza Skal bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1925–1998) provided the most detailed account of the Galdan Siregetü qutuγtu lineage. As Shing bza's account indicates, Sum pa Dam chos rgya mtsho has now

³² Tā la'i bla ma 07 Bskal bzang rgya mtsho 1983: 3b–4a.

³³ Thu'u bkwan 03 Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma 1988: 30. I have been unable to locate this work by Panchen. Did Thu'u bkwan confuse it with a work by the 7th Dalai Lama?

³⁴ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982: 57.

³⁵ Gser tog Blo bzang tshul khriims rgya mtsho 1982: 170–182.

been firmly absorbed into the Galdan Siregetü qutuγtu lineage.³⁶ Another biographical account of successive Galdan Siregetü qutuγtus by Sangs rgyas rin chen also places Sum pa Dam chos rgya mtsho as a fixed figure in the earlier line of Galdan Siregetü qutuγtus.³⁷

Despite these developments, the idea of forming a “greater” Sum pa lineage has not lost its vitality on the Sum pa’s side. Per Nyi ma ’dzin, in his account of the Sum pa lineage, suggests that La mo ba Blo gros rgya mtsho was a lineage holder. According to him, the Sum pa lineage is unilinear, with Sum pa Dam chos rgya mtsho being the first incarnation, La mo ba Blo gros rgya mtsho the second, and Sum pa mkhan po the third.³⁸ It is patently obvious that the author fabricated the lineage and has ignored the complexity that existed in the early history of the Sum pa lineage. He also disregards the existence of “greater” and “lesser” Sum pas, substituting a unilinear incarnation lineage in their place.³⁹

The reality of the lineage is complex because in the beginning the Sum pas held local power based on their property and kinship relations. Their local power also had some connection with Chinese authority. At some point, a son of this clan was sent to Central Tibet to increase his prestige through education. When he returned to his hometown, the stage for his future activities had been already prepared. His achievements led to the development of an incarnation lineage with respect to him, but the line was unstable and absorbed by a more powerful monastic institution. Thus, the “greater” Sum pa is now lost to us. However, another Sum pa incarnation lineage managed to overcome these obstacles by looking outside. This new version of the Sum pa incarnation lineage identified Sum pa mkhan po as its new Sum pa. What follows is an examination of the details of this new chapter in the Sum pa lineage.

³⁶ Skal bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan 1990. The author also gives Dam chos rgya mtsho’s death year as 1634, a piece of information that is not found in any other source. This information seems to have been added in an attempt to integrate him into the line of Galdan Siregetü qutuγtu incarnations more smoothly.

³⁷ Sangs rgyas rin chen 1991: 108–118.

³⁸ Per Nyi ma ’dzin 2007: 81–88.

³⁹ Here one may recall Vostrikov’s remark on Tibetans’ perfunctoriness in formulating histories of incarnations: “The Tibetans do not pay much attention to the lack of chronological sequence in the listing of incarnations. The fact that these texts ascribe, to the same person, two or more simultaneous re-births in the past is also taken by the Tibetan very lightly” (Vostrikov 1970: 97n307). Nevertheless, I believe that one should detect a meaning behind this “perfunctoriness” with careful analyses of relevant literature, rather than simply ignore them as “unscientific.” I owe this reference to the anonymous reviewer of this article.

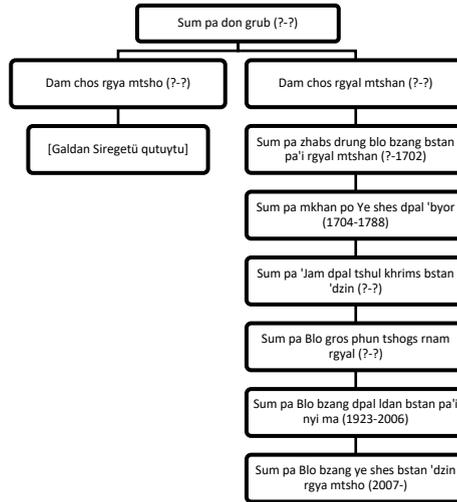


Fig. 1 — Genealogy of Sum pa incarnation lineages

2.3. Identification of Ye shes dpal 'byor as a Sum pa Incarnation

While the greater Sum pa, *slob dpon che ba*, was absorbed into the more powerful Galdan Siregetü qutuytu's lineage, the lesser Sum pa lineage has survived. The path that this line of incarnations has taken shows its own distinctive development that illuminates the functions and mechanism of the incarnation institution in 18th-century Amdo. We begin our examination of the details of how this lineage developed and has survived with the second lesser Sum pa, Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (d. 1702).

Little is known about how Sum pa *zhabs drung* Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan was chosen as the incarnation of Sum pa *slob dpon chung ba*. According to Sum pa mkhan po, he was born in Shing ru, a part of the Dgon lung monastic estate. He went to Central Tibet for studies and his activities in Central Tibet are attested by La mo *dge bshes* Ngag dbang 'phrin las (1661–1726),⁴⁰ who spent some time with Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan in Central Tibet. Ngag dbang 'phrin las was later called in to test the young Sum pa mkhan po because of that experience.⁴¹ After his return, Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan only wanted to live as a hermit but could not, because he had to take a leading role in the retinue of the 2nd Lcang skya Ngag dbang blo bzang

⁴⁰ This La mo *dge bshes* later became more commonly known as the first A mdo zhwa dmar, an important incarnation lineage in the Amdo area especially for La mo bde chen and its sub-monasteries.

⁴¹ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 13a.

chos ldan (1642–1714) when the latter traveled to Beijing in 1693.⁴² His title *zhabs drung* (which Sum pa mkhan po inherited for a time) was probably awarded to him for his service to Lcang skya.⁴³ He was likely a close servant to Lcang skya because he traveled to Doloon Nuur⁴⁴ and Beijing with him again in 1701. On that trip, when Lcang skya's company arrived in Beijing from Doloon Nuur, Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan fell ill and passed away there in 1702. We can be sure that Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan was quite important to Lcang skya, because the account of his death is preserved in verse in a long section of Lcang skya's biography:

On behalf of Sum bha [sic] *zhabs drung*, who had fallen ill with a serious sickness, I made donations to more than a 1,000 sangha who received their salaries in Beijing, performed a healing rite, and provided whatever medical care was available. Nevertheless, I was struck with immense grief because, as if it were inevitable, he passed into nirvāṇa.⁴⁵

It took some time to begin the process of finding a new Sum pa. In 1710, when a consecration ceremony was held for a newly built assembly hall at Dgon lung, the 2nd Lcang skya publicly raised the issue. Interestingly enough, instead of initiating the search himself, Lcang skya entrusted the task to 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa Ngag dbang brtson 'grus (1648–1722). When 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa visited Dgon lung Monastery, Lcang skya told him, “[My] friend Sum pa *zhabs drung* Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, who escorted me to China and was a virtuous friend in the spirit of the Bka' gdams, passed away. May you find an incarnation of him.” 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa delightedly accepted the task.⁴⁶

Some accounts about Sum pa mkhan po explain that this 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa was the person who led the identification of Sum pa mkhan po as the Sum pa incarnate. In a very broad sense, this is correct. However, a detailed analysis of the situation reveals that frictions and rivalry existed during the identification process. This becomes clearer when we realize that 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa was not the only figure who was involved in identifying Sum pa mkhan po, nor was he the only person trying to find Sum pa's incarnation. An

⁴² Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 8a.

⁴³ The literal meaning of “*zhabs drung*” is “at the feet of.” Generally, it refers to a servant of a great lama. When Sum pa mkhan po arrived in Central Tibet, he was still called “Sum pa *zhabs drung*” (Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 38a).

⁴⁴ Situated 250 km north of Beijing, Doloon Nuur was a religious center for Mongolian Buddhists during the Qing dynasty, with several monastic complexes at the location.

⁴⁵ Lcang skya 02 Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan (19th century): 27b–28a.

⁴⁶ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 12a.

attendant of the former Sum pa, whose name was Sum pa *chos rje* Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (d. 1740), began a parallel search for the incarnation. Phun tshogs rnam rgyal was a “kitchen servant” (Tib. *thab g.yog*) for Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan. He even traveled to Central Tibet to perform a funeral ritual for the deceased Sum pa and made a supplication to the 5th Panchen Blo bzang ye shes (1663–1737) to facilitate Sum pa's quick return.⁴⁷

Sum pa *chos rje* Phun tshogs rnam rgyal was born in Sum pa village and went to Ngam ring in Tsang to attain his *rab 'byams pa* title when he was 17. He was also a participant in other important moments in Dgon lung's history. Before Dgon lung's destruction during Blo bzang bstan 'dzin's Rebellion in 1723–1724, he was among three *chos rjes* (“religious lord”) who tried to dissuade Dgon lung monks from joining Blo bzang bstan 'dzin's troops. Perhaps thanks to his role in the event, he became the first *khri pa* of Dgon lung after it was re-established in 1729. It seems obvious that Sum pa *chos rje* Phun tshogs rnam rgyal was one of the Sum pas who had localized power and had a very similar background to the two Sum pa brothers. This Sum pa *chos rje* also became an incarnation lineage. It seems likely that he lived at a time when people formed as many incarnation lineages as possible, so long as candidates had academic training and were politically active.

According to Sum pa mkhan po, Phun tshogs rnam rgyal was not happy with others' attempts to identify Sum pa mkhan po as the incarnation of Sum pa *zhabs drung*. He believed that another child, born in Shing ru, the same town where the former Sum pa *zhabs drung* was born, was the right incarnation. He even made a prophecy inquiry (Tib. *lung zhu ba*) regarding this boy in Central Tibet and seems to have received a positive answer. He may have been looking to identify an incarnation from the prior incarnation's village to preserve local authority. When he informed 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa of his work, however, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa blocked his inquiry, declaring:

Given that, other than that the prophecy simply conforms to the petitioner, there is not much certainty [in this method], we will only be certain when he unerringly recognizes the prayer beads, water bottle, three supports, and such, of his own prior incarnation.⁴⁸

We do not know why 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa blocked Sum pa *chos rje*'s attempt. In any case, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa instead entrusted this task to a descendant of Gushri khan, Erdeni Taiji Tshang ba

⁴⁷ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 8b.

⁴⁸ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 12a.

skyabs.⁴⁹ Then Tshang ba skyabs dispatched messengers to many places and finally Sum pa mkhan po's parents informed one of them that their seven-year-old son was showing monk's habits.⁵⁰ 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa might have wanted to thwart the continuation of Sum pa's local authority in this matter, instead relying on his own patrons of the Khoshut Mongols.

But the story does not end there. The identification process unfolded in a way that it was not much in the hands of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa either. People from La mo bde chen Monastery got involved in the search for the incarnation, in which the most important person was aforementioned La mo *dge bshes* Ngag dbang 'phrin las. At that time, La mo bde chen Monastery was an emerging monastic power in the middle of the Amdo region and its founders were competing with people who were subordinate to 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa who later formed a more powerful religious center called Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil Monastery. The atmosphere of this confrontation had a lingering effect on Sum pa mkhan po's later life.⁵¹

Thus, the boy sent by Erdeni Taiji Tshang ba skyabs was confirmed at La mo bde chen. However, rather than finalizing the incarnation discovery process, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa sent Sum pa mkhan po to Thar shul Chos skyong rgya mtsho under the pretext of continuing his education, but probably also to verify his identity as the incarnation of the lama through an examination of his character. It is interesting that the new Galdan Siregetü qutuγtu Blo bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma (1689–1762) made the final notification to the Sum pa residence in Dgon lung Monastery after Thar shul confirmed the final decision.

However, the monastery did not accept that Thar shul and Galdan Siregetü qutuγtu had the authority. After receiving Galdan Siregetü qutuγtu's notification, Sum pa *chos rje* dispatched *dge slong* Blo bzang rab brtan to the family of Sum pa mkhan po. They made a final confirmation of the child's identity by having him identify the former Sum pa's old books. The identification was successful and the *dge slong* brought the news to Dgon lung. Dgon lung arranged an escort company for Sum pa mkhan po's family, but a female chieftain of the tribe refused to cooperate, saying, "'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa told us that [this child] should be brought to [Dgon lung] next year." Instead of Dgon lung's company, the escort was led by the female chieftain, and Sum pa mkhan po finally arrived at the Sum pa residence in the third

⁴⁹ Erdeni Taiji Tshang ba skyabs was a grandson of Gu shri khan's sixth son, Rdo rje dalai hungtaiji.

⁵⁰ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 12b.

⁵¹ For this La mo bde chen Monastery and its competition with 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's group of monastics, see Kim 2019.

month in the Water-Dragon Year (approx. 1712), a date that had been specified by 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa himself.⁵²

Even though Dgon lung and the Sum pas took the initiative to find a new Sum pa, the process was seized by non-Dgon lung powers once the process began. The non-Dgon lung powers that interfered with the identification were the newly built monasteries and Oirat Mongolian communities. Dgon lung by then was already an old powerhouse whose authority was based on their local power and groups of clan communities. Although they had tried to adjust their method of transmission of power by adopting the incarnation lineage, the lineage itself was soon absorbed by the more well-organized groups whose connections were more far-reaching. Sum pa mkhan po's identification process shows this complex nexus of monastic and secular powers in early 18th-century Amdo. As the Sum pa lineage was removed from the auspices of local authorities, monastic powers who were strongly connected to Oirat Mongols vied with one another to control it. Upon close examination, the changes in authority over the lineage can be seen in Sum pa mkhan po's later life too.

2.4. *Old and New Sum pa Coexistence and Dénouement*

Although the selection process of a new Sum pa was largely controlled by forces outside of Dgon lung, Sum pa mkhan po could not escape the Sum pas' meddling in the course of his life once he arrived at the Sum pa residence in Dgon lung Monastery. The term "*khu dbon*" appears frequently in Sum pa mkhan po's accounts. It means "uncle and nephew," and generally refers to a familial bond. But Sum pa mkhan po uses the term to refer to a group of people who were part of the Sum pas both in bloodline and incarnation lineage. Sum pa mkhan po's relationship with this Sum pa *khu dbon* helps us to understand the complex dynamics inside the Sum pa *bla brang*.

In 1722, when Dgon lung was about to send an envoy to Rgyal sras 'Jigs med ye shes grags pa (1696–1750) in Central Tibet, Sum pa mkhan po asked Sum pa *chos rje* "*khu dbon*" for permission to go along. They did not grant him permission.⁵³ Sum pa mkhan po persistently tried to get the permission, even presenting positive evidence gained by requesting a dharma protector through a medium for a divination, until he was finally allowed to go. In 1723, when Sum pa mkhan po

⁵² Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 16b, 18a–18b.

⁵³ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 29b.

was about to leave for Central Tibet, he overheard some Sum pa *dbon pos* (“nephews”) and other bad company talking behind his back.⁵⁴

Two things are noteworthy about this anecdote. First, there existed in Dgon lung Monastery a group of people who shared the name “Sum pa” and who were described as “uncle(s) and nephews.” We do not know if the term for uncle is singular or plural, but we do know that Sum pa *chos rje* was called “uncle” (*khu*) and was the person in charge of everything related to the Sum pa group. An equally important fact is that there were a number of Sum pa “nephews” (*dbon*) in Dgon lung Monastery. Second, Sum pa mkhan po was not sent to Central Tibet on his own, but as part of a “Sum pa” group. Sum pa Blo bzang phun tshogs went along as a guide for Sum pa mkhan po, and Sum pa *rab 'byams pa* Phun tshogs don grub was supposed to be one of his kitchen servants. However, the latter became an obstruction for Sum pa mkhan po’s career.⁵⁵ When Sum pa mkhan po returned to Dgon lung Monastery, Phun tshogs don grub again became a mischief-maker, causing later hostility between Sum pa mkhan po and the Sum pa “uncles and nephews.”⁵⁶ These are all signs that there was discord between Sum pa mkhan po and the preexisting Sum pa faction.

Sum pa mkhan po’s relationship with Sum pa *chos rje* can be gleaned from Sum pa mkhan po’s reaction to the passing of Sum pa *chos rje* after his illness in 1740. Although Sum pa mkhan po took care of the *chos rje* for more than 20 days, he attributed *chos rje*’s misfortune to the harm the *chos rje* had done to him earlier in his life. Sum pa mkhan po even quoted a stanza from *Bodhicaryāvatāra* to indicate his mixed feelings about losing the *chos rje*:

Those who will falsely accuse me,
And others who will do me harm,
And others still who will degrade me,
May they all share in Awakening.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 30a. They said: “When these two, our *zhabs drung* and Sum pa Blo bzang phun tshogs, arrive in Dbus, this *dbon po* will correct this untamed *zhabs drung* who does not practice good qualities.”

⁵⁵ Phun tshogs don grub caused Sum pa mkhan po to lose the opportunity to attend Rgyud smad grwa tshang. This was not simply a one-time setback, but had a lingering effect on Sum pa mkhan po’s later career. The 2nd Thu’u bkwan once recommended Sum pa mkhan po as an abbot of the Tantric College at Dgon lung, but elders of the monastery opposed the idea for the reason that Sum pa mkhan po had never attended a Tantric college. For this Sum pa mkhan po blames the “kitchen servant” (*thab g.yog pa*) Phun tshogs don grub (Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 102a).

⁵⁶ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 43a.

⁵⁷ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 95b. This is the 16th stanza of the chapter III from *Bodhicaryāvatāra* by Śāntideva.

In any case, Sum pa mkhan po led the funeral ceremony with abundant offerings and erected a stūpa to house *chos rje's* relics.⁵⁸

It seems that the Sum pa faction had a strained relationship with Sum pa mkhan po even after Sum pa *chos rje's* death. In 1741, there were many Buddhist services for Sum pa mkhan po including the reinstallation of the Maitreya statue and its temple. Sum pa mkhan po composed a *dkar chag* for the celebration.⁵⁹ However, he also lamented that there were some people who “do harm, like repaying great religious or material benefits given to them with poisonous food during a feast,” and that the “*khu dbon*” were the main group of this kind of wicked people.⁶⁰ These themes were mentioned again in 1749 when Lcang skya praised Sum pa mkhan po's tenure as Dgon lung's *khri pa*.⁶¹

It is interesting that Sum pa *chos rje* began to be succeeded through his own incarnation lineage and Sum pa mkhan po took charge of the selection. By depending on his own dreams, he chose Blo bzang dbang rgyal, the son of a Li kya chieftain from one of Dgon lung's monastic estates. The boy was invited to Dgon lung with a ceremony in 1746.⁶² For this occasion, it seems that the Sum pas still kept their influence within the bounds of Dgon lung's territory. However, Sum pa mkhan po's next step jeopardized their influence.

In 1762, Sum pa *chos rje's* incarnation, Blo bzang dbang rgyal, suffered from an illness and passed away at the age of 20.⁶³ Afterwards, the progression of the incarnation lineage took a turn when Sum pa mkhan po decided to confirm a new incarnation of the deceased Blo bzang dbang rgyal. Sum pa mkhan po's account has it that he had consulted relevant authorities in Central Tibet with several candidates' names, but a definitive answer could not be obtained for some time. As a result, it took more than ten years to determine the next incarnation after the former's death in 1762. Among several candidates, there were two final ones. For the first one, a medium possessed by a deity local to Dgon lung prophesied that a boy born to

⁵⁸ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 95b–96a.

⁵⁹ This *dkar chag* is in Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 97a–97b.

⁶⁰ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 98b.

⁶¹ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 112b.

⁶² Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 105a–105b.

⁶³ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 134b–135a. Sum pa mkhan po had an interesting interpretation of this incarnation's young death. He recounted that the former *chos rje* had helped him up until the time when he moved to Central Tibet at the age of 20. After that, the *chos rje* did not have the same kindness toward him because they were estranged from each other. Sum pa mkhan po argued that, like the *chos rje*, he could only take care of his incarnation until the boy was 20 years old. In that way, he framed the incarnation's death as a karmic repayment for the former *chos rje's* mistreatment.

a family in Zhwa dmar, a place five or six days' journey to the northeast of Dgon lung Monastery, was the incarnation.⁶⁴ The second candidate was a son of *gong* (duke) Mgon skyabs rdo rje in Ordos,⁶⁵ whom Sum pa mkhan po had met in Ordos on his way to Doloon Nuur in 1772. Sum pa mkhan po must have agonized over making the final decision for the selection. He requested the 3rd Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje (1717–1786) to advise him on the matter when the two met during their time on Mount Wutai in 1775, but Lcang skya maintained an ambiguous attitude with respect to the situation.⁶⁶ Eventually, when Sum pa mkhan po passed through Ordos again in the same year, he requested that the chieftains of the area let him bring the child to Dgon lung. The child's parents agreed to let him follow Sum pa mkhan po.⁶⁷

Some points need to be highlighted regarding this procedure of selecting a new incarnation. First, by selecting this Ordos child, Sum pa mkhan po was on the side of undercutting local interests vested in the Sum pa *chos rje* lineage, instead connecting the lineage to a Mongolian community beyond the bounds of the Dgon lung estates. In doing so, Sum pa mkhan po may have been acting upon his own belief that an incarnation should not be born in the same place as the former's birthplace. Secondly, this was not simply an isolated event in which a boy from among Chinggis Khan's descendants in Ordos was brought into Dgon lung Monastery, but it had a lingering effect on the monastery. In Sum pa mkhan po's later years, especially during his third term as the abbot of Dgon lung Monastery (1781–1785), the major sponsors for religious ceremonies held in the monastery—New Year's Smon lam Festival in particular—were Mongolian chieftains, including those from Ordos.⁶⁸ Thirdly, the selection was not an arbitrary and instant action, but a careful and time-consuming process, which shows the seriousness that the process of selecting an incarnation entailed. The final consultation with Lcang skya, in particular, clearly shows that Sum pa mkhan po maintained his prudence with respect to making the choice, even though the right to select the incarnation was in his hands and he was well aware that the incarnation institution was one of the main pillars that buttressed the

⁶⁴ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 170a. Zhwa dmar is an old name for a tribal union in present-day Dpa' ris (Huarui 華銳; a.k.a. Tianzhu) county in Gansu.

⁶⁵ According to Sum pa mkhan po (1975: 172a), Mgon skyabs rdo rje was the second son among three (other two were *wang* Tshe ring rdo rje and *taiji* Mgon po rdo rje) of *wang* 'Jam dbyangs of Ordos, who was a descendant of Chinggis Khan.

⁶⁶ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 170b.

⁶⁷ Sum pa mkhan po 1975: 172a–72b.

⁶⁸ Sum pa mkhan po surely did not mention that sponsorship was a direct result of this selection. However, the selection can be seen as one of many activities Sum pa mkhan po exerted himself with in order to establish connections with Mongols in his later life.

Tibetan form of Buddhism. Last but not the least, it should be pointed out that what Sum pa mkhan po had done with respect to the *chos rje* incarnation lineage was in line with a trend that had previously made Sum pa mkhan po himself an incarnate lama, namely, the transition of power in the matter of the incarnation institution from locally-based authority to the Dge lugs-Mongolian partnership.

4. Conclusion

While reviewing the history of the Sum pa lineage, it becomes clear that the incarnation institution in the 18th century was not a static, antique system, but, on the contrary, was rather lively and continually evolving. During that period, control of the lineage shifted from the localized power towards Tibetan-Mongolian groups. This is what Sum pa mkhan po experienced in his former and early lives, and also what Sum pa mkhan po himself fostered within the incarnation lineage system. Of course, we cannot say that this single case based only on one individual's experience unveils the whole picture of the system. Besides, although Sum pa mkhan po tried to solve problems that existed in the system, it finally caused the same issue among the Mongols, as one can see in the quotations at the outset of this article. Despite the ongoing problems, the attempts to fix the incarnation lineage system should be given credits since the resilience of the system has been due to efforts of authorities such as Sum pa mkhan po and the Qianlong emperor, whatever their ultimate objectives were.

Last but not the least, a note should be made about the final rendezvous between the Sum pa lineage and the Qianlong emperor. When Qianlong's new incarnation selection system of "the golden urn" was first tested at Lhasa's Jo khang Temple in 1793, the Sum pa incarnation was among the five selectee-lineages for the first trial of the system.⁶⁹ It seems that the Sum pa appointee for this golden urn selection was Sum pa 'Jam dpal tshul khribs bstan 'dzin, who succeeded Sum pa mkhan po (d. 1788). In this way, the Sum pa's succession finally became under the imperial control of the system.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ For details of this process, see Oidtmann 2018: 113–115.

⁷⁰ Per Nyi ma 'dzin gives 'Jam dpal tshul khribs bstan 'dzin's birth year as 1802 (2007: 93), but it is doubtful given his fabrication of the Sum pa genealogy as explained above.

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Treatise on Writing, Treatise on Music: Comparing Terminology¹

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f the grandiose celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA) is any indication, one might expect all of the Tibetan cultural heritage to be well preserved and documented. However Tibetan traditional fine arts² historically had very little coverage in Tibetan literature, since practical knowledge was supposed to be transmitted orally from a master to a student at a workshop. As oral traditions can disappear without a trace, every text on fine arts, e.g., calligraphy and music, thus becomes a valuable source of data.³

In this context, two texts, one on calligraphy and another on music particularly stand out to me. Both treatises date back to the period of the later spread of Buddhism in Tibet (*bstan pa phyi dar*, the late 10th–13th centuries), explain a relevant art form and, as I noted while working on them, use similar classification methods inside their fields of knowledge. Yet their historical fates turned out differently: while the treatise on calligraphy became quite renowned, the tractate on music has remained virtually unknown to Tibetan musicians and the general public until recently.

For analyzing these texts I combine the known facts about their historical and cultural background with a specially developed structuralist methodology model based on some techniques of text linguistics and terminology studies. There is not enough historical data on the topic and a small chance to find any additional

¹ This research was supported by the RFBR grant 19-012-00616 “Semantic Interpreter of Texts in the Tibetan Language.”

² Skt. *Silpakarmasthanavidyā*, Tib. *bzo gnas kyi rig pa*, one of the five great sciences according to the traditional system of Indo-Tibetan knowledge. Fine arts were considered a basis for all other sciences and included the production of *stupas* and *thangkas*, calligraphy, astrology, music, Tibetan opera, etc.

³ As the 14th Dalai Lama noted himself in a foreword to a book on Tibetan calligraphy: “I hope and pray that this [book] will [...] help towards the preservation and rejuvenation of our rich cultural heritage from destruction” (Sngang rgyal 2000: VI).

information in the future. Thus a linguistic comparison between terminological systems of the two texts can become a useful tool to provide the necessary data to construct a valid hypothesis regarding their respective historical trajectories. Terminology for me was an obvious choice for an object of analysis, since both texts are usually perceived as early theoretical works on Tibetan arts, which provide specific information and are rich in special lexica.

Although the idea to compare terminologies of the two texts came from my personal interest while working on these two texts separately, this method itself is supported by similar researches in the field of text linguistics for author, date and genre attribution, text comparison, text validation, etc.

1. *Treatise on Writing*

The first text discussed here is a treatise on calligraphy called “Magical Lantern: An Encompassing Treatise on Writing and a Treatise on Pens”⁴ (henceforth the *ML*) that was allegedly written in the 11th–12th centuries by Khyung bo g.yu khri, a famous calligrapher of that time or, as some argue, by one of his disciples—a calligrapher named Rong po.⁵ The treatise sets basic rules for Tibetan *dbu can*⁶-style calligraphy prescribing proper strokes and proportions of Tibetan letters and punctuation signs.

Khyung bo g.yu khri is known as a founder of two calligraphic schools—the Sbal lugs in ‘Phan yul⁷ and the Mang lugs in Ngor⁸. His calligraphic style *khyung bris*⁹ was used in the production of two golden-lettered editions of the Bka’ ‘gyur: *Gser bris bka’ ‘gyur them spangs ma* and ‘Bras spungs’ *Gser bris ‘dzam gling gyas bzhaq*.¹⁰

The text of Khyung bo g.yu khri’s treatise was later used in several doxographic (encyclopedic) works, such as *The Removal of the Tarnish of Deluded Appearances*¹¹ by Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1655–1705) and *The Treasury of Knowledge*¹² by ‘Jam mgon kong sprul Blo

⁴ *Yi ge’i bstan bcos stong thun smyug gu’i bstan bcos ‘phrul gyi sgron me zhes bya ba bzhugs so.*

⁵ *Tibetan calligraphy* 1996: 14; Kongtrul 2012: 927.

⁶ Lit. “headed”—the square style of Tibetan writing used in woodblock and modern printing.

⁷ A valley to the north of Lhasa, where Lan pa Monastery is located.

⁸ A valley to the south-west of Gzhis ka rtse, where Ngor e waṃ chos ldan Monastery is located.

⁹ Lit. “Khyung bo’s writing style.”

¹⁰ Rig ‘dzin bstan srung 2006: 113.

¹¹ *Khrul snang g.ya’ sel.*

¹² *Shes bya kun khyab.*

gros mtha' yas (1811–1899), in sections dedicated to *bzo gnas kyi rig pa* (arts and crafts) and Tibetan calligraphy in particular. At the beginning of the 20th century, Tshe tan zhabs drung used Khyung bo's proportional system as a model to create a similar set of rules for cursive calligraphic styles.¹³ From the 1980s onwards, Tibetan authors both in Tibet and in diaspora regularly use and cite Khyung bo's treatise in works on Tibetan calligraphy.¹⁴

Although the text of the *ML* has spread widely in the form of citations, there is only one known separate edition of the treatise, a reconstructed *dbu med*¹⁵ manuscript from the personal collection of calligrapher Smon lam rgya mtsho¹⁶, published in 1994–1995 in the issues no. 47 and no. 48 of *Zla zer* journal.¹⁷ As there is not enough data on the history of the text to name the most correct or the oldest version, for critical comparison I used three additional versions of the *ML*, from *The Treasury of Knowledge*,¹⁸ *Precious Treasury of Sutras and Tantras*¹⁹ by Klong chen Chos dbyings stobs ldan rdo rje (1785–1848) and *The Rules of Tibetan Writing, a Sight that Everyone Desires*²⁰ published in 1997 by Dpa' ris sangs rgyas.

The text of the *ML* consists of five main parts. The first part is an introduction, in which the author pays his respects to Mañjuḥoṣa Mañjuśrī and explains importance of studying fine arts. The second part of the text covers the history of Khyung bo g.yu khri's tradition from the creation of Tibetan writing by Thon mi Sambhoṭa to the spreading of Khyung bo's tradition by his students. It is obvious that this part could not have been written by Khyung bo g.yu khri himself, while the repeated usage of borrowed Buddhist terms could indicate that this part of the text was added later by someone with a monastic background.²¹ The third part of the text, called "Magical Lantern: A Treatise on Pens,"²² describes different types of Tibetan writing utensils and presents proper methods of preparing and using Tibetan pens. The fourth part also has a colophon where it is called "Magical Lantern: A Treatise on Writing"²³ and is attributed to

¹³ Tshe tan zhabs drung 2007.

¹⁴ See 'Gyur med tshul khrim 2006 and others described in Kramskova 2014: 41–76.

¹⁵ Lit. "headless"—the cursive style of Tibetan writing.

¹⁶ Khyung bo g.yu khri 1994: 89.

¹⁷ Khyung bo g.yu khri 1994; Khyung bo g.yu khri 1995.

¹⁸ 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1862–1864) 2000.

¹⁹ *Mdo rgyud rin po che'i mdzod* (Klong chen chos dbyings stobs ldan rdo rje 2002).

²⁰ *Bod yig 'bri tshul mthong ba kun smon* (Dpa' ris sangs rgyas 1997).

²¹ More detailed discussion will be presented in section 3.1 of the current article.

²² *Smyug gu'i bstan bcos 'phrul gyi sgron me zhes bya ba bzhugs so* (Khyung bo g.yu khri 1994: 92–93).

²³ *Yi ge'i bstan bcos 'phrul gyi sgron me zhes bya ba bzhugs so* (Khyung bo g.yu khri 1995: 79).

Khyung bo g.yu khri himself. It presents a set of rules for basic Tibetan graphemes²⁴ and their constituent graphical elements that prescribe their proportions, balance between black and white spaces, directions, order of strokes, and tempo of writing.

These rules are divided into five major categories: important qualities (*gces pa*) that point out the most significant features of the most common graphemes; manifestations (*'don pa*), or important characteristics that should always be present in well-written graphemes; primary qualities (*ma chos*) that describe the best, the average and the worst possible forms of the seven most common graphic elements; secondary qualities (*bu chos*) that describe similar forms of diacritical signs; common qualities (*spyi chos*) that present three basic principles of writing Tibetan graphemes.²⁵

The last part of the text is a set of detailed step-by-step practical instructions for writing most of the graphemes.

2. *Treatise on Music*

The second text under analysis is the *Treatise on Music*²⁶ (henceforth the *TM*). It was written in 1204 by Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182–1251). One of the most influential figures in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, he is famous not only for his religious and political activities as a Sa skya patriarch, but also for his academic prowess. His *Treasury of Valid Reasoning*,²⁷ *Elegant Sayings*,²⁸ *Clear Differentiation of the Three Sets of Vows*²⁹ and *Elucidating the Sage's Intent*³⁰ are well known among Tibetan intellectuals. Yet, unlike these works, the *TM* for a long time remained virtually unknown even to the followers of the Sa skya school itself. The situation somewhat changed in the mid-17th century, when the 28th head of the Sa skya Monastery A myes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams (1597–1660), lamenting the unfortunate fate of the treatise,³¹ dedicated a full commentary³² to this work in 1624.

After this, the *TM* apparently gained some recognition as it was

²⁴ 30 letters of the alphabet, three superscribed vowel and three subscribed consonant diacritic signs, and two punctuation signs—*shad* and *tsheg*.

²⁵ For more details on Khyung bo's rules of writing see Grokhovskiy & Kramskova 2014.

²⁶ *Rol mo'i bstan bcos*.

²⁷ *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter*.

²⁸ *Sa skya legs bshad*.

²⁹ *Sdom gsum rab dbye*.

³⁰ *Thub pa dgongs pa rab gsal*.

³¹ A myes zhabs Nga dbang kun dga' bsod nams (1624) 2000: 536.

³² For all published editions see Butsyk *et al.* 2018: 43–44.

included in the collective works by Sa skya Paṇḍita, several *Sa skya Bka' 'bum* editions, and even in *Shes bya kun khyab*.³³

For the current study I used the *TM*'s edition published in 1992–1993 in Dehradun's *Sa skya Bka' 'bum* that is considered to be the oldest version of the text as it was copied from the 1736's Sde dge printing woodblocks.

The text of the *TM* is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to melodies: it classifies different types of music (*rol mo*) and types of ritual melodies (*dbyangs*), as well as means of expressing various sounds (*nga ro*) and ways of combining different sounds, chanting and words. The second chapter deals with the usage of words in different communicative situations. Kun dga' rgyal mtshan³⁴ suggests that a type of audience (*yul*) that is present at the performance determines the singer's attitude to the addressee (admiration, contempt, rivalry, or other emotions). According to the type of audience a musician also has to choose a function of a song, content, and a form for its lyrics (poetic or prosaic). This chapter provides the reader with general guidelines on how to choose between poetic and prosaic form, as well as on how to determine the main features of the present audience and select fitting metaphors and comparisons to describe the *yul*.

In the third chapter the author underlines the importance of the proper mental attitude and body posture for a musician during the performance, which also differ depending on the genre of a song, its purpose and contents. He distinguishes different types of human voices based on home region, age, gender, and timbre of their owners. Certain voices, according to Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, can bring additional flavor to songs of corresponding genres.³⁵ At last, he briefly lists Tibetan traditional musical instruments, mentioning that he will not cover the instrumental music in the *TM* to avoid "redundancy."³⁶

As the purpose of this study is not to describe the contents of this work in great detail, for more information on the musical categories of the *TM* see a recent commentary study accompanied by an annotated translation into Russian by P. Butsyk, P. Grokhovskiy, and A. Kharkovskiy in 2018 (with the help on terminology from my side).³⁷ The commentary also provides a thorough overview of the previous works carried out on the *TM*. Among them is one of the

³³ Butsyk *et al.* 2018: 57–68.

³⁴ Henceforth Kun dga' rgyal mtshan's title "Sa skya Paṇḍita" will not be used when addressing him as the author of the *TM* to avoid anachronism.

³⁵ Sa skya Paṇḍita 1992–1993: 5a–5b.

³⁶ Sa skya Paṇḍita 1992–1993: 6b.

³⁷ Butsyk *et al.* 2018.

earliest and most detailed analyses of the *TM* presented in Ricardo O. Canzio's dissertation,³⁸ in which he gives much thought to the connections between musical categories and terminology used in the treatise. Another major research on musical categories of the *TM* was conducted by M. Helffer.³⁹ A. Egyed⁴⁰ and G. Gordon⁴¹ in their works mostly concentrate on the *TM*'s place in the Tibetan musical tradition, and the article by Mao Jiceng⁴² gives an insight from the position of Chinese philological tradition. For current research these works provided much help in understanding historical and cultural background of the *TM* and the meaning behind its terminology.

3. Terminological Systems of the Two Treatises

As mentioned before, in this article I use linguistic analysis to gather additional data on the two texts that along with knowledge of their historical background would be enough to dim light on the main question. The basic idea of this analysis was to compare the terminological systems of the *ML* and the *TM* with the help of formal linguistics.

Having previously studied terminologies of each treatise separately, I noted some similarities between them and wanted to find out what differences might be between them. Thus, I came up with the idea to combine traditional methods of terminology science (qualitative and quantitative analyses of terms, term classification, terminological hierarchies analysis) and text linguistics (text structure analysis). Later I also tested on the texts all of the metrics for relevance that allowed to sort out the most important characteristics for the present analysis.

For each treatise⁴³ I compiled a list of terminology, with the terms sorted out by their field of functioning: specialized, general scientific, borrowed, and homonymic. Specialized terms refer to the terms that define innate concepts of a particular field of knowledge. General scientific terms represent lexical units that preserve a single meaning in various terminological fields. Homonymic terms are used in

³⁸ Canzio 1978. This dissertation was also published in 2019 in Kathmandu by Vajra Books.

³⁹ Helffer 1998.

⁴⁰ Egyed 2000.

⁴¹ Gordon 2009.

⁴² Mao 1993.

⁴³ See the lists of terms that were used in this study (with some modifications) in Butsyk *et al.* 2018: 414–419 and Kramskova 2014: 98–127.

several fields of knowledge with different meanings. Borrowed terms refer to the terms that belong to other fields of knowledge.⁴⁴

Then, according to these terminology lists, I conducted a mark-up on electronic versions of the two treatises.⁴⁵ The mark-up was done semi-automatically with subsequent manual control and corrections done by me, yet there is still a possibility of an error.

I measured the resulting terminological models by type rate and type distribution of terms per text and per chapter. Additionally, I analyzed the terms for several formal characteristics, such as length, part of speech rate, type of word building model, etc. By judging their internal structure, terms can be divided into single-word terms and terminological phrases. I traced the occurrence of monosyllabic, disyllabic, and trisyllabic single-word terms in the two texts, as well as terminological phrases which are three and more syllables in length.

Terminology can form hierarchical ties between its elements naturally during its use, or it can be organized in a form of hierarchies by its author. Throughout each text I analyzed the hierarchical relations discovered, and described them in hypernyms, or more generic superordinate classes, and hyponyms, i.e., their subcategories. Popular non-academic terminologies show less systematization with fewer hierarchical relations between the terms compared to original terminologies that reflect an author's theory.⁴⁶

It should be noted that the word "term" in its modern strict definition does not fully apply to the special lexis of the two treatises, which rather consist of so-called "pre-terms"—lexemes used as terms in subject areas for naming concepts but not meeting the basic requirements for a term.⁴⁷ Though it is obvious that the terminologies of the two treatises were formed long before the establishment of modern science, out of convenience in the current study instead of "pre-term" I will use the name "term," defining it at its broadest meaning as a lexical unit "that denotes a general concept of a theory in the specific field of knowledge or activity."⁴⁸

3.1. Terminological System of Magical Lantern

The *ML* has in total 222 terms per 12 A4 pages (5971 syllables, 2709

⁴⁴ Grinev-Grinevich 2008: 25.

⁴⁵ I took part in creation of the electronic copies of the *ML* and the *TM* during work on electronic corpora of Tibetan texts under the supervision of P. L. Grokhovskiy.

⁴⁶ Leychik 2007: 107.

⁴⁷ Leychik 2007: 32.

⁴⁸ Leychik 2007: 31.

words). At 88.7%, the specialized terms constitute its terminological majority, the rest of the special lexicon is represented by terminology borrowed from Tibetan Buddhist doctrine, grammar, and poetics (6.8% in total) and by general scientific terms (4.5%).

The specialized terminology includes abstract calligraphic concepts, names of graphic units, writing utensils, and writing styles. The terms denoting graphic units (197 terms) fall into two major subgroups: names of graphemes (e.g., *ka* "letter ka," *tsheg* "dot," *na ro* "vowel o") and names of their constituent elements, such as *mig 'dril* "rolling eye," *sbo* "belly," *gdan thabs* "seat." There are 52 terms describing Khyung bo's typological categories and abstract graphic characteristics. Among them are *gces pa* "important properties," *'don pa* "manifestations," *tshad* "proportion," *dag* "correctness," *snyoms* "balance," *shad mnyam* "similarity of *shads*," *khong 'dren* "inner pull," *'khyugs* "swiftness," etc. Terms denoting writing utensils (24 terms) include names of pens, inks, supporting devices and their parts such as *lho smyug* "southern pen," *pir* "brush," *smyug gri* "pen knife," *snag gser* "golden ink," *thig shing* "ruler," *rtse mo* "tip [of a pen]," *gas* "cleave [of a pen]." The last subgroup of the specialized terminology comprises names of calligraphic traditions and calligraphic styles (15 terms), e.g., *ldan lugs* "*ldan lugs* tradition," *khyung bo'i lugs* "Khyung bo's tradition," *lan dza* "lañja style."

The list of 15 borrowed terms of the *ML* mostly consists of names of Buddhist concepts like *thugs dam* "tutelary *yidam*," *thugs kyi rten* "support of the Mind," *sangs rgyas* "Buddha," *dge slong* "monk." The overwhelming majority of them occur in the second part of the text that covers the history of Tibetan calligraphy. There are only three terms borrowed from other fields of knowledge. The terms *'dogs pa* "subscribed [letter]" and *tshig* "word" were borrowed from traditional grammar. The term *tshigs su bcad* "verse" is from poetics.

Homonymic terms are represented by two terms: *man ngag* "instruction [on writing]" and *gdams ngag* "advice [on writing]." These are terms that both mean "secret oral religious instructions" in Tibetan Buddhist doctrine. It should be noted that *man ngag* and *gdams ngag* occur only in the *ML* version published in *Zla zer* journal:

[For the letter *za*] it is **instructed** [to write] two balanced white spaces.⁴⁹

The corresponding passage in *Dpa ris sangs rgyas* reads:

[The letter *za* has] two balanced white spaces between three black

⁴⁹ *dkar gnyis mnyam pa man ngag go* (Khyung bo g.yu khri 1995: 78).

spaces.⁵⁰

The usage of terms homonymic with those of Buddhist doctrine could further substantiate the hypothesis that this version was edited by a person with monastic upbringing.

Finally, there are 10 general scientific terms that reflect abstract concepts (e.g., *don* “meaning,” *bye brag* “special feature,” *mtshan nyid* “feature”).

The usage rate of terms varies from one part of the text to another, with an average figure of 40.8% per text. The introduction has only 19 terms that constitute 31% of all the words in this part, half of these terms are specialized, the rest belongs to religious and general scientific lexica. The second part at 23% has the lowest rate of term usage (most of them are from Buddhist terminology), but this part is rich in toponyms and personal names of historical figures, such as *srong btsan sgam po* “[king] Srong btsan sgam po,” *rgya gar* “India,” *tra shod 'bum me* “[calligrapher] Tra shod 'bum me,” etc. The third part consists by 38 % of terms of a special lexicon; most of them are specialized names for writing utensils. The fourth and the fifth parts have the highest rates of term usage of 58% and 54% respectively, as well as the highest percentage of specialized terms.

Terms with the highest occurrence rates refer either to some graphic element or a general scientific concept: *mgo* “head” (occurs 81 times), *yi ge* “letter” (62 times), *cha* “element” (67 times), *rkang* “leg” (30 times), *dpung* “shoulder” (27 times).

The majority of the *ML*'s terminology are nouns. There are also several adjective terms used for characterizing graphic elements (e.g., *rab* “best,” *'bring* “average,” *zlum* “round”) and verbal terms denoting ways of drawing lines (e.g., *skor* “twist,” *'then* “pull”).

The majority of terms are disyllabic single-word terms. The longest terminological phrase consists of 14 syllables: *phying bu dkar po'i steng du nas sngon mo bsgrigs pa dang 'dra ba* “[writing] that resembles green barley sprinkled over white felt.” The usual principle is the longer the term the more rarely it occurs.

Simple terms consisting of only a root denote indivisible elementary concepts and often can form a linguistic tree of derivative terms. For example, the term *smyug gu* “pen” forms the following derivatives: *lho smyug* “southern pen,” *nyag smyug* “caved pen,” *smyug thogs* “writer.” Many names of basic concepts like *yi ge* and graphemes have derivative trees.

Most terms were formed by an ellipsis—through omitting grammatical particles between the roots of the main and dependent

⁵⁰ *nag gsum bar gyi dkar gnyis mnyam* (Dpa' ris sangs yas 1997: 59).

words, e.g., two nouns, a noun and a participle, a noun and an adjective or two verbs: *snag lam* “stroke” from *snag gi lam* “path of the ink,” *'dzin so* “holding tooth”⁵¹ from *'dzin pa'i so*, *snag gser* “golden ink” from *snag gser po*, *zhun thar* “smelting and refining”⁵² from *zhun nas thar pa*. Longer phrasal forms with limited ellipsis like *bris kyi mnyam* “balance of the written [letters]” occur as well. Additionally, some terms denoting abstract concepts are formed by combining roots of two words with opposite meanings, e.g., *mtho dman* “height.”

The second most popular word building strategy is a metaphorical transfer when graphic elements are named after parts of human body (e.g., *gru mo* “elbow”) because of their visual and/or functional similarity.⁵³

There are 28 terms formed using morphological methods—either by nominalizing a verb with the *pa/ba* particle (e.g., *'don pa* “manifestations” is formed from the verb *'don* “to make to appear, to take out”) or by adding a special suffix to a verb root (e.g., *'bri mkhan* “writer” is formed from the verb *'bri* “to write”).

There are nine terms translated or phonetically loaned from other languages. For example, names of traditional sciences and Indian scripts were borrowed from Sanskrit (*rig pa'i gnas lnga* from “*pañcavidyā*,” *na ga ra* from “*nāgarī*”) and a name of a writing utensil *pir* “brush”—from Chinese *bi* 笔.

The largest theoretical categories (*ma chos* “primary qualities,” *gces pa* “important qualities” and others) are not structured in any semantic hierarchy. Most of them have only one hypernym or none at all, as in *thig* “line” or *sha* “flesh.” Only some of graphic elements have additional subtypes. The biggest hierarchical trees have three elements (e.g., *yan lag* “element” → *mgo* “head” → *zur gsum tshag mgo ba* “triangle yak head”).

3.2. Terminological System of Treatise on Music

The *TM* has 103 terms per seven double-sided *dpe cha* folios (3406 syllables, 1523 words). All in all, the text’s terminology has 52.4% of specialized terms, 21.4% of homonymic terms, 19.4% of borrowed terms, and 6.8% of general scientific terms.

The specialized lexicon of the *TM* includes names of singing techniques, abstract musical concepts and musical instruments.

⁵¹ One of the elements of the subscribed letter *ya*.

⁵² The term refers to the process of smelting and refining iron tips for pens.

⁵³ In some cases, they are named even after houseware or weapons: *gdan* “seat,” *mdung* “spear.”

The biggest category of the specialized lexicon is represented by terms that denote different types, ways and characteristics of singing and types of melodies (27 terms): *bsgrengs pa* “rising [type of drawing melody],” *brtsegs pa* “layering,” *bsgyur ba* “changing [tone],” *mo* “female register,” *seng ge'i nga ro* “lion’s roar,” *sngon la 'gro ba* “outpacing [singing],” *zhum* “weak [voice],” etc.

Another group is comprised of 15 terms that reflect basic or abstract musical concepts, such as *skad* “vocal register,” *nga ro* “sound,” *gdangs kyi skyon* “deficiency of voice,” *rkyen gzhan las byung ba* “instrumental [music]” (lit. “arisen from other causes”).

Finally, there are the 12 names of most common instruments used in the Tibetan musical tradition (most of which occur only once per text): *rgyud* “lute,” *rnga phran* “small drum,” *cha lang* “cymbals,” *dung* “horn,” *gling bu* “flute,” *'khar rnga* “gong,” *rnga bo che* “big drum,” and others.

14 out of 20 borrowed terms come from poetics and are used mainly to describe a song’s lyrics: *tshig* “word,” *snyan ngag* “poetry,” *tshigs bcad* “verse,” *rkang pa* “string [of words],” etc. The remaining terms belong to traditional religious terminology and occur in the introduction, colophon, and the third chapter of the treatise (e.g., *slob dpon* “teacher,” *mchod* “offering,” *rgyal sras* “son of the Victorious”).

One of the specific features of the TM is a large number and frequent usage of terminological homonyms that are also used in the Tibetan grammatical tradition (22 terms and 30.8% of the total term usage). For example, one of the basic musical terms of the treatise, *dbyangs* “melody” in grammatical texts means “vowel.”

At last, there are seven terms that express universal scientific concepts: *bye brag* “type,” *dpe* “example,” *rnam pa* “type,” *chos* “characteristic,” *don* “meaning,” *yul* “object,” *rkyen* “condition.”

Terminological usage rate does not much differ throughout the text with 29.8% in average, except for the third chapter with a drop in term usage to 20.3% from 33–35% in the first two chapters because of the parts with the author’s general reasoning on morals.

Out of all cases of term usage the biggest amount at 47.3% is constituted by specialized terms, homonyms follow closely at 30.8%, and the rest is made up by borrowed terms at 12% and general scientific terms at 9.9%. The average frequency rate of term usage by type is different: the highest being 4.1 times for homonymic and general scientific terminology and only 2.6 and 1.8 for specialized and borrowed terms respectively.

The terms with the highest occurrence rates include names of basic musical notions and abstract categories of the treatise, e.g., *dbyangs* “melody” occurs 31 times, *tshig* “word”—24 times, *bsgyur ba* “changing [tone]”—16 times, *sgra* “sound”—15 times, *ltengs pa*

“attenuation and amplification”—14 times.

Most of the terms are nouns including quite a large number of nominalized verbal nouns. Additionally, there are five adjectives that describe characteristics of melodies (like *tsher* “sonorous,” *pho* “male [register]”) and two verbs: *dbyangs len* “to draw a melody” and *dbyangs sbyor* “to compose a melody.”

Single-word terms with a length of one to three syllables constitute the majority of terminology, terminological phrases number from three to seven syllables. The longest terminological phrase is *gtam brgyud kyi zlos gar byed pa* “performing theatrical dance to the story.” Disyllabic single-word terms make up for 43.6% of all terms, with single-words usually occurring more than five times and most terminological phrases occurring only one time.

The most common word building method is verb nominalization with *pa/ba* particles, as in *bkug pa* “bent [tone]” from the verb *'gugs* “to bend.” Ellipsis is used rather rarely with the majority of terminological phrases keeping generative case markers and other particles. Concise and full forms of the terms can occur simultaneously in the same chapter with ellipsis happening only due to the poetic rhythm, for example: *ghan skyes* “vocal music” from *ghan cig skyes pa'i rol mo* (lit. “music arising together [with the artist's body]”).

Loanwords (12 terms) are represented by terms directly loaned from Sanskrit like names of musical instruments *pi wang* (Skt. *vīṇa*) or *ka na di* (Skt. *khāṇḍikā*) and terms translated from Sanskrit like *byang chub sems dpa'* “bodhisattva.”

Hierarchical ties between the terms reflect a profound classification system with all basic concepts semantically organized. Hyponym-hypernym trees have up to 5 elements as in: *rol mo* “music” → *ghan cig skyes pa* “vocal [music]” → *bsgyur ba* “changing [tone]” → *mgrin* “[changing] by throat” → *mgrin ring* “long throat [changing].”

Additionally, special attention needs to be addressed to the metaphorical terms used as names of melodies. For example, *seng ge'i nga ro* “roar of a lion” refers to the loud and confident type of singing “appropriate for performance at a meeting”⁵⁴ compared to a soft and delicate *bung ba rol pa'i tshul* “play of a bee” that should be performed at “secluded places.”⁵⁵ Such usage of well-known imageries to describe different types of melodies are very similar to the usage of riddle-like *rupaka* (“metaphor”) in *kāvya* poetry.

⁵⁴ *tshogs su seng ge'i nga ro stel* (Sa skya Paṇḍita 1992–1993: 5b).

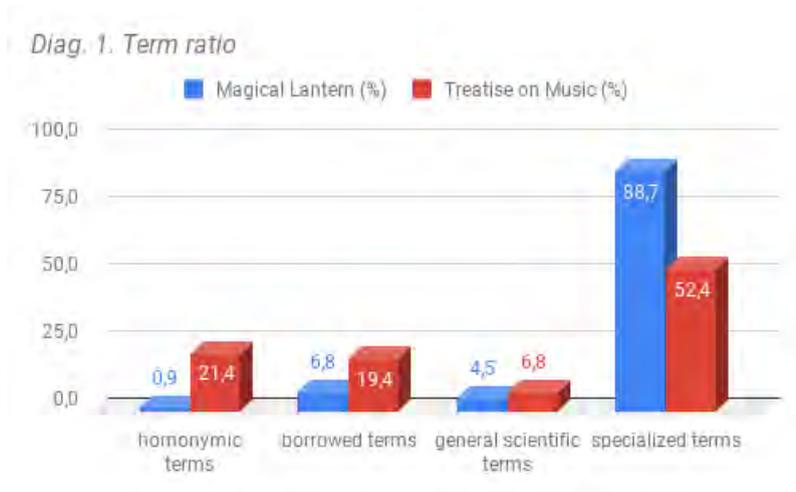
⁵⁵ *dben par bung ba rol pa'i tshul* (Sa skya Paṇḍita 1992–1993: 5b).

4. Terminologies as Reflections of Historical Backgrounds

The conducted terminological analysis reveals several formal similarities between the two treatises. First, specialized terms make up the largest category of terms for both texts while the general scientific terminology is low in number. The majority of terms in both treatises are nouns; there is also some addition of adjectives and verbs. There are more simple terms than derivative terms for both texts. Both treatises' terms are formed mostly by syntactic word building methods such as ellipsis and nominalization. Morphologic and semantic methods are less common. Mono- or disyllabic single-word terms occur several times more often than multisyllabic terminological phrases, which usually occur only once per text. The rate of loanwords is low for both texts.

Such similarities are not very representative, as they result from the peculiarities of the treatises and the nature of the Tibetan language itself. The differences, on the other hand, provide much more interesting data.

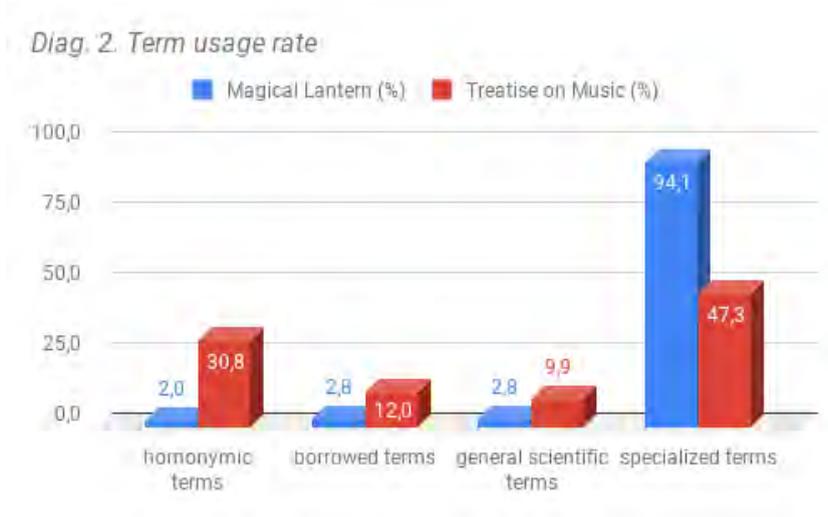
The *ML* has a higher ratio of terms per text in total (36.1% against 19.2% in the *TM*, see Diag. 1) and a higher rate of specialized terms (see Diag. 2), while most of its borrowed terms occur only in the second part of the text (which seems to have been severely modified or written entirely by a third party).



Diag. 1 – Term ratio by type

Compared to it, the *TM* has more homonymic and borrowed terms both in ratio to all terms and in usage, and its usage rate of

homonymic terms (30.8 %) is comparable with that of specialized terms (47.3%).



Diag. 2 — Term usage rate by type

Both treatises have syntactically built terms, yet the majority of such terms in the *ML* are formed by ellipsis, while the *TM* has terminological phrases formed without omitting grammatical particles.

The *ML* has a lot of terms denoting graphic elements that were formed by simple metaphoric transfer, for instance: the element *mgo* “head” is called so because it is located at the uppermost part of the letter and both serves and looks like its head. This word-building method is not a characteristic of the *TM*, on the other hand, it has a group of metaphorical terminological phrases that serve as names for the ways of producing melodies.

Close attention to the practical aspect of the subject displayed in the *ML* is supported by the difference between ratio and usage rate of instrumental terminology of the two texts. While the *TM* has 12 terms denoting musical instruments which occur only once throughout the text, the *ML* has 19 terms referring to calligraphic instruments and their parts which together occur almost three times as much (56 times).

Another interesting point of divergence for the two treatises is the hierarchical structures of the two terminologies. The *TM* has longer hierarchical sequences (up to five members against only three in the *ML*). All specialized terms belong to some hypernym-hyponym

connection (with the only exception of *dbyangs mkhan* “singer”). The *ML*’s terminology at the same time contains a large group of specialized terms (34%) hierarchically not connected with any other term. All in all, the *TM*’s terminology is more systematized, while the terminology of the *ML* appears to be closer to traditional terminologies that evolve more chaotically and possess less thought-of structure of internal connections.⁵⁶

The origin of the specialized terms is also different in these two texts. The *ML*’s specialized terms are mostly unique and characteristic only of this treatise (e.g., *ma chos*, *mig ’dril*, *nag mnyam* “balance of black [space],” etc.), with the majority of them being nouns formed by metaphorical transfer or ellipsis, with rare inclusions of nominalized verbs like *’don pa*, some adjectives and even rarer verbs. Such a situation is a usual case with terminologies in general, as terms are used to name mostly theoretical concepts in any field of knowledge. As for the *TM*’s specialized terms, which are already lower in ratio because of a high number of borrowed and homonymic terms, they on mass consist of common names of musical instruments, proverbial metaphoric phrases and basic musical terms like *dbyangs* and *rol mo*. There is only one group of terms that can be called original and characteristic of the text that is the terms for different types of melodies. Interesting though, that this authentic terminology does not contain any proper nouns. It consists only of nominalized verbs (e.g., *bsgyur ba* “changing [tone]”), adjectives (e.g., *zhum* “weak”) and proper verbs (e.g., *dbyangs len* “to draw a melody”).

To explain the differences revealed during the comparison of the two treatises, one has to do some research on the social statuses of the authors, historical settings and other factors that formed the cultural backgrounds of these two works, as well as assess them in the context of similar works on arts.

As mentioned earlier, Khyung bo g.yu khri was always known as a professional calligrapher, who had his own original style of writing. He founded two calligraphic schools and, presumably, taught a lot of students in his lifetime. Besides, he lived between 11th and 12th centuries—the time of vigorous translating and publishing initiatives brought by the second spread of Buddhism in Tibet, when the demand for scribes with good calligraphic skills was presumably high. From this perspective, Khyung bo g.yu khri’s treatise appears to be a practically-oriented, rather than theoretical, set of mnemonic verses to be recited while writing. Mnemonic technique of learning information by organizing it in the form of verses or rhythmic prose

⁵⁶ Grinev-Grinevich 2008: 125.

is deeply rooted in Tibetan culture in general. Hence, it seems likely that Khyung bo g.yu khri, a person who taught calligraphy for a living, would create a system of basic writing rules for his novice students. The aforementioned references to Rong po⁵⁷ as the true author of the *ML* in Tibetan sources could further support this hypothesis. Since Tibetan masters usually exhibit diffidence when writing about their own traditions, this hypothesis explains the presence of the part covering the history of Khyung bo's calligraphic tradition and dims light on how the treatise was created in the first place.

The *ML*'s terminology shows us that while the author of the treatise was acquainted with Buddhist religious notions, he was not a monastic scholar: references to Buddhist notions as in *zur gsum khro bo'i mig* "triangle eye of a wrathful [deity]"⁵⁸ are rare, and there is almost no Buddhist terminology apart from the second part of the text (only terms like *thugs kyi rten* "support of [Buddha's] mind" in the introduction). Most specialized terms are practice-oriented and original; borrowings from grammar or poetics, with which many Tibetan scholars were familiar at the time, are scarce.⁵⁹

The conclusion that these terms were highly specialized jargon is elucidated by the fact that (especially when explaining *gces pa* "important qualities") later scribes who copied his text of the *ML* had trouble discerning them and employed various versions of the terms: *yas 'phur/yar phul/yar 'phul* "upper prefixed [graphic element]," *sked gtsang/ske gtsang/rke gtsang* "clear neck," *phyir 'bring/phyi 'brang* "chasing forward,"⁶⁰ etc.

At the same time, along with the unique terms, there are some terms that can be attributed to Tibetan general calligraphic knowledge.⁶¹ Among them are the names of calligraphic styles and schools, and names of some basic graphic elements like *mgo* (or its honorific form *dbu*) "head," *rkang* (hon. *zhabs*) "leg" and *so* (hon. *mche ba*) "tooth."⁶² The term *sha* "flesh [of the letter]" usually is paired with

⁵⁷ Khyung bo's student.

⁵⁸ One of the types of grapheme *mig* "eye."

⁵⁹ It should be noted that the latter can be to some extent explained by the fact that many classical Indian works on poetics were translated into Tibetan only after the mid-12th century.

⁶⁰ One of the *gces pa* "important [qualities]."

⁶¹ It should be noted that though there are no other known original Tibetan works on calligraphy prior to the 20th century, every monastery and master of calligraphy had their own oral tradition of teaching it. Some of these traditions nowadays are getting a written form, e.g., "Principles of Tibetan Art" published by Tibetan artist and calligrapher Gega Lama in Darjeeling in 1983.

⁶² Gega Lama 1983 vol. 2: 59–60.

the term *rus* “bones [of the letter]”⁶³ and apparently comes from the Chinese notion of measuring the thickness of strokes while writing a character.⁶⁴

All in all, the text of the *ML* seems to be a written practical instruction on how to draw letters and prepare one’s writing utensils and it was originally locally transmitted from Khyung bo g.yu khri to his apprentices at the workshop. The terminological system developed by Khyung bo g.yu khri over the years of teaching calligraphy is systematized to a certain extent, but as in all naturally evolving terminologies the hierarchical relations between the most basic notions are not specified. It is no surprise that being a rare work on calligraphy of a professional calligrapher, the *ML* was acknowledged by different scholars and later reinterpreted as a fundamental theoretical work on Tibetan calligraphy.

Sa skya Paṇḍita, on the other hand, was just at the beginning of his scholastic career when he wrote the *TM*. The treatise was created in 1204—even before he took his full monastic ordination in 1209. In the colophon of the treatise, written in a somewhat humorous tone, he calls himself an *upāsaka*, a “Buddhist layman”:

Thus, having previously studied all objects of knowledge,
Here the one who completely attained [discriminating] intellect,
Glorious *upāsaka* Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan,
Compiled [this treatise] to increase the happiness of friends.⁶⁵

At that time Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan was forced to return to Sa skya Monastery because of the long illness of his father, where he became interested in grammar and music, which was unusual for a scholar of that period.⁶⁶

Later Sa skya Paṇḍita became a part of the “neoconservative movement” that aimed to preserve the purity of the Indian Buddhist tradition.⁶⁷ Supporting this idea, he developed a concept of a perfect Buddhist scholar, who would not only have a correct understanding of the Teaching of the Buddha but would also be well versed in other sciences such as poetics, grammar, and fine arts, so that with his vast knowledge he would help other sentient beings. Similarly, in the *TM* Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan presents an ideal of a musician who is

⁶³ Gega Lama 1983 vol. 2: 58.

⁶⁴ As a famous calligrapher Lady Wei Shao wrote in circa 320 AD, “There should not be too many bones, veins or flesh in the hieroglyph” (Gaur 1985: 176).

⁶⁵ *de ltar shes bya kun la sngon sbyangs mthus/ / ’dir ni blo gros rnam par gsal thob ba/ / dpal ldan dge bsnyen kun dga’ rgyal mtshan gyis/ / grogs po dga’ ba spel phyir bkod pa yin/* (Sa skya Paṇḍita 1992–1993: 7a).

⁶⁶ Jackson 1987: 66.

⁶⁷ Davidson 2005: 375.

competent both in the theory of musical composition and the laws of song writing.

It is impossible today to find out if Kun dga' rgyal mtshan received any vocal training at Sa skya Monastery, but the analysis of his terminology proves that he at least was acquainted with the basic notions of Tibetan musical tradition as some of the terms used by him correlate with musical terminology of other musical works. For example, 'gyur ba "changing [tone]," 'khug "bending [tone]," 'phra "thin voice," lus kyi skyon "deficiency of the body," and other terms similar to the *TM*'s terminology occur in a treatise by Bkra shis rgya mtsho (14th–15th centuries) and, arguably, in a treatise by Klong rdol bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang (1719–1805).⁶⁸ Mgo kar ba Bsod nams dbang po (17th century), the author of Sa skya's basic musical treatises, uses several similar categories like 'gyur and stod "high tone" (similar to the *TM*'s *bstod pa* "high [drawing]").⁶⁹ Furthermore, Ricardo Canzio points to some similarity of the *TM*'s terminology to the four types of musical melodies from Indian tradition (Skt. *varṇa*): *sthāyī* ("smooth sound"), *arohī* ("rising sound"), *avarohī* ("lowering sound") and *sañcarī* ("changing sound").⁷⁰

When comparing the *TM*'s terminology with those of other Tibetan works on music, it becomes obvious that Kun dga' rgyal mtshan coined many specialized terms himself. The terms for two basic types of music (*lhan cig skyes pa'i rol mo* "vocal music" and *rkyen gzhan las byung ba'i rol mo* "instrumental music") are among the most important ones. At the same time, he did not use any Sanskrit musical terms, characteristic of Tibetan musical tradition.⁷¹

Although it is common for the Tibetan musical tradition to borrow terms from grammatical terminology, as for instance in *dbyangs* "melody" from the grammatical *dbyangs* "vowel,"⁷² many researchers note in the *TM* the usage of grammatical terms that are uncommon for other musical treatises. For example, the four types of *nga ro* "sound" that coincide with the traditional characteristics of four basic vowels occur only in the *TM*: *bsgreng ba* "elevated" (characteristic of the vowel *a*), *bkug pa* "curved" (characteristic of the vowel *e*), *bstod pa* "high" (characteristic of the vowel *o*) and *smad pa* "low" (characteristic of the vowel *u*) respectively.⁷³

Some specialized terms that seem very original were later used by

⁶⁸ Butsyk *et al.* 2018: 60–62.

⁶⁹ Butsyk *et al.* 2018: 68.

⁷⁰ Canzio 1978: 58.

⁷¹ For example, names of the seven basic degrees of a scale (Skt. *ṣaḍja*, *ṛṣabha*, *gandhara*, *madhyama*, *pañcama*, *dhaivata*).

⁷² Smirnova 2015: 115.

⁷³ Ellingson 1979a: 387.

Kun dga' rgyal mtshan in his works on grammar. For example, terms *rkyang pa* "single" and *brtsegs pa* "layering" that denote different types of *bkug pa* "bending [tone]" were used in the work entitled "Head-Ornament of the Wise"⁷⁴ along with *'phul pa* "affixed" to designate the three basic types of phonemes depending on their position in a Tibetan word.⁷⁵

Unlike other treatises and traditional works on music such as collections of chants (*dbyangs yig*) or instrumental music (*rol tshig, dung tshig*) and ritual manuals (*phyag len*), the *TM* does not cover the instrumental aspect of musical tradition.

Through the conducted analysis of the *TM*'s terminology and Sa skya Paṇḍita's background, along with the comparison to other musical treatises, it becomes evident that the *TM* does not reflect the Sa skya school's musical tradition, but Kun dga' rgyal mtshan's own views on vocal music. Using notions of Sa skya school's musical tradition and his knowledge in grammar and poetics as a foundation, Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, already an aspiring intellectual at the time, developed his own logical analysis of vocal ritual music as he would later do with other objects of knowledge like doctrine, grammar, and poetics.

All in all, Kun dga' rgyal mtshan wrote this treatise as an interested observer and not as a specialist in music. There was no need to explain and theorize an already existing practical tradition at Sa skya Monastery, and again, any musical training was done orally at the monastery's workshops by trained musicians and did not require any written theoretical manual.⁷⁶ It is no wonder then that even the followers of Sa skya for a long time were unfamiliar with the *TM*, not to mention professional musicians. Thus the *TM* did not receive much recognition among Tibetan scholars for its musicological value, but it can be without doubt considered one of the first theoretical works on Tibetan music.

5. Conclusion

The Magical Lantern: An Encompassing Treatise on Writing and a Treatise on Pens appears to be originally a didactic mnemonic instruction created by a professional calligrapher that later—outside of the teaching tradition—lent itself to reinterpretation as a theoretical treatise. At the same time, the *Treatise on Music* was created as a theoretical work from the very start, it was written by an amateur

⁷⁴ *Mkhas pa'i kha rgyan*.

⁷⁵ Butsyk *et al.* 2018: 91–93.

⁷⁶ Canzio 1978: 7.

musician and an enthusiastic intellectual, who treated music as a means of perfecting oneself on the path of an ideal scholar and who described his own views on music rather than the existing tradition itself. As a result, the two treatises were treated differently throughout the course of history.

Regardless of the historical fates of these works, both of them fortunately survived to our days and nowadays both texts are rightfully held in esteem as valuable examples of written Tibetan literature with the help of which one can try to look into the history of Tibetan cultural heritage.

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Questioning Women: Ye shes mtsho rgyal and Other Female Disciples in *Zhus lan* Literature¹

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What is a woman's place in the Tibetan Buddhist literary world? Besides relying on the usual sources of Lives (*rnam thar*)² of eminent Buddhist women, mentions of female characters in predominantly male compositions, and, in some rare but fortunate cases, writings by women themselves, how else can we know about their concerns and stories? This article draws from a particular genre of didactic dialogues called "zhus lan" or "dris lan," literally "Questions and Answers." In these conversations, women are not only raising questions to be answered by their teachers, but their questions also reflect the distinct concerns of female practitioners. Furthermore, the narrative framework of these texts also informs us about the roles women played in the Buddhist community.

As the name *zhus lan* or *dris lan* suggests, these texts take the format of a series of questions and subsequent answers. *Zhus lans* contain recorded, actual conversations between a teacher and a disciple, or rehearsed answers to questions raised by an imaginary conversation partner. These question-and-answer works cover a wide range of topics, including detailed explanations of doctrinal points, instructions for practice, or even refutations that form part of an ongoing polemical debate. It is perhaps precisely because of its

¹ In addition to the Fifth International Seminar of Young Tibetologists in Saint Petersburg, September 2018, part of this article was presented in the panel "A Woman's Place in Buddhist Dialogues" at the Annual Meeting of American Academy of Religion in Denver, November 2018. I thank Lewis Doney, Kati Fitzgerald, Holly Gayley, Alina Gribkova, Alison Melnick, Natasha Mikles, Jann Ronis, Andrew Taylor, Nicole Willock, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions. All mistakes are mine. I also thank the Jefferson Scholars Foundation and the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia, who provided financial support for my conference travels.

² Here I follow Kurtis Schaeffer and translate the Tibetan literary genre *rnam thar* (or *rnam par thar pa*, literally "accounts of full liberation") as "Life." For a discussion on using European medieval saint's Lives as a heuristic device for Tibetan *rnam thars*, see Schaeffer 2004: 6–7.

eclectic nature that—except for some brief discussions of question-and-answer accounts in association with other texts within the same corpus³—*zhus lan* or *dris lan* as a literary genre has received little scholarly attention.⁴

This article analyzes the literary function of *zhus lan* in the Treasure tradition (*gter ma*) and argues that these question-and-answer texts provide a rich venue for a discussion about women's status and participation in Buddhist communities. In the context of Treasure literature, these texts are created with a scriptural model in mind and serve as a literary response from the Rnying ma pas, representative of the older tradition, to the influx of newly transmitted teachings and texts from India.⁵ This creation is done by modeling *zhus lan* after the classic dialogical framework of Mahāyāna sutras (and subsequent tantras). Question-and-answer works which include women are also characterized by a customary acknowledgment of female inferiority. This literary trope does the double duty of revealing real concerns about women's status in society and of justifying the need to teach women by highlighting their unfortunate position.

1. *Zhus lan in the Rnying ma Treasure Tradition*

Zhus lan texts are among the many genres found in cycles of Treasure teachings. This genre is not special to the Treasure tradition, but Treasure *zhus lans* present a particular narrative framework that is more stylized than other question-and-answer texts outside the corpus of Treasure literature. These dialogues take place in 8th-century Tibet between the legendary tantric master Padmasambhava and his female disciples, foremost among them Ye shes mtsho rgyal (777–817). She recorded their conversations, encoded them into a secret language, and concealed them all over Tibet. From the time of

³ Kragh 2015: 301. Kragh considers *zhus lan* an emerging genre in the 12th century that takes its inspiration from canonical texts bearing the word *zhus lan* (**praśnottara*) in their titles. For a study of early canonical texts from Dunhuang that have *zhus lan* in their title, for example, the *Rdo rje sems dpa' zhus lan* ("Questions and Answers with Vajrasattva"), see Takahashi 2009: 90–96 and Takahashi 2010. Rheingans 2011 presents a case study of a single *dris lan* text by the 8th Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554) and argues that the genre provides the opportunity for authors to offer concise doctrinal points within a limited space.

⁴ The first systematic study of Tibetan literary genres, *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre* (Lhundup Sopa, Cabezón, and Jackson 1996), does not include a separate treatment of *zhus lan* or *dris lan* literature.

⁵ For a discussion on the rise of Treasure revelation and its historical developments, see Davidson 2005: 210–243.

the Tibetan Buddhist renaissance in the 10th and 11th centuries of the later consolidation development (*phyi dar*), and further creation of Buddhist canons in the 14th and 15th centuries, these conversation-style accounts remain one of the most popular genres in the Treasure literature.

The *zhus lan* texts consulted here are selected from the Treasure cycles discovered between the 12th and 14th centuries, a time when Treasure revealers weaved together an origin narrative about their unique form of revelatory practice.⁶ It is also during this time that the Rnying ma Buddhists responded to new challenges: the impressive growth of literature in its rival New Translation (Gsar ma) Schools; the burgeoning prestige of mass institutional monasticism; and the ongoing criticism of their own practice of scriptural revelation. Relying on its “double system of apocryphal attribution”⁷—both the texts being revealed and the persons executing the revelation were attributed to imperial personalities back in the 8th century—these revealed Treasures claimed authenticity and authority for new (or renewed) teachings and practices, connected their lineage back to the “Golden Era” of imperial Tibet ruled by the Dharma kings (Tib. *chos rgyal*), and helped to cement a sense of shared identity among otherwise decentralized Rnying ma communities. In turn, these revelations, especially the narrative materials, played a central role in the apotheosis of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal.

By imitating the format of Buddhist scriptures, Treasure *zhus lans* make an implicit claim for their authenticity as words of the Buddha (Skt. *buddhavaacana*, Tib. *sangs rgyas kyi bka'*), thus elevating the status of Padmasambhava to “the second Buddha.”⁸ This literary strategy serves a few purposes. It authenticates teachings transmitted in *zhus lan* texts and provides support for the expanding Rnying ma canon. By bridging the temporal gap between Treasure texts and imperial

⁶ Doney 2018 examines the flourishing of the Lives of Padmasambhava, in particular those revealed by Ö rgyan gling pa (1323–c.1360). He also discusses how Treasure revealers (*gter ston*) channel the Tibetan imperial past through narratives of scriptural revelation. By personally inhabiting imperial personalities in current time and space and by recovering imperial teachings in the form of Treasure revelations, they speak to an audience of their day and address the concern of a Treasure’s legitimacy.

⁷ Davidson 2005: 225.

⁸ In another article tentatively titled “The Context of the Form: *Zhus lan* as Scripture in Tibetan Treasure Literature,” I discuss in detail the formal parallelism between Treasure *zhus lan* texts and exoteric as well as esoteric Buddhist scriptures. In short, by including the five elements or “perfect conditions” (*phun sum tshogs pa lnga*) in which a Buddha-voiced teaching takes place—the teacher, the time, the location, the audience or retinue, and the teaching—these question-and-answer texts adopt the formulaic sutric style and declare themselves to be authentic Buddhist scriptures.

personalities, it addresses external criticisms of these revelations as fraudulent. In terms of actual content, these question-and-answer texts also speak to the unique theological concerns of their time.

The texts used for this study include a series of conversation-style teachings (both question-and-answer texts and first-person instructions) with the collective title “Collected Teachings of the Great Master, the Emanation Body Padmasambhava” (Slob dpon chen po sprul sku padma ’byung gnas kyi bka’ ’bum), attributed to Nyang ral nyi ma ’od zer (1124–1192),⁹ and *The Heart Essence of the Dākinīs* (*Mkha’ ’gro snying thig*), a Treasure cycle discovered by Tshul khrim rdo rje (1291–1315), alias Padma las ’brel tshal.¹⁰ Another collection of *zhus lan* texts I consulted can be found in a later Great Perfection (Rdzogs chen) cycle discovered by Rigs ’dzin rgod ldem (1337–1408) with the title “Unimpeded Realization” (Dgongs pa zang thal).¹¹ This cycle contains five volumes. The fifth volume, titled the “Self-Emergent, Self-Arisen Primordial Purity” (Ka dag rang byung rang shar), contains primarily sacred conversations between various enlightened figures. The majority of these question-and-answer sessions take place between Padmasambhava and his disciples. Among the three questioners—Khri Srong lde btsan (742–796), Nam mkha’i snying po (8th century), and Ye shes mtsho rgyal—Ye shes mtsho rgyal is the disciple asking the questions in most *zhus lan* accounts; these accounts are also usually the longest ones. Lastly, I made use of two Treasure *zhus lans* between Padmasambhava and

⁹ This collection is found in volume 92 of the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo* (’Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas 1976–1980). Although the collection as a whole does not pre-date the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, individual texts within it are found in earlier writings not long after Nyang ral’s time. For example, a *zhus lan* titled “Rgan mo mdzub btsugs kyi gdams pa” (The Pointing-out Instruction to the Old Woman) is listed among the teachings requested by Ko brag pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan (1170–1249) to the teachers and masters of Bla skor. See Stearns 2000: 34–35. The Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC) has recently acquired another undated collection titled “Gter mdzod nyang gi bla ma dmar khrid zhus lan sogs” (A Treasury of Questions and Answers and Direct Teachings from the Nyang Master) from the Asian Classics Input Project’s (ACIP) Mongolian Collection. If these two collections overlap, it could shed further light on the transmission history of these teachings.

¹⁰ This collection is commonly found in a fourfold Snying thig cycle called “Snying thig ya bzhi.” For example, Dri med ’od zer 2009 vols. 1–12.

¹¹ Two notable editions of this Treasure cycle are available. One is a reproduction of blockprints prepared by A ’dzoms ’Brug pa rin po che (1842–1924) in his own monastery in the early 1900s (Rig ’dzin rgod ldem 1973); the other is a reproduction of blockprints prepared by the 11th Gnas chung Sku rten Shākya yar ’phel (19th century, Rig ’dzin rgod ldem 1979). Since the Gnas chung version does not have the fifth volume, which is the main topic of our discussion, I mainly cite from the A ’dzoms version. Turpeinen 2015 (27–30) examines in detail these two editions and their respective textual history.

his female disciples Padma gsal and Khrom pa rgyan, found in Padma gling pa's (1450–1521) *Lama Jewel Ocean* (*Bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho*).¹²

I also included excerpts from two Lives of Ye shes mtsho rgyal that are stylistically similar to *zhus lan* accounts. These two Lives predate her better-known Life, revealed by Stag sham Nus ldan rdo rje (1655–1708),¹³ and form the earlier stratum of her hagiographical tradition. The first is a corpus of the earliest full-length Life of Ye shes mtsho rgyal and is attributed to Dri med kun dga' (b.1347?) and Padma gling pa respectively.¹⁴ The third chapter of this Life, "The Princess Requests O rgyan for Songs of Instruction" (Lha lcam gyis o rgyan la gdams pa glu'i tshigs su bca'd pa zhus pa), is structured in the format of a *zhus lan*. Another Life of Ye shes mtsho rgyal, entitled the "Extensive Life and Liberation Story of Ḍākinī Ye shes mtsho rgyal" (Mkha' 'gro ye shes mtsho rgyal gyi skyes rabs rnam thar rgyas pa, hereafter *The Extensive Life*) is also of potential antiquity.¹⁵

¹² For example, Padma gling pa 1975–1976 vol.1: 289–370.

¹³ For example, Nus ldan rdo rje 1989.

¹⁴ This corpus is first made known by Gyatso 2006, where she referred to three manuscripts she found in Lhasa in the 1990s. I was able to locate further exemplars from *Garland of White Lotuses: Liberation Stories of Great Female Lives in Tibet* (*'Phags bod kyi skyes chen ma dag gi rnam par thar ba padma dkar po'i phreng ba*) in *Bla rung aryatāre'i dpe tshogs rtsom sgrig khang* 2013, a sixteen-volume collection of life stories of Buddhist women edited by the Āryatare publishing house at Bla rung Buddhist Academy, manuscripts digitized by the Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) at British Library, and from other extant block prints. For a complete, descriptive list of texts in this corpus, see Angowski 2019: 127–136. In the following discussion, I cite the two reproductions in *Bla rung aryatāre'i dpe tshogs rtsom sgrig khang* 2013, as they are the most easily accessible.

¹⁵ *The Extensive Life* is also included in *Bla rung aryatāre'i dpe tshogs rtsom sgrig khang* 2013 vol. 7: 5–179. Its colophon contains a prophecy of its place, time, and person of discovery, disclosing that the Treasure scroll (*gter shog*) shall encounter a person named Rdo rje drag po rtsal in a bird month and be revealed later in a dog month (*bsgrub pa'i ming ni rdo rje drag po rtsal/ bya'i zla ba'i dus tshod gter shog phrad/ [...] khyi'i zla ba'i dus su gter shog zheng sor bzhi/ dkyil mtho gsum la zhal bshus so//*, see Mkha' 'gro ye shes mtsho rgyal gyi skyes rabs rnam thar rgyas pa: 189b). However, there is no further information on the year of its revelation; I have not been able to locate a Rdo rje drag po rtsal associated with the composition of this Life. The name "Rdo rje gling gi phab" (lit. "descendent of Rdo rje gling [pa]"?) also came up later in the colophon. BDRRC lists this text as the revelation of Gter ston Rdo rje gling pa (1346–1405). However, it is not found in other literary works attributed to him. In this Life, Ye shes mtsho rgyal is not one of the queens of Khri Srong lde btsan (a narrative element usually found in the later stratum of her literary tradition). Rather, her karmic connection with Padmasambhava was directly established without the middle link of Khri Srong lde btsan. Judging from its content and the format of a combination of narrative and nonnarrative elements, I suggest that *The Extensive Life* could represent the initial stage of efforts to weave together the many literary representations of Ye shes mtsho

The Extensive Life is not structured by chapters or sections. Rather, the majority of this work is dedicated to Ye shes mtsho rgyal's conversation with Padmasambhava on various topics.¹⁶

The disciple who most frequently addresses Padmasambhava in these question-and-answer texts is Ye shes mtsho rgyal. Since these questions are usually posed to a male master by a female disciple or a group of women, and since many of the questions include special considerations particular to women, they provide a venue in which we can explore the richness of Tibetan Buddhist conceptualization of gender, especially in the Rnying ma Treasure context.

Borrowing from the notion of "metacommunication" from folklore studies, I consider these *zhus lan* accounts to be conventionalized, performative accounts. "Metacommunication" refers to

any element of communication which calls attention to the speech event as performance and to the relationship which obtains between the narrator and his audience vis-à-vis the narrative message.¹⁷

The focus on metacommunication provides the understanding of the frame, or "an interpretative context or alternative point of view," in which the story is situated.¹⁸ While the dialogical accounts themselves are traditionally understood to be vehicles of teachings,¹⁹ the metacommunication aspect or the narrative framing of these texts reveals the theological logic of its composition, structure, intended audience, and social context.

Reading these dialogues as stylized, performative accounts rather than actual conversations, I look at what these dialogues *do*, not what they *say*. Indeed, being born as a woman is depicted in decidedly unfavorable terms in these texts. However, if we read them as a part of the customary context in which women could receive instructions from Padmasambhava, or a literary gesture that has to be made before moving on to the teaching proper, these remarks on the inferiority of the female gender tell us more about women's situation and their access to teachings and practices. The rhetoric of female

rgyal and elevate her status to that of an enlightened master, a status that had not yet been securely established.

¹⁶ For more details on the literary format of *The Extensive Life*, see Liang forthcoming.

¹⁷ Babcock in Bauman 1978: 66.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Three collections of English translation of Treasure *zhus lan* accounts are called *Advice from the Lotus-Born*, *Dakini Teachings*, *Treasure from the Juniper Ridge* respectively (Padmasambhava 1994, 1999, and 2008). All of these titles emphasize the *content* ("advice," "teaching," and "Treasure"), rather than the dialogical narrative *format* (for example, a collective title like "Conversations between Padmasambhava and Disciples"), of the texts being translated.

inferiority does not simply function as an obstacle barring women from accessing teachings and practices, but consists of a necessary step on their way to become Buddhist practitioners.

2. *Lamenting Women's Inferior Birth*

One of the most common sentiments among female disciples of Padmasambhava is lamenting the unfortunate destiny of being born a woman, a sentiment shared by many other Tibetan Buddhist women. For example, watching a mare suffer from giving birth, O rgyan Chos skyid (1675–1729) sings the following song of lament:

When I ponder our female bodies
I am sorrowful; impermanence rings clear.
When men and women couple—creating more life—
Happiness is rare, but suffering is felt for a long time.
May I not be born again in a female body.
May the mare not be born as a mare.²⁰

Se ra mkha' 'gro (1892–1940) also laments her unfortunate destiny:

Because of my inferior female body (*lus dman*), it is difficult for me to benefit beings in the world. Hence, having abandoned this body, if I try to attain a man's body, I wonder if I will benefit beings?²¹

In a dialogue titled “The Pointing-out Instruction to the Old Woman” (Rgan mo mdzub btsugs kyi gdams pa),²² an old lady from Ston asks Padmasambhava for an instruction that “requires little effort, is easily intelligible and applicable, but profound in meaning.”²³ She makes this request because she is, first of all, born with the lower status of a woman. Even though she had accumulated some good merit, she does not have the acumen to recall the teaching. Moreover, she has an inferior intellect in general, and her mind is no longer clear due to old age. In response, Padmasambhava praises her as having greater faith than King Khri Srong lde btsan. He then teaches her how to reflect on the nature of one's mind and how to be fearless at the time of death, reassuring her that the causes for buddhahood are not

²⁰ Schaeffer 2004: 142.

²¹ Jacoby 2009: 132

²² 'Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1976–1980 vol. 92: 467–474. This text is translated into English by Erik Pema Kunsang in Padmasambhava 2008: 21–26.

²³ *tshegs chung ba go sla ba/ nyams su blang sla la don che ba/* ('Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1976–1980 vol. 92: 468).

deficient in women.²⁴

This description of women as possessing an inferior body is echoed in another conversation between Padmasambhava and seven of his female disciples, led by Ye shes mtsho rgyal. This untitled text (hereafter *Dialogue with Seven Female Disciples*) is attributed to Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer.²⁵ Having paid homage and offered golden *maṇḍalas* to Padmasambhava, each disciple asks him for an instruction specifically catered to her limited capacities as a woman:

[Ye shes mtsho rgyal]: A disciple like me, who is a woman with little wisdom and a dull mind, has limited understanding and is narrow-minded. I request an oral instruction on enlightenment in this lifetime with a female body, a teaching that is easy to know, to grasp, to understand, and to realize!²⁶

[Shel dkar bza' Rdo rje 'tsho]: A disciple like me, who is a woman with inferior motivation and lacking diligence, requests an oral instruction on enlightenment through indolence!²⁷

[Cog ro bza' Dpal gyi mchod gnas]: A disciple like me, who is a woman dominated by the five poisonous emotions, requests an oral instruction on enlightenment that does not require ridding oneself of these emotions!²⁸

['Bro bza' ma pad ma]: A disciple like me, who is a woman and has much to do and is easily distracted, requests an oral instruction on enlightenment that does not require abandoning worldly activities!²⁹

[Mar gong bza' Rin chen tshul]: A disciple like me, who is a woman and has bad karma, requests an oral instruction on enlightenment so that I will not take on another life as a woman in the future!³⁰

[Mchims bza' Sa le 'od]: A disciple like me, who is a woman with a

²⁴ 'Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1976–1980 vol. 92: 468–470.

²⁵ 'Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1976–1980 vol. 92: 474–494. This text is translated into English by Erik Pema Kunsang in Padmasambhava 2008: 111–120.

²⁶ *bdag bud med 'dra ba shes rab chung la blo brtul/ go ba chung la sems rgya chung ba/ shes sla/ bzung sla/ go sla/ rtogs sla ba/ bud med kyi lus 'di la brten nas tshe 'di la sangs rgya ba'i gdams ngag zhig [sic] zhu 'tshal lo//* ('Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1976–1980 vol. 92: 475).

²⁷ *bdag bud med kyi bu 'dra rgyu ngan pas rtsol sgrub mi nus pas nyal nas nyams su blangs pas/ sangs rgyas gdams ngag cig zhu 'tshal/* (Ibid: 477).

²⁸ *bdag bud med kyi bu 'dra ba/ dug lnga shas che bas/ dug lnga spang mi dgos pas sangs rgya ba'i gdams ngag cig zhu 'tshal/* (Ibid: 478–479).

²⁹ *bud med kyi bu 'dra ba/ bya ba mang la g.yeng ba che bas/ bya ba ma spangs par sangs rgya ba'i gdams ngag cig zhu 'tshal/* (Ibid: 481).

³⁰ *bud med kyi bu 'dra ba las ngan par gda' bas phyi ma la bud med kyi tshul 'di blang mi dgos pa zhig zhu 'tshal/* (Ibid: 482).

dull mind, requests an oral instruction on enlightenment in a single word!³¹

[Ru yang bza' Ma ti]: Since I am of little diligence, I request a teaching that is effortless!³²

Instead of a generic statement that “women are inferior,” the questions posed by these female disciples reveal the complex situations that have contributed to the inferior status of women. This feeling of inferiority is shared by other female disciples of Padmasambhava. Padma gling pa's *Lama Jewel Ocean* also includes two other dialogues between Padmasambhava and two princesses, Padma gsal and Khrom pa rgyan.³³ In her dialogue with Padmasambhava, Princess Padma gsal describes her female birth in the following way:

A disciple like me is a woman with an inferior birth and insufficient means, who is dull in speech and cannot recollect the teaching, who has worked as a servant for half of her life, and who has accumulated little merit. Taking me as a disciple, may the lama not cast me away into the swamp of cyclic existence! Having practiced the Dharma, I request the method of becoming enlightened within this life!³⁴

In his reply, Padmasambhava confirms that a female birth is indeed undesirable and unfitting for Buddhist practice, saying that

women are involuntarily thrown into the prison of cyclic existence by their parents and need to take care of various errands. They constantly live in the state of being attached to their egos, working without payment as a housemaid, and wasting their life away. In the end, they will definitely go into bad transmigration.³⁵

³¹ *bdag bud med kyi bu 'dra ba/ blo brtul bas/ gdams pa tshig gcig gis sangs rgya ba zhig zhu 'tshal/* ('Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1976–1980 vol. 92: 484).

³² *bdag rtsol ba chung bas byar med kyi chos zhig zhu 'tshal/* (Ibid: 485).

³³ “Lha lcam padma gsal gyi zhus lan gser gyi yang zhun” and “Lha lcam khrom pa rgyam gyi zhus lan” in Padma gling pa 1975–1976 vol. 1: 289–352, 353–370. These two texts are translated into English by Sara Harding in Padma gling pa 2003: 51–85, 87–98.

³⁴ *bdag bud med kyi bu 'dra ba/ skye ba dma' ba/ 'khos kha chung ba/ khas nyen pa/ chos mi dran pa/ mi lus phyed la mi'i bran byed pa/ tshogs ma bsags pa bdag 'dra ba la/ rje gu rus thugs rjes bzung nas kyang/ 'khor ba'i 'dam du mi gtong zhing/ bdag gis chos shig byas nas kyang/ tshe 'di la sangs rgyas pa'i thabs shig zhu/* (Padma gling pa 1975–1976 vol. 1: 290).

³⁵ *dbang med pha mas 'khor ba'i btson dong du bskyr zhing/ gyes rgyug gi kha ngo blta dgos/ mi tshe bdag 'dzin gyi ngang la gnas shing/ mi g.yog gla med byed dgos/ mi tshe stong zad kyi ngang la bsdas nas/ mthar ngan song du 'gro'ol/* (Ibid: 291).

Another princess named Khrom pa rgyan³⁶ provides an even more detailed account of her plight as a woman in her dialogue with Padmasambhava. Having made her offering to Padmasambhava in exchange for his teaching, she opens her request by listing the difficulties in the life of a woman, starting with her own life story:

Women like me have accumulated particularly bad karma in previous lives and are born with an inferior female body.

With an unwholesome body like this,
I have no place of hope but my father—
But he does not hold me dearly.
I have no source of compassion but my mother—
But mothers and daughters must part ways.
I care for no one but my brother—
But my brother auctions me off like merchandise.
The machinations of my father, mother, and brother
Throw this woman into cyclic existence.
Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!

My mind goes to the pure Dharma,
But as a woman, I cannot come and go at will.
In fear of legal disputes,
I have to stay with an evil spouse.
Trying to fend off slander,
I sank into the swamp of cyclic existence.
O rgyan Padmasambhava,
Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!

In my youth, I did not recall the teaching,
But engaged in bad deeds as a householder.
In old age, even though I recall the teaching,
My bodily functions have deteriorated.
O rgyan Padmasambhava,
Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!³⁷

³⁶ In O rgyan gling pa's *Chronicle of the Queens* (*Btsun mo'i bka' thang yig*), Khrom pa rgyan is praised as the exemplary faithful woman and is married to Padmasambhava.

³⁷ *sgos bu mo nga ni tshes ngon las ngan bsags pas/ skye dman 'dra ba'i lus blangs/ lus ngan 'di 'dra thob dus/ re sa pha las med kyang/ bu mo snying du ma sdug/ byams pa ma las med kyang/ ma smad gson bral byas byung/ bsam pa ming po yin kyang/ sring po zong du btsons byung/ pha ma ming po gros byas/ bu mo 'khor bar bskyur rol/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so/ rang sems chos la dkar kyang/ bu mo 'gro dbang ma byung/ kha mchu byung gis dogs nas/ gtan grogs ngan kyang bsdad dol/ mi kha gtam la 'dzems pas/ 'khor ba'i 'dam du tshud dol/ o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/*

Khrom pa rgyan then recounts the general challenges she and other women encounter:

Being deceived by demons,
I made mistakes wherever I went.
Being driven by the wind of bad karma,
I sank into the swamp of cyclic existence.
O rgyan Padmasambhava,
Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!

As a woman, my mental perception is limited,
And so, I must ask others for counsel.
Rare are heroic, righteous companions,
So, no one could guide me to the teaching.
Powerful is the evil that causes one's downfall,
So, I take everyone's ill advice to heart.
O rgyan Padmasambhava,
Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!

I have to leave my happy homeland,
And stray into the remote region of my husband.
Although I have accumulated some wealth,
It is left to be enjoyed by his new wife.
O rgyan Padmasambhava,
Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!

Even when I am desperate and weary of cyclic existence,
No one could teach or inspire me.
Even when I am crying helplessly,
People say I am faking it.
O rgyan Padmasambhava,
Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!

Even though I am deeply disillusioned with the world,
No one shows me any kindness.
Even though I am determined to go and practice,
Doubts sneak their way into my mind—
There is no way for me to access the teaching!
O rgyan Padmasambhava,

thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// gzhon dus lha chos ma dran/ las ngan khyim thabs byas pas/ rgas dus lha chos dran kyang/ 'byung ba'i dbang po nyams so// o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// (Padma gling pa 1975–1976 vol.1: 354–356).

Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!

Because I am immensely ignorant as a woman,
I cannot come to an understanding of the teaching.
Because I harbor much rage as a woman,
My mind is preoccupied with deceit, hypocrisy, and pretenses.
O rgyan Padmasambhava,
Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!

Distracted by secular obligations,
I did not get to meet a lama.
Even if I stay with my lama,
His wife will slander and scorn me.
O rgyan Padmasambhava,
Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!

Even when wandering in isolated, rocky regions,
I encounter enemies of heinous form.
Even when I take the teaching into my experience,
Calamities and obstacles befall me.
O rgyan Padmasambhava,
Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!

Because of the ripening of previously accumulated karma,
I am trapped in this inferior body.
Please, Great Father O rgyan Padma,
Close the door to rebirth as a woman!
O rgyan Padmasambhava,
Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!

Having obtained a male body in my next life,
I will become my own master.
I will exert myself in the teaching,
And attain the resultant enlightenment!
O rgyan Padmasambhava,
Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!

Please consider what I have said,
And hold me with your compassion!
May I escape from suffering and afflictions,
And be emancipated from the swamp of cyclic existence!
O rgyan Padmasambhava,

Please hold me with compassion and love,
I beseech you from the bottom of my heart!³⁸

As seen above, the voices of women in these dialogues generally agree that they are born with a less desirable karmic lot. Women possess an inferior body, their mind is not sharp, their intellect also limited. While later Buddhist women like O rgyan Chos skyid and Se ra mkha' 'gro connect the female body to worldly suffering and thus argue they have a unique perspective on the first noble truth, effectively transforming the female body "from a vice to a virtue,"³⁹ most female disciples of Padmasambhava do not seek to directly counter the negative gender stereotype themselves.

What are we to make of these depictions of women being inferior? And exactly *how* are women considered inferior? In the next two sections, I will investigate the two sides of female inferiority as

³⁸ 'gro sa bdud kyis bslus pas/ bu mo'i gom pa nor rol/ las ngan rlung gis bdas nas/ 'khor ba'i 'dam su tshud byung// o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// bu mo blo rtsal chung bas/ gros phug mi la dris soll/ yar 'gro'i dpa' grogs dkon pas/ chos la khrid mkhan ma byung// mar 'gro bdud dbang che bas/ kun gyi 'khrul gtam bslab nyan/ o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// pha yul skyid po bzhag nas/ mi yul sa mtha' bskor dgos/ nor rdzas rang gi bsags kyang/ shul du gna' mas spyod do// o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// yi mug skyo shas byung kyang/ gtam 'dun bslab mkhan ma byung// mchi ma dbang med shor yang/ bu mo'i khram dus yin zer/ o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// skyo shas snying nas skye kyang/ snying rje byed mkhan ma byung// chos la 'gro sems byas kyang/ the tshom sems la zhugs pas/ chos la 'gro sa ma 'byung// o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// skye dman gti mug che bas/ chos la go rtog ma rnyed/ bu mo zhe sdang che bas/ g.yo sgyu khram gsum dran gda'/ o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// 'jig rten bya bas g.yengs nas/ bla ma mjal rgyu ma byung// bla ma'i drung du bsdad na/ jo mos mi kha sdang 'ong// o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// gnyan sa ri khrod 'grim kyang/ lus ngan dgra dang 'phrad do// nyams len chos la byas kyang/ rkyen ngan bar chad 'jug gis/ o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// sngon bsags rnam smin de yis/ da lta'i lus ngan blangs zin/ pha mchog o rgyan padmas/ skye dman skye sgo chod mdzod/ o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// phyi ma pho lus thob nas/ rang la dbang yod byas nas/ chos la 'bad pa byed cing/ sangs rgyas 'bras bu thob mdzod/ o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// don de thugs la dgongs la/ bdag la thugs rjes zungs shig/ nyon mongs sdug bsngal 'dzom la/ 'khor ba'i 'dam las drong shig/ o rgyan padma 'byung gnas/ thugs rje brtse bas zungs dang/ snying nas gsol ba 'debs so// (Padma gling pa 1975–1976 vol.1: 356–358).

³⁹ Schaeffer 2004: 103 and Jacoby 2009: 145. Jacoby provides an illuminating discussion on Se ra mkha' 'gro's consistent self-description as an inferior woman. Jacoby argues that this description should be understood as both a "literal internalization of misogynist views" and at the same time "a rhetorical device that enabled her [Se ra mkha' 'gro] to make extraordinary claims about herself" as a religious authority (Jacoby 2009: 144).

presented in these dialogues. On the one hand, the extremely detailed list of female woes points not only to superficial misogyny, but also to a genuine reckoning of women's unfortunate lot in life. The fact that most (if not all) of this literature is attributed to male teachers or Treasure revealers also means that these men are at least aware of (if not sympathetic to) women's daily struggles. On the other hand, the sequence in which these dialogues take place also suggests that the lamentation about or denunciation of women could, in some cases, be a rhetoric device, a necessary step to take before continuing with the ultimately more important task of giving women teachings.

3. *Female Inferiority as a Real Concern*

Many aspects of a woman's life are examined in these self-deprecatory remarks by Padmasambhava's disciples or by the criticism by Padmasambhava himself. In the aforementioned *Dialogue with Seven Female Disciples*, each disciple requested an oral instruction that is particularly suited to their inferior capacities. Padmasambhava responded to their request with appropriate teachings.⁴⁰ At the end of each response, he added an admonition to each woman (such admonitions are not found in his instructions to male disciples like Khri Srong lde btsan), reminding them that women are still encumbered by their karmic conditions and their chances of success are slim:

[In response to Ye shes mtsho rgyal,] this difficult teaching hardly works for women, so do not deceive yourself, but practice with strict attention!⁴¹

[In response to Shel dkar bza' Rdo rje 'tsho,] I have never seen a woman who has perfected the teachings. If you want to persevere, you should still exert yourself in practice!⁴²

⁴⁰ For example, to Ye shes mtsho rgyal, who asked for a teaching that is "easy to know, to grasp, to understand, and to realize," Padmasambhava taught the realization of the true nature of suchness that is beyond conceptualization. To Cog ro bza' Dpal gyi mchod gnas, who asked for an instruction that does not rid oneself of poisonous emotions, he taught the empty nature of these emotions and how to properly recognize them ('Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1976–1980 vol. 92: 475, 479).

⁴¹ *bud med kyi chos 'di dka' bar gda' bas/ rang gis rang la rdzun ma byed par/ nyams len bag drag tu mdzod cig/ (Ibid: 477).*

⁴² *ngas bud med kyi chos la mthar phyin pa tsam ma mthong na/ rem la da rung chos la nan tan skyed cig/ (Ibid: 478).*

[In response to Cog ro bza' Dpal gyi mchod gnas,] still, women like you, in whom the five emotional poisons are burning like fire and whose evil dispositions flow like water, indulge in adultery. Due to dualistic conceptions, their desire for husbands is like the turbulent wind. Their understanding is flimsy and obscured, like a pile of dust. Not thinking about the Teaching, but only themselves, they deceive. Because the five poisons run the risk of running wild, rely on your practice!⁴³

[In response to 'Bro bza' ma pad ma,] still, women like you have limited mental capacity due to your inferior birth. Your body works against you so that you cannot approach the Dharma, and so you lead a householder's life. Because of your evil karma, you have a lot of work and cannot recall the Teaching. Indeed, for women, there is little Teaching, so let your determination grow!⁴⁴

[In response to Mar gong bza' Rin chen tshul,] still, women like you have little Teaching because of your mental capacity. You fail to accomplish much because you are not armed with diligence. You are narrow-minded, so it is difficult to teach you the essence of the Teaching. You are weak in determination, so you cannot accomplish much. Because the Teaching indeed rarely appears to women, increase your perseverance, and rely on your practice!⁴⁵

[In response to Mchims bza' Sa le 'od] still, women like you have an incorrigible mind filled with doubt. You cannot heed the master's instructions. You are difficult to discipline because you are dominated by afflictions. Few of you can perfect the Teaching. If you practice, honor the instructions from your teacher and be ready to overcome some difficulty!⁴⁶

[In response to Ru yang bza' Ma ti,] still, women like you are completely senseless. No matter how I teach, you will not understand.

⁴³ *lar khyed bud med kyi bu 'dra ba/ nyon mongs pa dug lnga rang gi rgyud la me ltar 'bar/ bag chags ngan pa chu ltar 'bru ba nas 'dod pa la g.yem/ gzung 'dzin gnyis kyiis khyo'i 'dod pa rlung ltar 'tshub/ spog sgrib gnyis po khrol sogs byas nas sa ltar gsog/ chos la mi sems bdag 'dzin sems zhing g.yod pas khyer/ dug lnga rmu r'god du 'chor nyen yod pas/ nyams len rgyud la khol mdzod dang gsungs/ ('Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1976–1980 vol. 92: 480).*

⁴⁴ *lar khyed bud med kyi bu 'dra ba/ skye ba dman pas snying rtsal chung/ lus la dgra yong pas chos la mi 'gro khyim thabs byed/ las ngan pas bya ba mang bas chos mi dran/ bud med la chos 'ong ba nyung bar gda' bas snying rus skyed mdzod gsungs/ (Ibid: 482).*

⁴⁵ *lar khyed bud med kyi bu 'dra ba shes rab kyi rtsal gyis chos mi 'ong/ brtson 'grus kyi go cha med pas sgrub mi nus/ blo chung bas chos nyid kyi don bstan dka'/ snying stobs chung bas sgrub mi nus/ bud med kyiis chos 'byung ba nyung bar 'dug na/ brtson 'grus skyed la nyams lan rgyud la khol mdzod gsungs/ (Ibid: 483–484).*

⁴⁶ *lar khyed bud med kyi bu 'dra ba blo sra ba la the tshom za/ bla ma'i gdams pa mi thub/ nyon mongs pa shas che bas gdul ba dka'/ chos mthar phyin pa nyung/ chos byed na bla ma'i gdams ngag gtsigs su gyis la/ dka' thub bag re gyis dang gsungs/ (Ibid: 484–485).*

Even if I point out the Dharma Body, you will not recognize it. Even if I introduce you to enlightenment, you cannot see it. Even if I teach the single stroke of nonaction, it will be difficult for you to realize. The Dharma of women is crooked, so arm yourself and do not be carried away by the demon that is your husband! Do not give birth to children. Although it is difficult, remain in solitary practice!⁴⁷

While Padmasambhava's attitude toward women's ability to understand his teachings and perform Buddhist practices remained largely negative, he nonetheless encourages them to practice in the end. He also recognizes that women are bound to a householder's life in his reply to 'Bro bza' ma pad ma and identifies the major difficulties women encounter in their lives, such as the confinement of domestic labor exemplified by marriage and motherhood. In the last conversation with Ru yang bza' Ma ti, he even suggested that women should not be seduced by their husbands—the demon—and should not give birth to children, lest the burden of raising them becomes obstacles on the path to liberation.

Princess Khrom pa rgyan's lamentation provides an even more detailed account of how women are disadvantaged in all aspects of life. Her account differs from the conversation between Padmasambhava and his seven female disciples in that it discusses women's difficulties less in terms of innate abilities (or the lack thereof), but of external circumstances. A woman has no place in her birth home: her father does not care much about her, her mother is powerless, and her brother only views her as a commodity. In her marriage, she also lacks independence and cannot move about freely. She does not have any external help—no one provides guidance for her or supports her practice. Even when she finds a teacher, she still suffers from his scornful wife. The only free time she has is when she is old, but by then, her body will have already become frail. Even when Khrom pa rgyan talks about her own deficiencies (she is "trapped in this inferior body," is "immensely ignorant," and "harbor much rage"), she still frames them in the context of karmic retribution. She was born in this female body, and faces these struggles because of past negative deeds. She says that if she can become a man in the next life, she will become her own master, exert herself in the teaching, and attain the resultant enlightenment.

The expressions of female inferiority in these dialogues indicate a

⁴⁷ *lar bud med kyi bu 'dra ba 'di gti mug shas che bas ji skad bstan kyang go ba med/ chos sku ngos 'dzin bstan kyang 'dzin mi shes/ sangs rgyas ngo sprod bstan kyang nthong ba med/ byar med chig chod bstan kyang rtogs pa dka' bud med kyi chos 'di 'khyogs mang bar gda' na/ go cha cher mdzod la khyo ga'i bdud kyi ma khyer bar gyis/ lus la bu ma skyes par nyams len gcig pur sdod la gyis dang ste dka' bar 'dra na gsungs/ ('Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1976–1980 vol. 92: 485–486).*

complexity that goes beyond a blanket statement of “women are inferior and cannot practice Buddhism.” In addition to the recognition of adverse circumstances contributing to the female plight, women’s inherent inferiority is explained as karmically determined—the reason one is born as a woman is due to past negative actions. That is, female inferiority at its root should be understood as karmic inferiority manifesting in the form of gender.⁴⁸ Even though this disparages women, the misfortunes that befall them are still considered to be adventitious and do not determine their soteriological destiny. To a certain degree, this description of female inferiority differentiates between a woman’s agency and the constraints put upon her by society and (an albeit sexist description of) her biology. Therefore, being a woman does not mean that they are absolutely incapable of practice. It is just that there are more obstacles—both external and internal—for women to engage with Buddhist teachings. As seen above, from the perspective of Padmasambhava, while these faithful disciples may have obstacles in their potential for enlightenment, these obstacles do not bespeak the entirety of their capacity. After the admonition, he invariably grants teaching to these female disciples. He emphasizes, at the end of every conversation, that these women should exert themselves and strive to practice to the best of their ability.

Moreover, when we look at the individual components that have made women “inferior,” they are quite varied, ranging from physical (being endowed with an inferior body with extra illnesses and the burden of childbirth) and psychological (limited intellect, tendency to get angry, or possessing emotional afflictions, just to name a few), to social factors (low regard from others or lack of support for her religious life). For the most part, a woman herself is blamed for her inadequacy, but the family, husband, people, and adverse external conditions surrounding her are understood as contributing factors. While it might be a stretch to count these remarks as social criticism, the detailed description of women’s disadvantages certainly acknowledges the problematic status of women. Women are not categorically denied access to Buddhist teachings from Padmasambhava in these dialogues, although they might need to make (or accept) a public commentary of their inferior status before receiving teachings. It is this required admission of inferiority I now turn to.

⁴⁸ There are also other forms in which karmic inferiority is manifested, including being born in other forms of lower birth, such as animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings. Physical deformities and diseases (especially those that are more visible on the outside, leprosy is one example, see Vargas-O’bryan 2001: 170–171) are also considered to be the result of past bad karma.

4. Female Inferiority as a Narrative Performance

Even with the many deficiencies in women's psycho-physical composition and the many obstacles in their social surroundings, as recorded in the dialogues above, female disciples are still given teachings by Padmasambhava. In this section, I present a reading of these dialogues as performative accounts and argue that their narrative framework sets up a favorable condition for Buddhist women to gain access to teachings and practices.

Despite severe warnings about their own shortcomings and the difficulties they would encounter, women in these texts were not discouraged from or denied access to any teachings or practice. One *zhus lan* text, the *Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* (*Zhus lan gnad kyi them bcu*) discovered by Rig 'dzin rgod ldem, depicts Ye shes mtsho rgyal's extraordinary visionary journey with step-by-step guidance from Padmasambhava.⁴⁹ The ten steps outline a series of Great Perfection teachings, generally considered the most advanced system of practice in the Rnying ma curriculum. It is not uncommon for *zhus lan* texts to list several titles transmitted during the teaching. The fourth chapter of the *Dri med Kun dga' / Padma gling pa Life*, titled "The Princess Requesting Teaching Transmissions of the Nine Vehicles from O rgyan" (*Lha lcam gyis o rgyan gyi drung du theg pa rim pa dgu'i chos lung zhus pa*), also provides a detailed list of texts and teachings received by Ye shes mtsho rgyal. She alone is entrusted with all of his teachings.⁵⁰ *The Extensive Life* also enumerates teachings and practices received by Ye shes mtsho rgyal. These include practices on yogic channels and winds (*rtsa rlung*),⁵¹ mantras on subjugating wrathful demons along with the detailed explanation,⁵² different types of empowerments,⁵³ an extensive prophecy regarding 108 future Treasure revealers, their names, the occasions for their Treasure discoveries, and from whom they are emanated.⁵⁴

The question-and-answer dialogues between Padmasambhava and his disciples are not representative of real-life conversations, but stylized conversations setting the stage for an enlightened teacher and his disciple(s). They are also performative accounts that list all

⁴⁹ Rig 'dzin rgod ldem 1973 vol.5: 321–401. Turpeinen 2018 provides a translation of a major part of this dialogue.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Bla rung aryatäre'i dpe tshogs rtsom sgrig khang 2013 vol.6: 247–250, 319–321.

⁵¹ *Mkha' 'gro ye shes mtsho rgyal gyi skyes rabs rnam thar rgyas pa*: 25b.

⁵² *Ibid*: 29a–30b.

⁵³ *Ibid*: 122a–b.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*: 152a–162a.

the steps of the ideal exchange in which the teaching is requested and then received. This performative aspect becomes clear when we look at the overall sequence of events in these *zhus lans* between Padmasambhava and his female disciples:

1. Opening scene;
2. Female disciple(s) requesting teaching from Padmasambhava;
3. Discussion on the inferiority of women: lamentation from female disciples themselves; or criticism from Padmasambhava;
4. The main body of the text (the order for the following two are interchangeable):
 - a. Admonition or exhortation by Padmasambhava: "This is a worthy disciple who could do it" or "It is not going to be easy, but practice nonetheless!"
 - b. Teaching from Padmasambhava;
5. Concluding scene.

After the opening narrative, a disciple requests some teaching from Padmasambhava. S/he will need to demonstrate a need for such teaching, usually citing the reason for their lack of realization or understanding. The required act of humility is done by Khri Srong lde btsan and other male disciples as well, just to a lesser extent than the female disciples, and not explicitly gendered.⁵⁵ For women, this demonstration takes on two forms: either they themselves lament about their inferiority, or they receive criticism from Padmasambhava. The teacher then continues with the teaching and allows the transmission to take place, which consists of the main body of the text. This is done by either singling out the disciple asking questions as a worthy recipient (for example, Ye shes mtsho

⁵⁵ While the male disciples of Padmasambhava also make literary gestures of humility in their requests for oral instructions, they do not regard their shortcomings or vices as characteristic of their gender. Consider the following example from *Gsang sngags kyi gseb lam: sdig po che sngon la sangs rgya ba'i man ngag* ("The Narrow Path of the Secret Mantra: Instructions on Enlightenment in the Face of Grave Sins"), in which King Khri Srong lde btsan confesses his immorality and inadequacy in practice when asking for teachings from the master: "A king like me has little faith but a lot of wealth and prestige. My virtuous thoughts are limited, I am vicious and hostile to the Teaching—I am an evil person! I take pleasure in distractions and enjoyments. If I have good fortune in this life, I do not even fear the prospect of bad transmigration in the future." *bdag rgyal po 'dra ba dad pa chung ba/ khe grags che ba/ chos la gnag pa/ gdug pa/ dge sems chung ba/ sdig pa shas che ba/ chos la mi gnas pa/ g.yeng ba dang bsod nams la dga' ba/ tshe lam 'di la bsod nams dang ldan na/ phyi ma ngan song du 'gro yang 'jigs sems med pa lags pas/* ('Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1976–1980 vol. 92: 191).

rgyal), or by emphasizing the difficulty, but encouraging the disciples to practice nonetheless.

In these conversations, women are represented (and represent themselves) as generally inferior to men in many aspects of their lives. They are constantly warned that their practice will be difficult and their spiritual path treacherous. These copious comments on women's limited intelligence, debaucherous lifestyle, and unscrupulous inclinations could be easily (and perhaps not unjustifiably) interpreted as a reflection of the general misogyny in the Tibetan Buddhist context. However, it might also be worthwhile to see what these accounts achieve beyond beating the dead horse of women's well-established inferiority and if we can ask more of these accounts. By looking beyond what the text is saying but at what it is doing and who is the intended audience, and by treating women as a conventionalized performance required of a disciple, I suggest that these texts could also represent an uneasiness toward—if not an implicit break from—misogynistic tendencies. If Padmasambhava (or the Treasure revealers associated with these texts) really dislikes women so much or thinks so little of them, why go through all the trouble berating them and then grant them teachings? Why not refuse to teach women altogether? It is easy to explain why women are disparaged in these texts—it is in line with the established inferiority of women in Buddhist traditions. However, it is the unusual exhortation from Padmasambhava that deserves our attention. An equally important takeaway from these dialogues, besides that women are considered second class citizens in Tibetan society, is that these dialogues are also evidence that women are, at least in the literary imagination and in some rare cases, recipients and practitioners of Buddhist teachings.

5. Conclusion

This article examined the literary representations of Ye shes mtsho rgyal as the chief disciple of Padmasambhava in Treasure *zhus lan*, or dialogues, a genre to date less examined. These are sacred dialogues modeled after Mahāyāna and tantric canons and claiming themselves to be authentic transmissions coming from an unbroken lineage. This lineage can be traced back to Padmasambhava, who, in turn, was characterized as “the second Buddha.” These new revelations open the door to a canon only accessible through visions; the role of Ye shes mtsho rgyal in *zhus lan* literature (and to a larger extent, Treasure literature) is the indispensable conduit through which Padmasambhava's teachings were transmitted to future generations.

In most *zhus lan* texts, Ye shes mtsho rgyal is the disciple who addressed her questions to the master and was further entrusted with his teachings and their transmission to future generations. Much like Ānanda, the Buddha's favorite and most intimate disciple, she is said to possess infallible memory and can retain all the teachings in her mind, write them down, and transmit them to future generations.

On a less symbolic level—also quite like Ānanda⁵⁶—Ye shes mtsho rgyal is the spokesperson for women's concerns. Another word might be said of the historical background of these dialogues. The period of and after the renaissance of Buddhism in Tibet witnessed the rise to fame of several important female masters and practitioners from within and outside the Rnying ma tradition. These women include Ma gcig zha ma (1062–1149), Ma gcig lab sgron (1055–1149),⁵⁷ a group of female disciples of Longchenpa,⁵⁸ the 1st Bsam sding rdo rje phag mo (1422–1455),⁵⁹ and so forth. Groups of unnamed female practitioners also constituted a significant part of the Buddhist communities of that time.⁶⁰ Tibetan women were thus active participants in the Rnying ma Buddhist communities as well as other schools.

In the literary world, although negative comments on the inferior status of women abound in Padmasambhava's dialogues with his female disciples, it does not necessarily translate into the lack of access to Buddhist teachings for women. Upon a close reading of the content and style of these dialogues, I argue that the formulaic disparagement of women discloses more than simple misogyny from its composers. It confirms women's inferiority but also includes them in Buddhist teachings and practices. Some of these negative images contain rich details of women's daily struggles, suggesting an awareness of—and perhaps sympathy with—the lower social status

⁵⁶ Ānanda is said to have campaigned on behalf of the Buddha's foster mother, Mahāprajāpatī, for her to become the first Buddhist nun. Mahāprajāpatī wanted to become a monastic and went to ask the Buddha if he would initiate the nun's order. The Buddha turned her down three times. Ānanda encountered the weeping Mahāprajāpatī outside the Buddha's residence, learned about the reason for her distress, and decided to ask the Buddha again on her behalf. He reminded the Buddha of his personal debt to Mahāprajāpatī, who raised him after his mother passed away. The Buddha finally agreed to ordain Mahāprajāpatī and other women as nuns. Ohnuma presents an analysis of the importance of Mahāprajāpatī's role as a mother in the Buddha's decision to allow ordination (Ohnuma 2012: 94–112).

⁵⁷ For a discussion on the importance of these two female characters for the Tibetan Buddhist renaissance, see Davidson 2005: 290–293.

⁵⁸ Germano and Gyatso 2000.

⁵⁹ For a study on her Life (*rnam thar*), see Diemberger 2007.

⁶⁰ These groups are discussed in Martin 1996: 188–189; Davidson 2005: 293; Germano and Gyatso 2000.

of women. As performative accounts, they also satisfy the requirement for a disciple to demonstrate modesty and serve as part of a rhetoric about how teachings should be requested and then transmitted.

Lastly, by dividing my interpretation of female inferiority into “real concerns” and “performance,” I am not saying that the description of female inferiority in these dialogues should be read in either of the two ways—as a sympathetic acknowledgment of the difficulties women encounter in everyday life, or as a perfunctory gesture that mitigates granting women Buddhist teachings. Rather, these two aspects could very well function at the same time and provide some literary relief for women from their precarious situations.

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Prophecies and Past Lives of the Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho: On Interpretation and Authority in a Tibetan *'Khrungs rabs**

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 here is no official biography of the Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705), the right-hand man of the 5th Dalai Lama and erstwhile ruler of the central Tibetan state. This is not to say that nothing was ever written about the Sde srid, by himself or others. There are autobiographical reflections, accounts of his auspicious birth and precocious youth, and records of his scholarship and accomplishments.¹ Arguably no aspect of his person was more central to portrayals of the Sde srid than his spiritual *bona fides*, that is, the narrative of his past lives and supporting prophecies. When the Sde srid and others took up “the Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho” as a subject, these topics were their main interest.

This article surveys the Sde srid’s *'khrungs rabs* or past-life narrative,² based primarily on its initial formation in the *Ngag dbang snyan sgron* or “Ngag dbang’s Report,” a critical response by the eponymous author to the Sde srid’s masterwork on astronomy and divination, the *Bai dūr dkar po* or “White Vaidurya.”

* My thanks to Elizabeth Angowski, Jacob Dalton, and Sonia Hazard for their critical feedback on drafts of this article, as well as Daniel Wojahn for his editorial guidance and all the conveners of the ISYT St. Petersburg seminar. This article was written with the support of the Shinnyo-en Foundation and the Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

¹ On his birth and childhood, see *Snyan sgron*: 12b; *Bai ser*: 354a–b; *Dzam gling rgyan gcig*: 584a–85a; *Dza ya Paṇḍita* vol. 4: 170a–170b; on his studies, *Bai dkar*: 311b; Kilty 2010: 328–345. The *Du kū la’i gos bzang* recounts his years in office and the *Rna ba’i bcud len* adds details about the 5th Dalai Lama’s death and search for the 6th Dalai Lama (on which see also the Sde srid’s biography of the latter). Contemporary works such as the autobiography of Sle lung Bzhad pa’i rdo rje offer occasional perspectives on the Sde srid (see, e.g., his 1702 visit to the Potala: Sle lung Bzhad pa’i rdo rje 2009, 58–63).

² I am treating *'khrungs rabs* as a type of narrative occurring within different genres (*gsol 'debs*, *rnam thar*, *thob yig*, etc.), not to mention visual and material representations.

Ngag dbang's portrayal of the Sde srid is unique because rather than just list his past lives (as is often the case), it demonstrates how the *'khrungs rabs* was constructed. It provides an opportunity for a broader reflection on Tibetan past-life narratives, especially how they, like other discourses of self-fashioning, implicate questions of power.

1. *The 'Khrungs rabs as an Interpretative Practice*

I want to begin by recognizing that a past-life narrative is an act of interpretation. It produces a new sense of the present through a dialogue with the past. In other words, this meaningful and purposive understanding has a dual nature: it is both inventive and responsive. Paul Ricoeur, who wrote at length on this subject, summarized this dialogical quality when he spoke of interpretation as being both "an act *on* the text" and equally "an act *of* the text."³ On the one hand, persons bring their own interests to bear on the sources they interpret to refer them to their world in a particular way. Herein lies the strategic aspect of crafting a past-life narrative—say, reading a prophecy as indicating one person and not another. On the other hand, Ricoeur observed, "a work also creates its public."⁴ That is, the sources bring an autonomy of their own that orients potential readers. As we will see with Ngag dbang's efforts to construct a narrative for the Sde srid, this autonomy operates at the level of the language of texts, as well as through intertextual relationships, communities of reading and transmission, or histories of prior interpretations. All of this weight comes to bear on the interested reader. Therefore, to assess the cultural and literary impact of such discourses requires taking into account both of these aspects of interpretation in connection to one another.

My observations here build on contributions to the study of Tibetan literature by scholars like José Cabezón and Andrew Quintman, who endeavor to restore a degree of complexity and authorial self-awareness to discourses of self-fashioning.⁵ Quintman, mindful of developments in the field of hagiography studies, speaks of moving past the critical binaries that formerly structured scholarly inquiries. "Examining the life stories of a figure," he notes, "is no longer a matter of taking sides between the opposing factions of mytho-centrism and historical positivism."⁶ After all, much hagiography exhibits ambivalent coordination between what may seem like hyperbolic exaggeration on the one hand and sober truth-telling on the other.

³ Ricoeur 1991: 117.

⁴ Ricoeur 1976: 31.

⁵ Quintman 2014; Cabezón 2017.

⁶ Quintman 2014: 25.

Religious studies scholarship has explored how hagiographers—hardly unaware of that contrast themselves—endeavored to “balance” superhuman idealizations of their subjects against frank representations of them.⁷ The larger point, I take it, is that such tensions occurred not in spite of self-fashioning discourses, but rather were constitutive of them.

In sum, I am positing an irreducible relationship between inventiveness and responsiveness that is characteristic of past-life narratives as an interpretative practice. Although this observation may seem relatively straightforward, it presents the social and political dimensions of such narratives in a new light. Specifically, it complicates our sense of how discourses of self-fashioning functioned as authorizing discourses capable of establishing supremacy or legitimacy. I will address this problem below, after first analyzing our Tibetan sources; but it can be summarized as follows. It is basically undisputed that such authorizing discourses succeeded by attributing to their human subject some power greater than him- or herself. That power might be drawn from the charisma of those past lives, or the divine agencies animating their rebirths, or some combination of the two. At the same time, it is also uncontroversial for scholars to view the creation of those discourses as a deliberate human effort to harness sources of authority in an evidently self-interested way. In other words, power is really something that humans make for themselves, and tradition or the gods are more like instruments wielded for personal ends. The problem is that even though these two ways of thinking undermine one another, we have rarely taken seriously the ramifications of recognizing both simultaneously.

How is it, in other words, that humans both understand their authority as deriving from something beyond themselves, and also deliberately and even self-knowingly fashion one another in those terms, at the same time? What would it mean to acknowledge that they recognized the disjunction between the two? In posing these questions, I have in mind the work of the anthropologist David Graeber, who raises the same point in even more general terms:

The really striking thing is how often people can see certain institutions—or even society as a whole—*both* as a human product and also as given in the nature of the cosmos, both as something they have themselves created and something they could not possibly have created.⁸

⁷ Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages*, Oxford University Press, 1988: 30, quoted in Quintman 2014: 25–26.

⁸ Graeber 2001: 232. Emphasis in original.

This basic problem remains on the horizon of our efforts to explain the social and political importance of Tibetan discourses of self-fashioning.

Let us approach the larger issue by first looking closely at the Sde srid's past-life narrative as formulated in the *Snyan sgron*.

2. Tibetan Sources

While there has been no small attention to the Sde srid, with one exception, the topic of his spiritual pedigree is conspicuously absent from scholarship.⁹ A major reason is the evident preference of many historians for the more dramatic events, such as the Sde srid's dubious parentage or his ignominious downfall. One might also detect the long shadow of the historical positivism that Quintman decries. A. I. Vostrikov, the preeminent scholar of Tibetan historiography, declared outright that '*khrungs rabs* are of interest to the historian only to the degree that "genuine" information can be filtered from their "mythical" elements.¹⁰ The genre of '*khrungs rabs gsol 'debs*, or petition prayers to past lives, "of course, have no historical value by themselves."¹¹ Although these priorities are rarely so explicitly stated, they are attested in scholarship on the Sde srid.

Nevertheless, past lives and supporting prophecies were central to the Sde srid's portrayal. This is unsurprising, given the circumstances. One, if not *the* predominant theme of the literary, material, and ritual productions issuing from the Dga' ldan pho brang, was the kingship wielded by their rulers. Past lives were an integral component of that complex topic, which also incorporated cosmological concepts and doctrines of buddhahood, bodhisattvahood, and karma. No individual was more instrumental in articulating and implementing those ideas than the Sde srid. Politically, the Sde srid's authority was tied to the 5th Dalai Lama's, the one being ideally inseparable from the other, as his edict of investiture declared. The same relationship characterized their

⁹ Research into the Sde srid's life includes Richardson 1980; Ishihama 1992 & 2015; Mi nyag mgon po 1996: 366–378; Byams pa 'phrin las 1997 & 2000: 323–327; Yamaguchi 1999; Nor brang O rgyan 2006; Oyunbilig 2008; Sperling 2014. Other scholars reflect on the Sde srid's scholarship or literary persona, often to illuminate his broader intellectual or political milieu (see Schaeffer 2009; Gyatso 2015; and references therein). Ishihama's groundbreaking study (1992) listed the Sde srid's past lives but did not delve substantially into the sources for that narrative, its presentation in Ngag dbang's text, or the Sde srid's remarks on it. While my own analyses thus recognize her contributions, it will become clear that our interests and conclusions differ.

¹⁰ Vostrikov 1970: 94.

¹¹ Ibid: 101.

past lives, which were commingled and sourced in an overlapping set of texts. Their political relationship thus reiterated a cosmic one and comprised another part of the same overarching discourse about the state and its authority.

The narrative of the Sde srid first emerged in two related texts. One is the aforementioned *Ngag dbang snyan sgron nyis brgya brgyad pa* or “Ngag dbang’s Report in 208 [Points of Contention],” by the Lu ’go Bla mkhyen Ngag gi dbang po (“Ngag dbang” for short), an expert on *dbyangs ’char* or divination based on the *Svarodayatantra* and one of the Sde srid’s teachers.¹² The second is a petition prayer by the Sde srid, the *Thogs med bskal pa ma* or “The ‘Unimpeded Age’ Prayer.”¹³ Both works had their impetus in the 1685 publication of the *Bai dūr dkar po*, the Sde srid’s paradigm-setting treatise on astronomy and divinatory methods. This work prompted many responses, including Ngag dbang’s critical questions.

Ngag dbang prefaced his text with a long introduction that was essentially an argument for the Sde srid’s divinity, or as he put it, “the topic of this ruler of humans being more than an ordinary person.”¹⁴ He touched on some specific events (like military victories in Yarkand that he credited to the Sde srid)¹⁵ but primarily discussed the past lives. The Sde srid treated Ngag dbang as an authority on this subject and called the *Snyan sgron* “my own *avadāna*” (Tib. *kho bo’i rtogs brjod*, invoking the Buddhist genre label for life stories of the Buddha and other saints).¹⁶ The release of the *Snyan sgron* in early July 1687 prompted the Sde srid to reply with his *Bai dūr g.ya’ sel* (“Tarnish Remover”), begun days later, and tackling each of Ngag dbang’s

¹² In the colophon to the *Snyan sgron*, he styled himself “Ngag dbang from Phying ba Stag rtse in G.yo ru.” The Sde srid named him Lu ’go bla mkhyen, Bla mkhyen Ngag gi dbang po, and similar permutations. See *Bai dkar*: 314a2; *Mu tig chun po*: 276–277; *Dzam gling rgyan gcig*: 592a; cf. also Schuh 1973: 39–40; Kilty 2010: 330. An 18th-century divination manuscript contains portraits of a lineage ending with “Vagindra” (Ngag gi dbang po), followed by “Buddhasamudra” (Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho); see Dorje 2001: 58.

¹³ One also finds *thog med*; I follow the block print. Copies exist in the Nepal National Archives and the Tōyō Bunkō. The Sde srid mentioned a commentary by the Rnam gling paṅ chen Dkon mchog chos grags (*Lo gsar ’bel gtam*: 34a) but I am unaware if it is extant.

¹⁴ *mi dbang nyid so skye’i yul las ’das pa ni* (*Snyan sgron*: 7a). The introduction spans folios 5a–16a.

¹⁵ *Snyan sgron*: 14b–15a. Ngag dbang was referring to the Dzungar Galdan Boshukhtu’s conquest of the Yarkand Khanate in Xinjiang (Millward 2007: 86–92; Ma 2003: 184–185, 191–193). From the perspective of the central Tibetan state, this was an expansion of “greater Tibet” (*bod chen*), not in the sense of direct rule but rather expanding the sphere of tribute flowing into Lhasa. The foreigners fawning with gifts at the Sde srid’s feet in his portraits (e.g., Jackson 1996: 212) give some impression of this mindset.

¹⁶ *Lo gsar ’bel gtam*: 34a.

critical questions. Concurrently, noting that Ngag dbang had requested to adapt the past-life series for ritual use, he also obligingly composed the *Thogs med bskal pa ma*.¹⁷ This prayer named 20 of the Sde srid's past lives, all but one of which were discussed in the *Snyan sgron*. Formally and stylistically, it mirrors the *Rmad byung bskal pa ma* or "The 'Fortunate Age' Prayer," a petition to the Dalai Lama's past lives that the Sde srid assembled in 1693 out of verses written by the Dalai Lama, adding a seven-limbed offering and other prayers, plus a commentary, the *Mu tig chun po* ("String of Pearls").¹⁸ Many verses in the *Thogs med bskal pa ma* specified the relationship to the corresponding life of the Dalai Lama (the reverse is not also true). It also identified itself—in its title and again in the third stanza—as an account of rebirths of Mu ne btsan po, who was the eldest son of King Khri srong lde btsan (past life of the Dalai Lama) and thirteenth of the Sde srid's past lives.¹⁹ Mu ne btsan po was by far the most important of the Sde srid's past lives and formed a kind of hub for the network of persons and prophecies that Ngag dbang assembled.

Before turning to the *Snyan sgron*, let us mention a few later sources, starting with the Sde srid's preface to his *G.ya' sel*. In it, the Sde srid commented on Ngag dbang's portrayal (critically, at times) and addressed concerns such as the ethical implications of bodhisattvas assuming karmically compromised human occupations (like his own). Most pertinent here is his excursus on the sons of Khri srong lde btsan, a key concern insofar as prophecies were hardly consistent in naming them.²⁰ The Sde srid later broached the subject of his spiritual pedigree in several texts during the 1690s, including the *Lo gsar 'bel gtam* ("New Year's Speechmaking"), his guidebook for court oratory; the *'Dzam gling rgyan gcig gi dkar chag* ("Tomb Inventory"), his inventory of the Potala Palace and the Dalai Lama's reliquary stupa; and the *Bai dūr ser po* ("Yellow Vaidurya"), his survey of state-administered monasteries, which included a long appendix on the 5th Dalai Lama.²¹ The latter text,

¹⁷ *Snyan sgron*: 15a; *Thogs med bskal pa ma*: 5a; *G.ya' sel*: 472a–b. The *Snyan sgron* was published at the end of the fifth Hor month and the Sde srid began his reply on the first of the sixth month (July 10). Within about a month, he completed the preface, most answers on Indian astronomy, and the *Thogs med bskal pa ma*. Occupational responsibilities and work on the *Blue Vaidurya* delayed him until he finished the *G.ya' sel* on August 31, 1688.

¹⁸ Its colophon (*Mu tig chun po*: 275–282) details the preparation of both texts.

¹⁹ The sequence is not chronological but arranged by group. For the Sde srid's suggestions on chronology, see *Thogs med bskal pa ma*: 5b; *G.ya' sel*: 16a–b.

²⁰ *G.ya' sel*: 11b6–15a5.

²¹ *Lo gsar 'bel gtam*: 30a–b; *'Dzam gling rgyan gcig*: 585a–588b; *Bai ser*: 353a–355a.

especially, was a vector for disseminating those ideas and, more broadly, the specific sources and interpretations that informed them.²²

Among its early readers was the Dza ya Paṇḍita Blo bzang 'phrin las (1642–1715), who, in his *Thob yig* (1698–1702), recapitulated the Sde srid's arguments about the 5th Dalai Lama.²³ The short section on the Sde srid, often paraphrasing or quoting from the *Bai ser*, stands alongside the *Snyan sgron* as the closest things we have to a contemporary biography.²⁴ It listed the Sde srid's past lives, surveyed the major prophecies, and commented on the Sde srid's life and works. The Dza ya Paṇḍita noted that he had personally received a transmission of the *Thogs med bskal pa ma* from the Nyi ma thang zhabs drung, a frequent emissary between the Dga' ldan pho brang and the Qing.

3. *The 'Khrungs rabs*

There is, alas, no space to translate the whole *gsol 'debs* here, so the Dza ya Paṇḍita's terse rendition must suffice:²⁵

1. Dharmarāja Sucandra, whom the Bhagavān Buddha taught the *Śrī Kālacakramūlatantra*;
2. Yid 'ong ma,²⁶ mother of the brahmin's pupil Gsal ba;
3. Dga' rab dpal, older brother of Kun tu dga', king in Vaiśālī;
4. The beggarwoman Des ma [who received offerings from Lha skyes];
5. The fine steed (*cang shes*, *ājāneya*) of Dkon mchog 'bangs;
6. King Bhaṅga, father of the prince Dad pa brtan pa;
7. Sgyu ma mchil pa, minister of Dad pa rab tu brtan pa;
8. The householder Dpal sbas, contemporary of the boy Dge 'dun chos 'phel;
9. The parrot G.yu mthing,²⁷ friend of the bird Kun tu rgyu;
10. Mu khri btsan po, son of the ruler Gnya' khri btsan po;

²² For the influence of the *Bai ser* on representations of Tsong kha pa, see Dargyay 1977; for local history informed by this text and its sources, Diemberger and Wangdu 1996.

²³ Ujeed 2017.

²⁴ Dza ya Paṇḍita vol. 4: 165b–174b.

²⁵ Ibid: 165b–166b; cf. *Thogs med bskal pa ma*: 1b–4b.

²⁶ For this and subsequent names from the *Bka' gdam glegs bam bu chos* (nos. 2–9), I present the transliterated Tibetan rather than guessing the intended Sanskrit.

²⁷ Often called *ne tso smra mkhas*, “loquacious parrot.”

11. Khri gnyan gzugs can, scion of Lha tho tho ri snyan shal, first to encounter the holy Dharma;
12. Gung ri gung btsan, son of the Buddhist king Srong btsan sgam po, who introduced a writing system to translate Dharma from India and established the human custom of the 16 laws;
13. Mu ne btsan po, scion of the Buddhist king Khri srong lde btsan, who invited the Mkhan po Bodhisattva and omniscient Padmasambhava to build the *sanyang* (三樣, “three styles”) Mi ’gyur lhun grub gtsug lag khang [Bsam yas];
14. Lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje, slayer of Glang dar ma, who persecuted the dispensation;
15. Rngog Legs pa’i shes rab, who requested Dharma from ’Brom ston Rgyal ba’i ’byung gnas;
16. Gter ston Rin chen gling pa, *vidyādhara* (“awareness-holder”) and fifth of 17 rebirths of Lha sras to serve sentient beings, as in the immaculate guru’s prophecy (*dri med bla mas lung bstan pa*);
17. Sechen [Khubilai] Khan, sovereign over the great Sino-Mongolian empire;
18. Gter ston Bzang po grags pa;
19. Nor bzang rgya mtsho, learned and accomplished master and main guru to the omniscient [1st Dalai Lama] Dge ’dun rgya mtsho;
20. Altan Nominkhan, who invited the omniscient [3rd Dalai Lama] Bsod nams rgya mtsho to Mongolia and used the light of the teachings of the great Tsong kha pa, who is master of those wearing the Yellow Hat, to expel the gloom from outlying regions.

Lives two through nine are secondary characters from stories in the *Bka’ gdams glegs bam bu chos* (“Son Teachings of the Book of the Bka’ gdams”), all past lives of Rngog (number 15); 10 through 14 are kings from Tibet’s Spu rgyal dynasty, plus one famous regicide; the rest include two *gter ston*-s or “treasure-revealers,” a Dge lugs scholar, and two Mongol Khans. Now is a good moment to pause and mention two visual representations of this list. The first, from the Potala Palace, was published in *Bod kyi thang ka* (Chin. *Xizang tangka* 西藏唐卡) and reproduced in David Jackson’s *History of Tibetan Painting*.²⁸ The second (Fig. 1) is a linen block print that Giuseppe Tucci acquired in Rgyal

²⁸ *Bod kyi thang ka* 1985: pl. 78; Jackson 1996: pl. 33; see also *Himalayan Art Resources*, item 99078. www.himalayanart.org. Accessed May 14, 2020.

rtse, recently reproduced in color in a survey of Tucci's collection.²⁹ The editor astutely recognized the Sde srid but noted that clarification of the figures remains a desideratum.

The Potala painting poses no issue as it includes labels identifying the 20 figures from the list above, alternating down both sides of the canvas.³⁰ The linen print, notwithstanding its unique composition and style, clearly depicts the same set. Here I offer my best guess as to their arrangement (Fig. 2). There is much overlap of iconographical detail between the two portraits, especially seats, hats, and held objects, making it easy to confirm lives 11–14 and 16–20. The composition in the top half poses difficulties because the horse and parrot (5 and 9) are featured on opposite sides, allowing an elegant symmetry but thwarting any regular alternation. The posture and crown of the center-top figure suggest Sucandra (1). I have identified Dga' rab dpal (3) by his flower and Yid 'ong ma and Des ma (2 and 4) by my best guess at gender, plus the latter's beggar's robes. The minister Sgyu ma mchil pa (7) is identifiable by his bare chest and sash; the other two (6 and 8) by their placement and the hint of a beard on King Bhaṅga. By process of elimination, we can place Mu khri btsan po (10) and Rngog (15).

²⁹ Tucci 1949: pl. 228; Klimburg-Salter 2015: pl. 33.

³⁰ See also Ishihama 2015: 177.



Fig. 1 — Linen print of the *Sde srid's 'khrungs rabs*. After Klimburg-Salter 2015: pl. 33.
© Museo delle Civiltà/MAO "G. Tucci"



Fig. 2 — Proposed arrangement of figures. Drawing by the author

4. Prophecies in the *Snyan sgron*

To reiterate, what is unique about the *Snyan sgron* is that it shows how this list comes together in the first place. Starting from *Mu ne btsan po*, as the pieces fall into place, they reinforce one another (and the kindred narrative about the 5th Dalai Lama). Such is not to say the entire set populates itself automatically; instead, it resulted from sifting and clarifying multiple inherited connections. It was not so much assembled from scratch as disentangled from a mass of potential relationships.

Ngag dbang organized the prophecies into three tiers: outer, inner, and secret. The logic behind this rubric probably relates to Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's 1679 enthronement as *Sde srid*, which Ngag dbang described in related terms:

On his investiture with authority as human ruler (*mi'i rje bo*), (1) outwardly, there was the unprecedented edict, marked with the profound imprints of [the Dalai Lama's] handprints and in its fine points indistinguishable from proclamations of Avalokiteśvara, which, insofar as it must be binding upon all three sorts of person—noble, middling, and base—weighs down heavy as the golden mountain [*Yugandhara*] upon all necks and should be witnessed by every person from highest to lowest; (2) inwardly, the profound rite of authorization transforming him into a sovereign king (*rgyal po la mnga' bsgyur ba'i mnga' dbang zab mo*) was devised together by the Protector and Refuge [Dalai Lama] and the Rig 'dzin Gter bdag gling pa [Gyur med rdo rje, 1646–1714], who also decreed that this sovereign authority ought to be respected in like manner as would befit a *cakravartin*, a bodhisattva assuming life in the world, or a forceful king who rules according to Dharma; and (3) secretly, what they did is not a suitable topic for discussion here.³¹

The “outer” prophetic sources were the thirty-sixth chapter of the *Mañjuśrīmūlatantra* and the *Bka' thang sde lnga* (“Five Chronicles”). By at least 1675, a passage in the former, once thought to refer to 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, was being linked to the 5th Dalai Lama.³²

For the *Sde srid*, the crucial thing about this passage was that it named the 5th Dalai Lama's political identity as a *sdom brtson rgyal po* or a “renunciate king,” both monk and sovereign. This key term is ubiquitous in his texts. The lines pertaining to the *Sde srid* followed immediately after.³³ As Ngag dbang read them, they foretold his birth-

³¹ *Snyan sgron*: 7b.

³² See Karmay 2014: 225.

³³ See *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma* vol. 88: 917–918. These lines on the Dalai Lama and the *Sde srid* corresponds to verses 935–939 of the Sanskrit (cf. Jayaswal 1934: 75).

name “Dkon mchog don grub”³⁴ and “Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho” in Tibetan and Sanskrit.³⁵ Thus, I suspect that this source played two roles for the Sde srid: first, it reinforced the core idea of the Dalai Lama as a *sdom brtson rgyal po*; second, it established a broad base for reconciling other prophecies tied to the Sde srid that mentioned various names (Rin chen, Dkon mchog, Sangs rgyas, etc.).³⁶

Ngag dbang cited passages from three of the five *bka' thang*: the *Lha 'dre bka' thang*, the *Btsun mo bka' thang*, and the *Rgyal po bka' thang* (respectively, chronicles of “Gods and Demons,” “Queens,” and “the King”). The passage he quoted from the first of these predicted accomplishments of a future *dharmarāja*, such as restoring Bsam yas and military victory, that Ngag dbang credited to the Sde srid. From the second, he quoted four lines predicting a projection of Khri srong lde btsan’s “activity” named “Byang” (referring to the Dalai Lama) and calling for someone to make statues and paintings in his likeness (referring to the Sde srid). This passage echoed lines in both the *Blon po bka' thang* (“Chronicle of Ministers”) and the *Thang yig shel brag ma* (“Crystal Cave Chronicle”) that foretold five projections of Khri srong lde btsan—body, speech, mind, quality, and activity—as the progenitor of the Byang lineage. As interpreted in the Byang gter tradition, the first four were (1) Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer, (2) Guru Chos dbang, (3) the Mnga' ris Paṅ chen Padma dbang rgyal, and (4) Dbang po sde Bkra shis stobs rgyal. Their connections predated the Dalai Lama; for instance, Bkra shis stobs rgyal (of the Byang clan) was identified by the second Rdo rje brag sprul sku as the rebirth of the Mnga' ris Paṅ chen.³⁷ The Dalai Lama allegedly prioritized treasures of Bkra shis stobs rgyal, whom he “cherished above all.”³⁸ Fittingly, it was the 4th Rdo rje brag sprul sku Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717) who suggested that the Dalai Lama was Khri srong lde btsan’s fifth and final projection.³⁹

³⁴ Evidently, he was named *in utero* by the deity Tshangs pa dung thod can. This episode became a stock part of the Sde srid’s story.

³⁵ *Snyan sgron*: 8b–9a. The *Mañjuśrīmūlatantra* mentioned one “Ratnasambhava” (*rin chen 'byung gnas*). Ngag dbang argued, first, that *rin chen* and *dkon mchog* are synonyms; and second, that *rin chen 'byung gnas* was also a poetic term for the ocean (*rgya mtsho*) and an epithet for a buddha (*sangs rgyas*). The next lines mentioned the letters *Ba* (*Va* in Sanskrit) and *A*, thus, *Buddha-apti*.

³⁶ The generosity of that reading was not lost on the Sde srid: “In a world where *rgya mtsho* and *dkon mchog* are synonyms for *sangs rgyas*, we could never measure how many persons there are [who fit this description]—so what makes it me? (*nged ga nas yin*)” (*G.ya' sel*: 8b1).

³⁷ See also the Sde srid’s exposition of those four projections based on the *Shel brag ma* and the Mnga' ris Paṅ chen’s own *Rig 'dzin yongs 'dus* (*Bai ser*: 290a–b).

³⁸ Dudjom 2002: 824.

³⁹ Karmay 2014: 244.

The Sde srid later complemented that reading with a parallel one, incorporating lines from the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*, whereby Khri srong lde btsan's first four projections simultaneously named the first four Dalai Lamas.⁴⁰ These parallel series rejoined in the 5th Dalai Lama, inheritor of both Rnying ma and Bka' gdams/Dge lugs lineages. The three chapels that the Sde srid built around the Dalai Lama's stupa in the Potala Palace were dedicated, respectively, to his past lives and these two inheritances. The Sde srid also festooned the palace with images of the 5th Dalai Lama. He cited in support these very same lines (create his likeness in statues and murals) from the *Btsun mo bka' thang*.⁴¹ Here we find a case where passages were refigured as calls to action—life imitating prophecy, so to speak.

Ngag dbang quoted two excerpts from the *Rgyal po bka' thang* predicting the Sde srid as a rebirth of Khri srong lde btsan's son. The first, from the nineteenth chapter, prophesied one "at the end of 12 disparate rebirths of the prince," born in a *kṣatriya* family⁴² and a mighty, sagacious ruler. In the source, it seems that Padmasambhava was speaking about 12 rebirths of Khri srong lde btsan's youngest son Sad na legs; however, Ngag dbang and the Sde srid read it as referencing Mu ne, the eldest. Now, there are notorious discrepancies between Tibetan sources as to how many sons Khri srong lde btsan had, how long they reigned and lived, and even what their names were. It may be helpful here to summarize the position of Ngag dbang and the Sde srid.⁴³

Both maintained that there were three sons: (1) the eldest, Lha sras Mu ne (or Mu khri, or Mu tig) btsan po, who ruled briefly until his mother poisoned him; (2) Mu rub (or Mu rug) btsan po, who was exiled (and later assassinated) for killing a minister's son; and (3) Sad na legs mjing yon, also known as Mu tig btsan po or Tri lde srong btsan, who eventually took the throne and had five sons. More boldly, they insisted that the epithet "Mu tig" applied to all three—as a term of office, not a personal name, hence not unlike "Sde pa" or "Sde srid." Moreover, the Sde srid added, when teachings like the *Bsam pa lhun grub ma* ("Prayer that Spontaneously Fulfills All Wishes") described how "Lha sras" requested them from Padmasambhava, this, too, was referring to Mu ne.

The Sde srid's appeal here to the *Bsam pa lhun grub ma*, last chapter of the *Le'u bdun ma* ("Prayer in Seven Chapters"), is important not only because it was revealed by Bzang po grags pa—past life number 18—

⁴⁰ See, e.g., *Bai ser*: 289b.

⁴¹ *Dzam gling rgyan gcig*: 285a.

⁴² Here, the landed aristocracy; see *Lo gsar 'bel gtam*: 31b; *Bai ser*: 353b; *Dza ya Paṇḍita* vol. 4: 167a.

⁴³ *Snyan sgron*: 13b6–14a3; *G.ya' sel*: 12a1–15a6.

but also because in that text, Padmasambhava told Lha sras that he would have *seventeen* future births.⁴⁴ This explains why, although the aforementioned passage from the *Rgyal po bka' thang* prophesied a life “at the end of 12,” Ngag dbang insisted that it was really describing this same series of 17 future births of Lha sras.⁴⁵ It may also explain Ngag dbang's other selection from the *Rgyal po bka' thang*, from its eighteenth chapter, itself a work in 44 sections called the *Kha byang mdzod kyi lde mig* (“Certificate Treasury Key”). The eighteenth section—on the holy water that Padmasambhava concealed inside a cliff at G.ya' ma lung—included lines about a rebirth in 17 future lives as one “Khri rgyal.”⁴⁶ Ngag dbang added that Gter bdag gling pa (who discovered his own *Rig 'dzin thugs thig* at G.ya' ma lung in 1668) had bestowed that water upon the Sde srid, along with a scroll of the *gter ma*, indicating a strong connection.⁴⁷ Real events thus also impacted choices for how to read.

Next, for the “inner” prophecy, Ngag dbang quoted Gter bdag gling pa's *Rig 'dzin thugs thig*,⁴⁸ which predicted “a projection of Mu ne, an intelligent king/ one named Buddha, turning the wheel of the two laws.” These same lines featured in the Sde srid's enthronement in 1679. The biography of Gter bdag gling pa by his brother, the Lo chen Dharma śrī, noted that during the second month of the Earth-Sheep Year (March/ April 1679), the Dalai Lama had sought Gter bdag gling pa's counsel on suitable candidates for the office of Sde srid. In response, he furnished “a detailed and lengthy memorandum on how the *Rgya can* and the treasure texts explained [who] was appropriate for the ruler of Tibet, etc.”⁴⁹ The *Gsang ba rgya can* or “Sealed Secret” is the Dalai Lama's record of his visions.⁵⁰ In 1672, the Dalai Lama authorized Gter bdag gling pa and the Rdo rje brag sprul sku as the principal bearers of this teaching; Gter bdag gling pa bestowed empowerments and transmissions of it during his travels through central Tibet.⁵¹ His biography also recounted the Sde srid's rites of royal investiture, which it portrayed as fulfilling these same lines on Mu ne btsan po from the *Rig 'dzin thugs thig*.⁵² We may speculate that Gter bdag gling pa singled out this passage for the enthronement in

⁴⁴ *Rin chen gter mdzod* vol. 7: 19b6; quoted in *Lo gsar 'bel gtam*: 31b.

⁴⁵ *Snyan sgron*: 9a.

⁴⁶ Ngag dbang took *khri* to refer to rebirths of Mu khri (i.e., Mu ne) btsan po and *rgyal* as indicating either connections to the “*rgyal ba*” Dalai Lama or his own status as king.

⁴⁷ *Snyan sgron*: 9b3.

⁴⁸ Here I follow the usual spelling, although it was the Sde srid's habit to write *rigs*.

⁴⁹ Dharma śrī: 59a4.

⁵⁰ See Karmay 1988 for a summary.

⁵¹ Dharma śrī: 37a3 and 41b1.

⁵² *Ibid*: 59b–60b.

concert with prophetic statements about Mu ne btsan po in the *Rgya can* (discussed below), which in turn furnished the basis for seeking statements about Mu ne (or Mu khri/Mu tig/Lha sras) from other treasure texts.

Ngag dbang cited several “secret” sources, foremost being three chapters of the *Rgya can ma*.⁵³ Its fifth chapter recounted the Dalai Lama’s visions during a retreat from May 29–June 5, 1659. The Gnas chung Oracle had urged the Dalai Lama to seek clues about keeping their subjects in order: Bsod nams rab brtan, the first Sde srid, had died over a year prior, a secret the Dalai Lama only publicized after this retreat. Ngag dbang remarked that in hindsight, these visions anticipated conflicts that year related to the succession, especially the so-called “uncle and nephew uprising” fomented by Sde pa Nor bu, the first candidate for the vacant office. Eventually, the Jai sang sde pa ‘Phrin las rgya mtsho of Grong smad, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho’s paternal uncle, became the next Sde srid. In a vision on the eleventh (June 1), a yogin gave the Dalai Lama cryptic predictions for the upcoming 12 years. Ngag dbang highlighted two lines in particular: “the monkey will stay at the top of the tree/ doing harm [of/to] the beaked bird.”⁵⁴ He read this as signaling that the next Sde srid “would not live past the Monkey and Bird Years.” (Indeed, ‘Phrin las rgya mtsho died in the Earth-Monkey Year, 1668.) The dream yogin then offered what Ngag dbang took for a clue about choosing a successor: “Midst the Sde pa’s first [and] third/ seek the name and [he] will swiftly come!” He read “first and third” as referring to rows of the Tibetan syllabary (i.e., the gutturals and dentals), thus, the “K” and “D” in the Sde srid’s birth-name Dkon mchog don grub. The implication is that even at this early date, there were signs (if only recognized retrospectively) that the office should go to Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. It went first to Blo bzang mthu stobs before being offered to him in 1675.⁵⁵

From the sixteenth chapter, Ngag dbang cited a vision on November 7, 1672, which established the most unambiguous link to Mu ne btsan po. In it, Padmasambhava twice predicted a rebirth of Mu ne, as someone named “Ra tna” and then “Dkon mchog.”⁵⁶ Again, we see the importance of the *Mañjuśrīmūlatantra* for furnishing a rationale tying these names to Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. Finally, Ngag dbang

⁵³ The Sde srid cited the same three chapters (5, 16, 22) for clues about the past karma responsible for the Dalai Lama’s (apparent) pain, illness, and death; see *’Dzam gling rgyan gcig*: 135a (gong).

⁵⁴ *spre’u shing rtser gnas pa la/ mchu can bya yi gnod pa byed* (*Gsang ba rgya can* vol. ca: 6a).

⁵⁵ *Snyan sgron*: 10a; cf. *’Dzam gling rgyan gcig*: 585a.

⁵⁶ *Gsang ba rgya can* vol. ma: 5b.

quoted two lines from the twenty-second chapter, supporting another key idea: "In all former lives, and for later ones too/ they are inseparable, without a doubt."⁵⁷ Ngag dbang coupled this to the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*, which touched on the same theme of persons who remain inseparable across lifetimes. He quoted two passages from the *Bu chos* applying that theme to 'Brom ston and his colleagues—"like the sandalwood tree and its scent," as one put it, "as father and son in every lifetime," in the other.⁵⁸ Given the assertions in the *Bu chos* about 'Brom's affiliation with Khri srong lde btsan, plus the longstanding association of 'Brom with the Dalai Lamas, and now adding the Sde srid's connection to Mu ne btsan po, one can see how all these elements mutually supported one another.

In addition to the *Rgya can ma*, Ngag dbang also quoted a prophecy of Dri med kun dga', a late-14th-century *gter ston*, whose empowerments the 5th Dalai Lama had received from Gter bdag gling pa. Probably its main attraction lay in its references to the names "Sangs rgyas" and "Rin chen," not to mention its prediction that this prophesied ruler would compose new treatises and "put forth his own language" (*rang skad thon pa*), which Ngag dbang used to highlight the Sde srid's singular intellectual contributions. His last secret source was from the Mnga' ris gter ston Zla ba rgyal mtshan (1640–1685), also known as Gar dbang rdo rje, whose revelations were authenticated by the Dalai Lama and Gter bdag gling pa and included prophecies about the 5th Dalai Lama (e.g., "last of the Za hor line;" "rebirth of the Mnga' bdag rgyal po and, in truth, Avalokiteśvara") as well as the Sde srid ("a *dharmarāja* named Ra tna who brings peace to Tibet; my projection, the real Lha sras"). In his own texts, the Sde srid added another prophecy, describing a projection of Lha sras named "Rin chen,"⁵⁹ from the *Spyi lung mdor bsdus snying po*, part of the *Rig 'dzin yongs 'dus*, revealed in 1532 by the Mnga' ris Paṅ chen Padma dbang rgyal, third of the five projections of Khri srong lde btsan.

5. On Mu ne btsan po

Many of these prophecies concerned the connection to Mu ne btsan po. As mentioned above, one impetus was the construal of the Sde srid's

⁵⁷ *Snyan sgron*: 11a6. The quoted passage (albeit in a letter-shifted code script common in this text) seems to be vol. *za*: 5b6–6a1.

⁵⁸ Ngag dbang clarified: "'Father and son' means there is no doubt that by and large they will be inseparable, whether in a Dharmic context as master and disciple, in a worldly one as husband and wife, etc." See *Snyan sgron*: 11a5.

⁵⁹ The Sde srid acknowledged that it was also applied to 'Bri gung Rin chen phun tshogs (1547–1602); see *G.ya' sel*: 15a.

enthronement in consultation with the *Rgya can ma* and the *Rig 'dzin thugs thig*. Those readings may have been guided by an interest in the sons of Khri srong lde btsan, unfolding against the backdrop of the Dalai Lama's own connections to the Byang gter tradition (whose literature informed his link to Khri srong lde btsan) and the *Bka' gdams bu chos* (the key source on Avalokiteśvara, which also identified 'Brom ston with that king). Not only would Mu ne thus stitch the Sde srid into the same text traditions, but since there were other sources that associated Mu ne with Khubilai Khan (and thence Altan Khan), they would reiterate the link between the Dalai Lamas and 'Phags pa. As such, Mu ne may have simply been the card the Sde srid was dealt.

However, there are resonances between their respective reigns. Mu ne was Khri srong lde btsan's scion (*sras kyi thu bo*), a term that the Sde srid employed to emphasize his own favored status in the Dalai Lama's eyes and inheritance of responsibility over the entire government, formerly the prerogative of the Dalai Lama. Both Mu ne and the Sde srid held office in an abbreviated fashion and in the absence of their departed predecessor. Khri srong lde btsan absconded to Zung mkhar, where he died (a fact kept hidden, in some accounts), whereas the Sde srid is infamous for concealing the 5th Dalai Lama's death.⁶⁰

Mu ne's contributions as recounted in texts like the *Dbā' bzhed* ("Testament of Ba/Wa") and the variant *zhabs btags ma* ("supplemented version") were not lost on the Sde srid. The parallels are striking. Mu ne was instrumental in negotiating his father's funeral and upheld his father's tradition of religious patronage, including "leveling rich and poor" three times—an attempt at socioeconomic parity prompted by inequalities in public offerings.⁶¹ The failure of that policy (political engineering could never overcome differences of karma) prompted Mu ne to introduce holidays of worship at Bsam yas and other sites as a means of redress. The Sde srid cited Mu ne's works as precedent for his own responses to the Dalai Lama's death, foremost the golden reliquary stupa and the new *tshogs mchod chen mo* or "Great Worship Assembly" holiday. Surely it would be oversimplifying to think copying Mu ne was the only factor here; but it demonstrates nevertheless how the Sde srid's narrative was inflected by his deeds as ruler.

⁶⁰ In the *G.ya' sel*, the Sde srid cited the *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, which says the death was hidden for three years (14b4); later, in his *'Dzam gling rgyan gcig gi dkar chag*, he cited a version of the *Sba bzhed* in which it was hidden for one cycle (*lo skor*, i.e., 12 years), which he took as his own benchmark (139b6).

⁶¹ On the funeral, see Diemberger and Wangdu 2000: 92–97. On Mu ne's actions in the *Sba bzhed zhabs btags ma*, see *Rba bzhed phyogs bsgrigs*: 57–59.

The value of past lives is not automatic or instantaneous. If their very enunciation may have bestowed some modicum of prestige or legitimacy, the narrative was also retrospectively made meaningful through action.

6. Past Lives

Ngag dbang turned next to other past lives of the Sde srid. He started with the *Bu chos*, which yielded past lives two through nine, all considered past lives of Rngog.

Why Rngog? After all, the *Bu chos* made many identifications regarding 'Brom's compatriots. In the *G.ya' sel*, the Sde srid recalled two encounters with the Dalai Lama:

Once, in the Earth-Bird Year [1669] while we were sitting in the Red Chapel [apartments], when [the Dalai Lama] got up to walk about, he took hold of the bird-perch on the window and said—as the chant-master Blo bzang yon tan and the chief provisioner Ge ra ba Blo bzang mkhyen brtse clearly recall—"Do you not remember when we were born as the bird Kun tu rgyu and the loquacious parrot?" And then later, in the Fire-Dragon Year (1675) while he was making himself appear as if stricken by rheumatism, once he started feeling a little better, we went for a stroll. It was easy going out but hard coming back, so I made as if to convey him, and as he went onto the cushion it occurred to him, "this is a bit like the time we went west to O rgyan in pursuit of [the *ḍākinī*] Gsang ba ye shes!"⁶²

These episodes refer respectively to the tale of the two parrots and the tale of Dkon mchog 'bangs, whose magical steed bore him rapidly to O rgyan. Recall the prominent placement of parrot and horse in the linen print of the Sde srid's past lives. In the *Bu chos*, Atiśa explicitly identified Rngog with both. So, it is possible that specific associations like these guided the choice of Rngog, and the other eight lives followed from cues given by the text.

Why just these eight? By contrast, the Dalai Lama had past lives in all the *Bu chos* stories (and sub-stories, too).⁶³ The answer is that these were the only stories where the link between Rngog and some side character was stated explicitly in the text. Actually, Ngag dbang *did* concede that one could posit a past life of the Sde srid in the remaining

⁶² *G.ya' sel*: 11a6–11b2.

⁶³ The Sde srid noted that chapters one and seven described their protagonists as rebirths of someone else. He added another nine lives from stories the parrot told in the *khu chos* (*Bka' gdams glegs bam bu chos*: 608–641).

stories, too, as witnessed in Ishihama's extended version of the list.⁶⁴ What has been overlooked, however, is that Ngag dbang set aside these hypothetical identifications in a separate section and stressed that they were only "implicit" (*shugs*).⁶⁵ As Ngag dbang and the Sde srid indicated, "implicit" meant that these identifications relied on annotations to the *Bu chos* manuscript, some by the 3rd Dalai Lama. Clearly, the work of sketching connections between *Bu chos* characters and 'Brom and his comrades (and thence to lives outside the text) was long underway, although the text's own language remained the determining factor.

Ngag dbang turned next to the kings Mu khri btsan po, Khri gnyan gzung btsan, Gung ri gung btsan, and Mu ne. Why just these kings? Again, there were ten kings in the Dalai Lama's direct rebirth line. An answer is found in the *Bu chos* story of King Lha'i rgyal po, which treated the quartet of Gnya' khri, Tho tho ri, Srong btsan sgam po, and Khri srong lde btsan as a significant group.⁶⁶ These are just the fathers of the four kings linked to the Sde srid. The logic of this quartet is that Gnya' khri was the head of the dynasty; Tho tho ri, the first to encounter Buddhism; Srong btsan sgam po, the founder of the tradition; and Khri srong lde btsan, its propagator. Indeed, the better-known "three ancestors" (*mes dbon rnam gsum*) corresponding to the "three family guardians" (*rigs gsum mgon po*) Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Varjapāṇi, were not the only way of grouping kings or bodhisattvas. In Lha'i rgyal po's tale, the sage Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna predicted that in the future (as Avalokiteśvara) the king would be exhorted by four bodhisattvas (Nivāraṇaviṣkambhin, Samantabhadra, Mahākāruṇika, and Mañjuśrī) to become those four kings (Gnya' khri, Tho tho ri, Srong btsan sgam po, and Khri srong lde btsan). The story added that Khri srong lde btsan would emit two "rays of light," referring to his sons. Thus, we see how one might extrapolate a kindred quartet of kings for the Sde srid.

Ngag dbang also proposed two lives on account of the Sde srid's expertise in the *Kālacakrantra*. One is King Sucandra, whom the Buddha taught its *mūlatantra*; the other is Mkhas grub Nor bzang rgya mtsho, a Phug lugs scholar who authored a commentary on the *Kālacakra*.⁶⁷ I will quote the Sde srid's remarks on these two:

The *dharmarāja* Sucandra is ordinarily considered a projection of Vajrapāṇi, but because of [the formula] "three families, one essence"

⁶⁴ Ishihama 1992: 64–67.

⁶⁵ *Snyan sgron*: 11b–12a; cf. *G.ya' sel*: 11b4.

⁶⁶ *Bka' gdams glegs bam bu chos*: 454–455, 471–472, 476–477; quoted at *Snyan sgron*: 8a4.

⁶⁷ *Snyan sgron*: 13b.

(*rigs gsum ngo bo gcig pa*) there is not any problem here.⁶⁸ Plus, for the *Kālacakra*, [my own] vigorous understanding of [its] knowledge occurred just as taught (? *dus kyi 'khor lo la rig pa'i go ba drag tsam kyang ji ltar gsung ba ltar byung ba*). As for [my being] the all-knowing Nor bzang rgya mtsho: there is no definitive evidence of being so. Nor does he seem to have any connection to the past lives of Lha sras. Still, insofar as in the main text (*ma dpe*) of my treatise the *White Vaiḍūrya* I set forth all the ideas, which nobody understood, from the supplementary instructions (? *zhal lung bu dpe'i rigs*) and Mkhas grub Rin po che [Nor bzang rgya mtsho's] own documents (*rang gi yig cha*), plus the fact that I reached [that understanding] while thinking about them at night and designing the diagrams during the day, this accords with the idea (*thugs dang bstun*).⁶⁹

Finally, Ngag dbang addressed Lha lung Dpal gyi rdo rje, the *gter ston* Bzang po grags pa, and Khubilai and Altan Khan. For Lha lung, he quoted one prediction from the Lha'i rgyal po story⁷⁰ and another naming Dpal gyi rdo rje as the rebirth of "Mu khri btsan po" from Ra tna gling pa's "Great General Prophecy" (*ra tna'i spyi lung chen mo*). Here, too, the Sde srid had his doubts.⁷¹

Ngag dbang described Bzang po grags pa as "certainly being Lha sras's affiliated rebirth," likely due to his status as the revealer of the *Le'u bdun ma*, in which Padmasambhava predicted those 17 future births of Lha sras. Its last chapter, the *Bsam pa lhun grub ma*, was a favorite of the Sde srid's (hearing it as a baby, he said, made his nose scrunch and eyes water).⁷² This identification was bolstered by the fact that Bzang po grags pa's treasure *Zhal chems thugs thig* predicted that "Lha sras Mu khri btsan po" would be reborn as the *hor gyi rgyal po se chen*, that is, Khubilai Khan. (The aforementioned "Great General Prophecy" of Ra tna gling pa included lines to the same effect.) As was well known, 'Phags pa allegedly predicted to Khubilai that the two would meet again after seven lifetimes apart, respectively, as "one with an aqueous name" and "one with a golden name," thus, the 3rd Dalai Lama Bsod nams rgya mtsho and Altan Khan.⁷³

⁶⁸ Ngag dbang made the same point, namely that Vajrapāṇi, Mañjuśrī, and Avalokiteśvara were equivalent at a higher level and hence interchangeable. (This is also how Khri srong lde btsan, linked to Mañjuśrī, was construed as Avalokiteśvara in the Dalai Lama's *'khrungs rabs*).

⁶⁹ *G.ya' sel*: 11b–12a.

⁷⁰ Ngag dbang omitted that the *Bu chos* linked Lha lung to 'Brom ston, not Rngog, which may be why the Sde srid never discussed this passage.

⁷¹ The Sde srid stressed that there was no evidence apart from Ra tna's prophecy as to whether Dpal gyi rdo rje was a direct rebirth in Mu ne's series (*skye ba dngos yin min*; *G.ya' sel*: 11b6).

⁷² *G.ya' sel*: 8b; 'Dzam gling rgyan gcig: 584b; *Bai ser*: 354a.

⁷³ See, e.g., the 5th Dalai Lama's biography of Bsod nams rgya mtsho (*Gsung 'bum* vol. 11: 128).

This leaves past life number 16: Rin chen gling pa, sometimes called Me ban Rin chen gling pa, known for treasures on Nāgarakṣa (on which Gter bdag gling pa authored practice materials) and reckoned as the fifth of Lha sras Mu ne's 17 rebirths. In the *G.ya' sel*, the Sde srid averred that this identification was validated by the Dalai Lama, quoting supporting lines from Rin chen gling pa's *lung bstan gtad rgya*, part of the *Rdzogs chen chig chod kun grol*.⁷⁴ Presumably, the Sde srid was following the Dalai Lama, who in his record of received teachings (*gsan yig*) had quoted the same lines and named Rin chen gling pa as Lha sras's fifth rebirth, also giving the transmission of the *Chig chod kun grol* as passing from Padmasambhava to Khri srong lde btsan and "Lha sras btsan po," and thence to Rin chen gling pa.⁷⁵ To justify Mu ne as the right "Lha sras," the Sde srid cited the history accompanying the Nāgarakṣa treasure, in which Padmasambhava identified its three main characters as past lives of himself, Khri srong lde btsan, and Mu ne btsan po.⁷⁶

7. Conclusions

It is clear that the main themes of the Sde srid's past-life narrative are Mu ne btsan po and the recurring ties to the Dalai Lama. Many of the past lives were already embedded in relationships of their own or prefigured by earlier acts of interpretation. Beyond establishing the individual supremacy of the Sde srid, this narrative thus enacted what Birgit Kellner calls "a refashioning of the past," that is, a structuring of the terms for deliberating about supremacy in the first place.⁷⁷ Consequently, while I agree with Cabezón that past-life narratives "function to create a distinctive kind of personal identity," in other respects, the subject is not so much the end as the means.⁷⁸ Identity-formation was itself a way to make official the particular orientations to ideas and sources, thereby delineating a kind of canon for understanding past, present, and future.

Furthermore, the legitimacy of those discourses was hardly *sui generis*. It could be the subject who validated their narrative as much as the other way around. Wen-Shing Chou, commenting on the *'khrungs rabs* of Rol pa'i rdo rje, has suggested that a subject's former lives "prescribe their future through their past accomplishments."⁷⁹

⁷⁴ *G.ya' sel*: 15b.

⁷⁵ *Gsung 'bum* vol. 3: 428.

⁷⁶ *G.ya' sel*: 15b3.

⁷⁷ Kellner 2017: 203.

⁷⁸ Cabezón 2017: 22.

⁷⁹ Chou 2018: 87.

This may be putting it too strongly, but it is true that the Sde srid's narrative was retrospectively affirmed through his real-life actions. We might say that the subject actively constitutes the capacity of their narrative to constitute themselves.

Hence my insistence on approaching the *'khrungs rabs* as a dialogical act of interpretation. If such a narrative was clearly a work of invention—a working-over of the past in the interests of the present—that understanding also became meaningful by placing itself, as Ricoeur might say, within the direction opened up by those sources. The narrative achieved clarity against the backdrop of a world where connections between persons, texts, and communities were myriad, where ambiguous visions were touchstones for parsing the evidence, and where texts were not just passive resources but sometimes dictated ways of reading.

By way of a conclusion, I want to suggest that this basic ambiguity—that it is through present action that tradition or the gods are made meaningful, even as the present orients itself by those sources and draws its force from them—has implications for how we think about power.

Allow me to make a broad—but not unfair—generalization. Academic analyses of Tibetan past-life narratives tend to be predicated on vaguely Weberian statements about authority. That is, the scholarship represents choices about past lives as motivated choices whose narration ultimately served to empower some individual or institution. As Cabezón puts it, “the temptation is to always read these choices in socio-political terms.”⁸⁰ The authority such discourses invoked may be grounded in tradition *per se*, as when the general Tibetan practice of identifying *sprul sku* lineages is cast as a legitimizing endeavor.⁸¹ Or, it might derive from some cosmic source that stands behind those past lives—as with Avalokiteśvara for the Dalai Lama or Mañjuśrī for Qianlong.⁸²

To be clear, this observation—that past-life narrative is a technique for acquiring power by harnessing established sources of authority—is hardly unwarranted. After all, there is something transparently self-serving about plucking important people or gods out of the past and arrogating them to a living person, with all the ease and panache of filling one's plate from the buffet. That element of intentionality is all the more apparent because, as scholars also point out, past-life narratives often introduced glaring chronological inconsistencies or depended on seemingly strained readings. All the same, they never seem to have failed to gain a willing audience. The classic formulation

⁸⁰ Cabezón 2017: 22.

⁸¹ Maher 2006; Schwieger 2015.

⁸² Ishihama 1993; Uspensky 2002; Kellner 2016; Chou 2018.

of this uncomfortable juxtaposition between artifice and acceptance might, again, belong to Vostrikov, who excoriated *'khrungs rabs* for employing “the most superfluous ideas of history,” while nevertheless acknowledging their sway as “an equally important source of income” for the lamas they elevated.⁸³ In other words, never mind the shoddy craftsmanship: past-life narratives were a ringing success.

But this approach begs the question of how those sources of authority could have ever been so convincing, especially when the fingerprints of the artist, so to speak, were all over the finished product. Nor should we presume that those articulating or reproducing such narratives would not have been aware of the same thing. In short, despite pointing out that past-life narratives were acts of deliberate invention, scholars also maintain—rightly, I think—that they were more than just empty rhetoric. They were socially and politically effective. How could this be? The problem is not that such observations are incorrect, but rather that their combined implications are inadequately accounted for. It is precisely by taking those implications seriously that past-life narratives might illuminate larger questions about power.

For instance, to maintain simultaneously that self-fashioning discourses (1) are self-evidently fabricated appropriations of the past (hence a kind of intentional strategy), yet (2) succeeded as authorizing claims (thus conceding that the sources of authority they invoked had real potency), is to juxtapose two ways of thinking about power. One treats it as something humans create through their own actions; the other sees it as rooted in something beyond human beings, such as the ancestors or the gods. Both of these alternatives were operative in the formation of a *'khrungs rabs*.

In the first case, power flowed from the very act of enunciation, the self-authorizing claim to know and speak on behalf of the past. Here we might invoke Pierre Bourdieu's idea of political power as the capacity “to proclaim the official,” thereby officializing oneself in the process.⁸⁴ In the second case, power was something invisible, a hidden potential exceeding human life, of which we have no clear and present knowledge. Along these lines, Thomas Hobbes argued in *Leviathan* that invisibility just *is* power, that is, “fear of power invisible,” unlimited because it is unknown. As we have seen, both of these alternatives coexist in practice. However, as Graeber has insightfully argued, neither would ever be effective entirely on its own.⁸⁵ He points to a practical dilemma: hidden forces require real human effort in order for their presence to be inferred; but then again, if everyone

⁸³ Vostrikov 1970: 92, 97n307.

⁸⁴ Bourdieu 2014: 33, 44–47.

⁸⁵ Graeber 2001: 230–247.

agreed that authority was something made up, who would ever be convinced by it?⁸⁶ Each depends on, but ultimately undermines, the other.

One way of dissolving that tension would be to invoke some notion of mystification. That is, one would concede that there are indeed two ways of thinking about power, but with the critical caveat that one is really false, the other true; and those who subscribe to the false alternative thereby fail to see the true one, which absolutely opposes it. Everyone must stand on one side or the other: be the deceiver or the deceived. I suspect this is how to make sense of Vostrikov's contradictory observations. But that approach is really quite condescending. It insinuates that everyone was either gullible or inept at critical thinking, or that a select few somehow learned to game cosmological and theological frameworks at everyone else's expense.

Moreover, as already discussed, it is not as if the authors of such discourses were at great pains to conceal their own handiwork, or for that matter, their skepticism. For Ngag dbang and the Sde srid, it was entirely the contrary.

What if, instead, we were to acknowledge that the people involved in producing these narratives and putting them to work were no less aware of that dilemma than ourselves? What if we viewed the tension as constitutive of the discourse, rather than dissolving it between the alternatives of false consciousness or a clever ruse? This is why I have insisted on thinking about past-life narrative as interpretation: both inventive and responsive, or as Ricoeur put it, both an act *on* and an act *of* the text. Power, I am suggesting, especially insofar as it manifested through such self-fashioning discourses, observed the same relationship.

This is the challenge that confronts us in reading texts like the *Snyan sgron*. People appealed to higher powers *and* asserted their own mastery, often in overlapping ways. They glimpsed cosmic forces behind one another but also took license to represent those forces as they saw fit. Sometimes they voiced reservations about identifying someone else or being identified themselves in this way. It would be impossible to definitively adjudicate just who was speaking sincerely and who was not, and in which cases.

Indeed, what makes the *Snyan sgron* so interesting, in my opinion, is that it highlighted that dilemma in dramatic fashion. This is a text that ascended to a high theological register but also visibly delighted in critical intellectual practice as an end in itself. Stylistically, Ngag

⁸⁶ Bourdieu is also instructive here: even if one individually doubts there is anything special about the king, one will also reckon with the fact "that the others reckon with the fact that the king is king." This expectation makes the king a king (2014, 252–253).

dbang's work is a master class in how to sing someone's praises while also twisting the knife. Again, this is not entirely unexpected: Tibetan intellectuals, like modern academics, often seasoned their polemics with sweet words for their opponent, whether in the mood of constructive criticism or simply out of convention. Here is an excerpt suggesting the spirit of Ngag dbang's prose:

Know that such a great treatise [as the Sde srid's] is unprecedented, and not only on account of its words; for above all, it gets at the real sense of *Kālacakra* and Mañjuśrī [i.e., *skar rtsis* and *nag rtsis*] and in particular Phug pa father and son, Du ha ra, Khyung nag Shāk dar, and all such illustrious scholars, in a way never accomplished before now, and it has eliminated all points of contradiction. Indeed, even before I had the opportunity to touch it to the top of my head, I had all sorts of marvelous dreams about it, particularly one vision in which I was studying it and felt like I was a protector god whose body was being pierced with arrows and spears.

Granted, were it to be dissected by the discerning eye of some exalted person from on high, they would notice some minor faults and contradictions; but otherwise, I ask nothing more than to have such a glorious opportunity to transmute the bad into the good, not to wallow in the swamps of idle criticism, so I will not venture much [!] and do so with reverent respect inseparable from my very inner being which causes my heart to shrivel up.⁸⁷

Pleasurable as this delicate dance may be, there is something strange going on here. What does it mean that the first formulation of the Sde srid's spiritual pedigree came in a work whose main purpose was to show how the Sde srid was wrong? Even in a literary tradition known for effusive hagiography, this seems extreme. Who launches a critique by first raising their opponent to the status of a god? Would not this foreknowledge undermine one's own objections? Conversely, if the criticisms are still to have any bite, then what does that say about divinity?

It is unsatisfying to demur that Ngag dbang was only being polite or pragmatic and never really meant any of it about the Sde srid being "more than an ordinary person." Why did he go to such lengths to establish just that, and why were practical works and pieces of art based on it, some at Ngag dbang's own urging? Not to mention its mutual imbrication with the discourse on the Dalai Lama's divinity. Surely Avalokiteśvara is too central to our ideas about Dga' ldan pho brag authority to argue that all *that* was just fancy talk, too.

These questions may seem facetious, but they raise a crucial point. If we mean to read these discourses closely and seriously—to ask how

⁸⁷ *Snyan sgron*: 6b.

they endured, were reproduced, informed actions, or structured preferences and values—it will mean grappling with the problems that their very existence called attention to. It will mean granting that Tibetans recognized and lived those problems, too.

Ngag dbang was putting into practice the understanding that a realm ultimately ordered by cosmic powers was equally one that required humans to struggle together over the right ways to think and act, not least to make those hidden forces present. By making a case for the Sde srid's divinity, Ngag dbang reaffirmed a core ideological commitment that there were greater agencies behind the worldly exercise of authority. At the same time, the gods do not have the last word. Quite the opposite: all the actual work of knowing and making the world must be a task that humans carry out with, and against, one another. Indeed, the Dga' ldan pho brang court is basically famous for two things: the divinity of its ruler, the Dalai Lama, which has endured to the present day, and for being a wellspring of intellectual and artistic creativity, with a deep impact on subsequent discourse. The *'khrungs rabs* is at the nexus of both.

Past-life narratives are acts of interpretation that fashion the self in terms of the past while refiguring the past according to present interests. That juxtaposition of responsiveness and inventiveness is essential to the existence and exercise of power within this cosmos. To study such discourses is to inquire into the human effort to make oneself meaningful in terms of tradition or the gods, and to make those powers vital as an expression of one's own capacities, at one and the same time.

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The Ming, Tibetan and Mongol Interactions in Shaping the Ming Fortification, Multicultural Society and Natural Landscape in Mdo smad, 1368–1644

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his article focuses on the interactions between Ming China, Tibetans, and Mongols in the northeastern Tibetan Plateau from 1368 to 1644. To defend itself against Tibetan and Mongol raiders and stabilize western Shaanxi, Ming China captured eastern Mdo smad, set trade barriers, promoted the tribute system, and fortified its borderland. To continuously obtain Chinese goods, Tibetans and Mongols developed their own tactics to respond to the Ming-centric political, cultural, and trading orders. Their entwined military, political and economic interactions reshaped Mdo smad, prompting the Ming construction of fortifications in western Shaanxi, the formation of a multiethnic society in Mdo smad, as well as the transformation of the surface environment in the present-day Gansu-Qinghai borderland. Hence, this article analyzes how the Ming integration of eastern Mdo smad affected the settlers between the Kokonor and Shaanxi, how Tibetans and Mongols reacted to the Ming policies, how Ming China consolidated its borderlands, and how these multisided contacts led to substantial changes in the social and natural landscapes of Mdo smad.

1. Landscape and Peoples of Mdo smad at the Dawn of Ming China

According to traditional Tibetan geographical knowledge, Tibet was divided into three regions, namely, “the upper three divisions of Western Tibet” (Tib. stod Mnga’ ris skor gum), “the intermediate four wing-districts of Central Tibet” (Tib. bar Dbus gstang ru bzhi), and “the lower and upper six ranges of Eastern Tibet” (Tib. smad Mdo khams sgang drug).¹ Khams was the ancient Tibetan frontier that met the western borderland of medieval China, consisting of Mdo smad and Mdo khams. This paper focuses on the former region, Mdo smad.

¹ ‘Jam dbyangs ‘jigs med dbang po 1990: 7.

The actual implication of this term changed over time. In the late 13th century, Mdo smad referred to a narrow administrative region under the jurisdiction of the Tufan Regions Pacification Commission (*Tufan deng chu xuanweisi douyuanshuaifu* 吐蕃等處宣慰司都元帥府) of the Yuan Empire (1271–1368). Lintao 臨洮 and Gongchang 鞏昌 of Shaanxi, and Xining 西寧 of Gansu Province were adjoined to the Tufan Regions. Many post-18th century Tibetan scholars generally regarded the Yuan Xining and Tufan Regions as Mdo smad. During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), this region was integrated into Shaanxi and known as Xifan 西番 (see Fig. 1).²

This region overlaps into the convergent zone of the Himalayan, Loess, and Mongolian Plateaus. It extends from the southern Qilian Mountains 祁連山 to the eastern prolongation of the Kunlun Mountains 昆侖山. In between the two chains of snow peaks, the Xiaojishishan 小積石山, Taizishan 太子山, and Dieshan 迭山 mountains tower up and form a significant natural barrier between alpine steppe and loess hills. With the radical altitude drop from west to east in the northeastern Tibetan Plateau, the upper Yellow River 黃河 drainage system shapes countless valleys in Mdo smad. The Datonghe 大通河, Huangshui 湟水, Daxiahe 大夏河, Taohe 洮河, and Bailongjiang 白龍江 rivers and their tributaries erode steep valleys in their upper streams and form alluvial plains in the lower streams.

² Song 1976: j87.2193–2196, Brag dgon pa Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982: 1. For a discussion of Yuan administrative incorporation of the Tibetan borderland, see Petech 1988: 369–380.



Fig. 1 — Location of Mdo smad

The mountains, river systems, and altitude changes shape the surface environment of Mdo smad into varied landforms. In specific, western Mdo smad consists of highland steppes and flat hill-grasslands with typical Tibetan Plateau features. The Himalayan highland crisscrosses with the Loess Plateau in central Mdo smad and is characterized by precipitous mountains, alpine meadows, pine forests, shrubberies, valleys, and deep gorges. To the east lie gentle mountains, rolling hills, flat valleys, and large alluvial plains showing the pale yellow of loess. Due to the latitude and climate of Mdo smad, small ecological zones arise at the interface of the temperate monsoon and plateau-mountain climates. Overall, the northeastern Tibetan Plateau was too cold and densely forested to develop large-scale agriculture. For centuries, the region's culturally diverse residents primarily relied on animal husbandry to adapt to the local environment.

From the 7th century, Tibetans migrated from Dbus gtsang and established garrisons in Mdo smad. Some Han 漢 and the vaguely termed Qiang 羌, Rong 戎, Xianbei 鲜卑, and Dangxiang 党项 groups were either absorbed or expelled by the expanding Tibetan Empire. The Tang dynasty (618–907) documented this geopolitical entity adjoining Longyou Circuit 隴右道 as Tufan 吐蕃, its subjects as Fanren 蕃人 and its non-Tibetan military slaves as Wamo 嗚末 (Tib. *g.yog mi, mun dmag* or *'od 'bar*).³ After the demise of the Tibetan Empire, Dbus gtsang-centric records show that petty rulers controlled this frontier region made up of purportedly barbaric inhabitants. Chinese sources show that Fan or Xifan were used as both geopolitical names and ethnonyms to primarily refer to the region and people living beyond the borders of the Song (960–1279), the Tangut Xia (1038–1227) and the Jurchen Jin (1114–1234) dynasties.⁴

These medieval powers vied for the control of 91 forts in the flat valleys of eastern Mdo smad.⁵ The seizure and abandonment of these forts fulfilled key military needs, leading the Song, Xixia, and Jin troops to manage them as temporary bases or outposts on this turbulent frontier. None of these states made sustained efforts to reclaim the valleys in Mdo smad. Chinese sources suggest that the Song relied on arduous long-distance transportation rather than local reclamation to supply its frontier troops. Albeit Han frontiersmen did settle in Mdo smad, they at best opened up a few agricultural patches near some forts.⁶ In the late 13th century, the Han settlers were under the jurisdictions of Lidian 禮店, Wenzhou 文州, Jiezhou 階州, Fuzhou 扶州, and Mongol-Han-Fan military battalions and companies (*Menggu Han Fan jun qianhu/baihu suo* 蒙古漢番軍千/百戶所). As the Yuan only installed a revenue supervisor (*shuiwu tiling* 稅務提領) in Wenzhou and a granary tax officer (*ke cheng cang liang guan* 課程倉糧官) in Hezhou 河州, the patchy farmlands seem to have been concentrated in easternmost Mdo smad. The population of Han, who were known as “native Chinese” (Tumin 土民) during the Ming, was not large.⁷

Fan groups, whose economy was sustained by nomadism, dominated the region outside the medieval forts. Although the Song court conferred official titles to Fan leaders and recruited *zu* to reclaim

³ Liu 1975: j196, Wang and Yang 1989: 11362a–b, Toqto'a 1977: j492.

⁴ For detailed discussions of the geopolitical and ethnic meanings of Fan and Han in the medieval dynasties, see Yang 2014: 9–35 and Beckwith 2005: 5–20.

⁵ Toqto'a 1977: j87.2143–2170.

⁶ Li 1792: j247, 12b–13a, 22a–24b, j442, j444, j514, j520. 35b–37b.

⁷ Song 1976: j60.1429–1434, j87.2195–2197; *Ming shi lu* (MSL) Taizu: j55.1098–1099.

valleys near its northwestern border, only a few Tibetans adapted to the sedentary way of life in Lintao, Taozhou 洮州, and Minzhou 岷州.⁸ Mdo smad Tibetans oftentimes organized tents into *cu* 簇 or *zu* 族, the Chinese terms designating a group, tribe, clan, or federative unit. Several dozens of *zu* aligned tens of thousands of tents into a *bu* 部 or confederation to launch war, plunder Chinese settlements, negotiate peace, or affiliate with a more powerful dynasty. Their animals grazed grasslands ranging from Tsong kha to Jiezhou, which interlocked with the Song Qinfeng Circuit 秦鳳路 and the Jin Lintao Circuit 臨洮路.⁹ The Yuan administrative boundary between Shaanxi Province and Tufan Regions indicates that this dividing line between nomadic Fan and agricultural Han worlds was retained up until the late 14th century.¹⁰

Besides, as Christopher Atwood notes, “Yellow-Head Uyghurs” 黃頭畏兀兒, “Straw-Head Tatars” 草頭韃靼 and Chong’ul 種楡 had settled in northern Mdo smad since the 11th century.¹¹ The Yuan incorporation of Mdo smad brought more Mongol and Semu 色目 populace into Mdo smad in the 13th century. The newcomers included Mongol nobles, officials and dependencies, Central and West Asian servants, merchants and craftsmen, as well as the soldiers of the Tanmachi army 探馬赤軍.¹² In the late 14th century, these Mongolic and Turkish speaking peoples appear as Salar 撒拉, Baoan 保安 and various Huoer 霍爾 (Tib. *hor*), as well as Dada 韃靼 or Dazi 達子在 the Ming accounts. It is noteworthy that the Ming court did not, at least from the perspective of indirect control, differentiate these groups from Tibetans. Although their cultural practices and social organizations might be distinct from Mdo smad Tibetans, they were generally treated as Xifan by Ming officials. In the Ming records, the same term *zu* was used to document these non-Tibetan communities.¹³

In sum, Tibetans predominated the population of Mdo smad at the dawn of Ming China, while several smaller culturally distinctive groups which added to the diversity of the region. The boundaries of Tibetan territories in eastern Mdo smad often interlaced and overlapped with the Ming administrative borders in western Shaanxi. Xining, Hezhou, Lintao, Taozhou, and Minzhou were known as the

⁸ Even after the Tibetan ruling lineages such as the Zhao 趙 (Tib. *Rgyal sras*) and the Bao 包 (*Yulongke*) settled down in Lintao and Minzhou, their tribesmen still roved in between Xining and Jiezhou. Toqto’a 1977: j264.9129, j492.14151–14168.

⁹ The term *cu* instead of *zu* was used in *MSL* before 1498.

¹⁰ Toqto’a 1977: j121.4733–4761, j492.14151–14166; Chen 1977: j41.401–408.

¹¹ Atwood 2015: 26.

¹² Liu 2010: 109.

¹³ Zhang 1990: j9.1a–12a.

"Gates of Xifan." Without enough Chinese cities, forts, and farmlands to form a solid agricultural borderland for Ming China in Xifan, the land in western Shaanxi remained wild, the roads were dangerous, and the nomadic inhabitants were disruptive.¹⁴

2. *The Making of the Ming Garrisons in Xifan*

In 1368, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398) expelled the Mongol ruler Toghon Temür (1320–1370) from Beijing and announced the Ming succession to the Mandate of Heaven. After expelling most Mongols out of China proper, Mongol cavalries began to repeatedly harass the new state on the northern frontier from end to end. The old Chinese rationale of defending against steppe raiders became the backbone of the Ming military strategy. Buffer zones were established in northern Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Zhili. The borders were blockaded. In this process, eastern Mdo smad became a major Sino-Mongolian battlefield. The Ming launched punitive campaigns in Mdo smad.¹⁵

In 1369, the Ming generals battled against Mongol forces over Gongchang and Lintao, the largest cities in western Shaanxi. Based on the experience of the early Ming military officer Yu Ben 俞本, the generals attached strategic significance only to Lintao and treated the further westward cities as the "land beyond civilization." Although Hezhou was the capital of the Tufan Regions, Feng Sheng looted and slaughtered local residents and burned the city to the ground.¹⁶ When Ming troops left Shaanxi, the Mongol and Tibetan joint forces immediately launched a revengeful assault on Lintao. Even after the Ming army defeated Köke Temür (d. 1375), who commanded the largest Mongol force to attack western Shaanxi in 1370, the Yuan princes, generals, Daruḃačis 達魯花赤 and Tibetan chiefs still organized multifocal revolts to recapture the Tufan Regions.¹⁷

Consequently, Zhu Yuanzhang intended to build a strong border in western Shaanxi, similar to the one on the northern frontier. Following this defensive strategy, the Ming expeditionary generals occupied the four major cities in eastern Mdo smad after the suppression of Mongol-Tibetan unrests. The garrison (*weisuo* 衛所) system was set up in Hezhou (1371), Xining (1373), Minzhou (1378), and Taozhou (1379). The four cities became known as the "Four Guards in Xifan" 西番四衛. The garrisons were under the jurisdiction of Shaanxi Provincial

¹⁴ MSL Taizu: j122–1972; Zhang 1974: j330.8539–8541.

¹⁵ MSL Taizu: j34.627; Zhang 1974: j125.3726–3730, j327–28.8463–8504.

¹⁶ Yu 2015: 275–300.

¹⁷ MSL Taizu: j48–52.947–1032.

Administration Commission (*Shaanxi chengxuan buzheng shi si* 陝西承宣布政使司).¹⁸

However, Ming expeditionary generals were unwilling to set up permanent garrisons outside the Yuan Shaanxi. In Xifan, hostile Tibetans surrounded the cities and the natural environment was not particularly inhabitable to Chinese farmers and soldiers.¹⁹ In addition to the logistic difficulties, the generals in Taozhou and Songpan 松潘 suggested to the Hongwu Emperor abandon these front-line garrisons. Nonetheless, the emperor insisted that maintaining them was a small cost in comparison to the crisis that would result without them.²⁰

The cost was by no means small for both Ming China and Mdo smad Tibetans. The Ming troops relied on looting Tibetans before initiating the land reclamation (*tuntian* 屯田) to achieve military self-sufficiency. The Ming reports on punitive campaigns show that Ming troops took thousands of Tibetan yaks, sheep, and horses as trophies. The emperor typically advised his generals to construct garrisons and use the looted livestock as supplies.²¹ From the 1370s to the 1380s, the guard officers carried out many plans for the construction of military colonies (*juntun* 軍屯) and defensive infrastructures. In comparing the 530 fortresses established by the 1540s with the 91 outposts before the 13th century, it becomes clear that Ming China established many stockade-villages (*zhai* 寨) and forts (*bao* 堡) in eastern Mdo smad (see Fig. 2).²²

For the Ming, substantial manpower was required to manage western Shaanxi, which encroached upon Mdo smad. Regular troops (*zhengjun* 正軍) were deployed to the station in Xifan after building the new guards (*wei* 衛). In each garrison in Xifan, the number of soldiers exceeded 5,600—the standard number of the inland guards (*neiwei* 內衛). In particular, around 10,000 soldiers protected Hezhou and Minzhou in the 1370s, respectively.²³ In the Huangshui Valley, the Ming treated the hundreds of *zu* settled around Xining Guard as a constant threat. In 1377, the emperor moved 2,000 garrison soldiers from Zhuanglang 莊浪 to enlarge the standing troop of some 6,000 soldiers in Xining. After the revolt of Tao-Min Shibazu 十八族, nearly 7,200 soldiers led by six battalion-commanders were ordered to

¹⁸ Zhao 1997: 678–690.

¹⁹ MSL Taizu: j53.1056–1057, j59.1178–1179, j70.1439, j86.1541, j119.1938, j122.1972.

²⁰ MSL Taizu: j123.1986.

²¹ Gu 1977: j10.127–151; MSL Taizu: j122.1979.

²² Xu 2009: 349.

²³ Wu 2008: j1.28b.

construct and defend the Taozhou Guard.²⁴ In 1391, another division of 8,000 soldiers in Huayin 華陰 was transferred to reclaim Xifan. Moreover, demoted officials, criminals, and civilians affected by corporal punishments (*lian-zuo* 連坐) were registered as military households and sent to protect garrisons in northern and western Shaanxi.²⁵

Ming China thus made a strong presence in Mdo smad. Apart from soldiers stationed in the guards, the Ming frontier force was further distributed to the fortresses of battalions (*qianhusuo* 千戶所), companies (*baihusuo* 百戶所), and colonies. Based on the Ming policy, 40–90% of soldiers acted as the defending force in Xifan. The rest were responsible for farming.²⁶ These were highly trained and state-salaried Han and Hui soldiers. Ming sources suggest that these soldiers mostly came from Jiangsu, Anhui, Shandong, Zhili, and Shaanxi. It is noteworthy that the Ming often placed Han soldiers in the interior areas of the Four Guards and Hui soldiers at the outposts bordering with Tibetan territories. In Nianbo 碾伯 of Xining, Guide 歸德 of Hezhou, Jiucheng 舊城 of Taozhou and Xizhai 西寨 of Minzhou, the forts guarded by Hui men served as a buffer zone between Tibetan and Han settlements.²⁷

From the 1380s, the Ming government registered the hereditary military households (*junhu* 軍戶) nationwide and adopted the conscription methods on the basis of household obligations (*jixuan* 籍選) to draft troops. The Ming conscription regulation required the military household to send a replacement soldier, his wife and an attendant (*yuding* 余丁 or *junya* 軍余) to the garrison and refill the empty slot. Ideally, such a policy would prevent soldiers from desertion. In practice, soldiers were far away from their homelands, separated from families, and placed in a harsh environment. The passive resistance of military households was severe. The desertion of garrison soldiers prevailed in western Shaanxi.²⁸ In 1436, Shaanxi officials had to hire 4,200 attendants and willing men as professional

²⁴ *MSL* Taizu: j115.1881, j122.1978–1979.

²⁵ Li, Xu and Shen 1988: j155.1a–23b; Zhang 1974: j93.2289.

²⁶ In general, 30% of soldiers protected the garrison and 70% of soldiers farmed the land. The reclamation soldiers in Minzhou comprised only 10% in 1435. For the defense against Tibetan raiders, Jiezhou decreased the reclamation soldiers to 60% in 1441. *MSL* Xuanzong: j76.1754; *MSL* Yingzong: j14.251–252, j83.1658; Zheng 1937: j2.97–101.

²⁷ This observation is based on the cross examination of my field data and the Hui and Han genealogies in eastern Mdo smad. I will do a more thorough investigation on the Ming deployment of Hui troops in another project.

²⁸ Zhang 1974: j89–92.

soldiers to refill the empty slots. Because of the scarcity of accounts, the scale of hiring men from non-military households is unclear. Our understanding of the process of drawing soldiers from northeastern China to fill the slots in Mdo smad also remains incomplete.²⁹ Nonetheless, it is evident that the Ming could not maintain the initial number of garrisons. In his record on frontier garrisons, the Shaanxi Regional Censor (*xun'an yushi* 巡按御史) Zhang Yu 張雨 indicated that nearly two-thirds of the total amount of soldiers were no longer in service in Xifan by 1547. Although new soldiers were conscripted or hired, the total numbers remained small, and the garrison system's deteriorating condition never improved in western Shaanxi.³⁰

In contrast to the declining military population, civilians or *min* 民 steadily increased in the four garrisons. As the military colonies were underdeveloped in the Hongwu reign (1368–1398), the supply of logistics often troubled the Ming generals in Xifan. In 1372, the Hezhou commander (*zhihui* 指揮) sought to employ Tumin farmers to ease the burdensome long-distance transportation of provisions from Xi'an to the Four Guards. The emperor approved and the soldiers were paid in valuable goods such as tea, salt, and silk to trade with native Chinese for grains.³¹ Since there were few Tumin in the upper Taohe and Huangshui Valleys, the Ming dispatched Han farmers to open up farmland and solidify the borderland. In 1378, Zhu Yuanzhang relocated a *li* of Qishan 岐山 farmers to Minzhou, expecting them to increase agricultural production and be “model people” (*yangmin* 樣民) to civilize Tibetans.³² In addition to state-directed migrants, there were also many military attendants, unregistered households, and traders in Xifan.³³ The Ming official data, which only counted males of registered households, shows that the number of civilian settlers in the four garrisons surpassed the soldiers by the 1540s.³⁴ To levy tax and corvée on the non-military households, the guard officers registered them in the *lijia* 里甲 system. The population was divided into the *li* 里 of 110 households. The *li* was further divided into ten units of ten households known as *jia* 甲.³⁵

²⁹ Zhang 1974: j91.2249.

³⁰ Zhang 1990: j2.71a–84b, j3.6b–9a. For a discussion of the tactics adopted by military households to cope with the Ming system of conscription, see Szonyi 2017.

³¹ *MSL* Taizu: j55.1098–1099; Wu 2008: j1.15a–16b.

³² Zhang 1974: j80.1947–1953.

³³ For the cases of unregistered settlers in Xifan, see *MSL* Yingzong: j70.1352–1353, j76.1501, j196.6311, j232.5079–5078, j305.6437–6438; *MSL* Xianzong: j150.2741; *MSL* Wuzong: j25.2503–2504, j162.3124–3125; Zhang 1990: j9; Wang 1706: j2.52b–53a.

³⁴ Zhao 1997: 678–690; Zhang 1990: j3.47a–84a, j4.1a–9a.

³⁵ *MSL* Taizu: j55.1098–1099; Wu 2008: j1.15a–16b.

This tax and labor allocation system was also established in some Tibetan *zu* despite most Mdo smad Tibetans being nomadic. Lintao and Hezhou were the trade centers and transportation junctions between Mdo smad and Shaanxi in the Yuan period. As the Ming border control blocked free trade, the Tibetans were in shortage of Chinese products, especially tea. When the court set up tea-horse bureaus (*chamasi* 茶馬司) in Shaanxi from 1374 to 1397, some dominant Xifan federations paid allegiance to the Ming, settled near the four garrisons, built or restored local monasteries, adapted to the Ming political-trading order, and became intermediate traders between Ming China and Greater Tibet.³⁶ The Confucian scholastic officials regarded them as either “raw barbarians” (*shengfan* 生番) or “cooked barbarians” (*shufan* 熟番) if they “were cultured enough to accept moral edification and eventual civilization.”³⁷ A more practical standard for the classification of Tibetans, from the Ming garrison officers’ point of view, was whether the Fan groups aligned with the Ming responded to the imperial instruction and paid taxes.

The *lijia* system was promulgated among *shufan*. In Hezhou, Qiezang 札藏 and Laoya 老鴉 *zu* formed Yinchuan *li* 銀川里. Some *zu* in Minzhou were organized into 16 *li*. In Taozhou, 49 *zu* were organized into five *zongjia* 總甲 which were equivalent to five *li*. Native chiefs were appointed as *lizhang* 里長 and *jiazhang* 甲長. By the mid-Ming reign period, Xining, Hezhou, Taozhou, and Minzhou managed four, 45, 17 and five *li* of Chinese and Tibetan subjects respectively. The regional variation with respect to the Ming’s practical control over these *lijia* was complex. Han *lijia* were managed by guard officers. Tibetan *lijia* were ruled by local chiefs who were appointed as native officials (*tuguan* 土官). In Xining, the number of registered households was small. Only a registry bureau (*jingli si* 經歷司) under the supervision of the guard commander was instituted to manage local *lijia* in the late 15th century. In Taozhou, all *zongjia* were ruled by the native commander commissioner (*tu zhihui shi* 土指揮使), the Co ne king. Due to the growth of the civilian population, the court separated the civil administration from the *weisuo* system and established Hezhou (1472) and Minzhou (1544) subprefectures (*zhou* 州) under the

³⁶ Dongke Monastery 東科寺 (Tib. Stong 'khor dgon pa) in Xining, and Honghua 弘化 (Tib. Mdzo mo mkar) and Lingzang 靈藏/Maying 馬營 (Tib. Lin gtsang zi) Monasteries in Hezhou were regional markets. Wang 1706: j2.52b–53a; Yang 1908: 160–161; Yang 2016: 1–9.

³⁷ Harrel 1995: 19.

Lintao Prefecture (*fu* 府).³⁸

As Ming officials extracted tax in grain or horse from all registered households, the widespread desertion of registered households in the two subprefectures suggests that the civil administration was not welcomed by non-military settlers. In Hezhou, the *shufan zu* fled from the *lijia* settlements to avoid tax in the 1440s. They occupied northwestern Hezhou and robbed traders, travelers, and Han settlers. The local gazetteer composed by Wu Zhen in 1546 shows that the number of *li* decreased to 31 in Hezhou.³⁹ After the establishment of the subprefecture in Minzhou, Tibetan *lijia* chiefs who were removed from their positions in 1562 led local *shufan* to resist the Ming tax and labor allocation. Meanwhile, the Taohe Valley was repeatedly raided by Mongols. The court had to remove the circulating official (*liuguan* 流官) and recruit Tibetan chiefs to protect the garrison. Ming authorities explicitly stated that Fan peoples were accustomed to native officials. Up to the 1620s, Minzhou Guard still nominally managed 17 *li*.⁴⁰

3. The Ming Management of Mdo smad

After taking over Hezhou in 1370, the Ming inherited the Yuan administrative structure of Tufan Regions and reformed the nine marshal commissioner offices (*yuanshuai fu* 元帥府) into the *weisuo*. The surrendered Yuan officials, all non-Tibetans, were reappointed as six battalion heads 千戶, nine company heads 百戶 and 17 supervisory managers 都管. The court integrated them into the garrison bureaucracy. They were supervised by Vice Commander (*zhihui tongzhi* 指揮同知) Suonanpo 索南普, who was the highest Yuan official in the Tufan Regions and a Ming deputy commander in Hezhou.⁴¹ The Ming military personnel's control over the vast Mdo smad remained

³⁸ MSL Shizong: j497.8236–8237; Wu 2008: j1.17a–19b, j2.9b–10a, j4.52a–b; Zhang 1990: j9.4a, 9a; Wang and Tian 2008: j2.11b–14b; Yang 1990: j33.15a–b; Gong 1970: j5.15a–25b.

³⁹ MSL Yingzong: j66.1264–1265, j88.1761–1762; Wu 2008: j1.17a–19b.

⁴⁰ Wang and Tian 2008: j2. 12b–5b, j8. 1b–4a; Zhang 1974: j330.8845–8846.

⁴¹ By 1373, the nine marshal commissioner offices were reorganized into the Tiecheng 鐵城, Minzhou, Shibazu, Changyang 常陽, Jishizhou 積石州, Menggujun 蒙古軍, Mieqijun 滅乞軍, and Zhaozangjun 招藏軍 battalions (8), Taozhou Military-Civilian Battalion 軍民千戶所 (1), Shangzhai 上寨, Lijia-wuzu 李家五族, Qizu 七族, Fanke 番客, Huazhou-dengchu 化州等處, Changjiazu 常家族 and Zhualizu 爪黎族 companies (7), as well as Jiezhou-Fuzhou and Yangwa 陽峒 Han-Fan military-civilian companies 軍民百戶所 (2). See MSL Taizu: j70. 1439.

limited. After the establishment of the Four Guards, the court still did not exert that much control over Tibetans in Xifan.

During the punitive campaigns in 1369, 1370, 1372, 1373, 1376, and 1379, military reports from western Shaanxi reveal that Mdo smad Tibetans often colluded with Mongol princes. Once the Ming expeditionary force left Mdo smad, the Mongol-Tibetan joint forces would attack Hezhou, Lintao, or Lanzhou.⁴² To prevent the Mongol princes from collaborating with Tibetan rulers, Zhu Yuanzhang deposed the Mongol principalities in Mdo smad. He designated Princes Bunala 卜納刺, Heshang 和尚, and Sangge Duoerzhiban 桑哥朵兒只班 as vice commanders of Wujing 武靖, Gaochang 高昌, and Qishan 岐山 Guards, and later transferred them to the Ming capital as imperial bodyguards.⁴³ Nonetheless, the political sway of the Yuan princes and marshal commissioners over Xifan peoples was not as strong and direct as the Ming court expected. In addition to the large-scale construction of fortifications, Ming China implemented a series of policies to strengthen state control in Xifan.

First, the court adopted the Yuan policy that vested official positions in native rulers and let them manage their own *zu* without direct state interference. This is an archaic strategy known as *jimi* 羈縻 or bridle in Chinese history. The early Ming sought to enlist native leaders who would pay allegiance to the emperor. Hereditary positions such as command commissioner (*zhihui shi* 指揮使, 3a rank), vice commander (3b), command officer (*zhuihui qianshi* 指揮僉事, 4a), native battalion heads (*tuqianhu* 土千戶, 5a/b) and native company heads (*tubaihu* 土百戶, 6b) were conferred on many Tibetan and a few Mongol, Monguor and Turkish speaking leaders.⁴⁴ The Ming emperors appointed over 200 Tibetan chiefs to indirectly harness their subjects in Xifan. This policy was described as “divide and rule” by later historians.⁴⁵ However, Ming China mostly recognized the existing chiefs in Mdo smad, among whom many ceased to obtain Ming ratification and did not leave a trace in the official record (see Chart 1). The driven objective seems to be the enforcement of a more systematic control over Xifan instead of the fragmentation of an assumed Tibetan solidarity.

Second, the early Ming rulers embraced the same ideology to expand state influence through bestowing monastic official positions and fancy titles on Xifan religious authorities. Unlike the Yuan

⁴² MSL Taizu: j48–52.947–1032.

⁴³ Ibid: j60. 1172–1173.

⁴⁴ Wang and Nyima 1997: 31–33.

⁴⁵ Jia 2010: 67–73; Sperling 1983: 339–356.

emperors who favored the Sa skya sect, Ming rulers patronized all Tibetan Buddhist sects to preclude them from bonding with Mongols.⁴⁶ In the Monk Registry (*senglusi* 僧錄司) of the Ming central government, some Tibetan ecclesiastic leaders were designated as the left/right compassionate one (*shanshi* 善世, 6a), teaching elaborator (*chanjiao* 闡教, 6a), preacher (*jiangjing* 講經, 8a) or righteousness awoken being (*jueyi* 覺義, 8a). In the four garrisons, eminent religious leaders were appointed as monk supervisors (Chin. *sengzheng* 僧正, Tib. *bla dpon*), monk preceptors (Chin. *senggang* 僧綱, Tib. *mkhan po*) and supervisory monk preceptors (Chin. *dugang* 都綱, Tib. *mkhan chen*) to run local supervisory monk offices 僧綱司. Besides, hundreds of lamas and monks were granted titles like King (*wang* 王), Dharma King (*fawang* 法王), Great/State Preceptor (*da/guoshi* 大/國師), Son of Buddha (*fozi* 佛子) and Chan Master (*chanshi* 禪師).⁴⁷ These Buddhist leaders were sponsored by the emperors and honored by Mdo smad leaders and Tibetan communities. The court deployed them as political mediators to enlist Xifan chiefs, negotiate frontier peace, and organize tributaries.

Third, the court utilized border commerce as a key political device to establish a new political order in Xifan. As early as the 1370s, Lintao and Hezhou officials received trading requests from their Xifan neighbors. Border commerce was occasionally used to win over Tibetans. The privilege of trade was a gift to award those who yielded to the Ming. Nonetheless, such small scale and irregular trade could not satisfy the huge demand for tea in Mdo smad. Like the Mongols on the Ming northern frontier, the urge for increased trade motivated Tibetans to raid the border garrisons.⁴⁸ Taking into account Ming China's constant need for battle steeds to fight against Mongols, Ming officials revisited the Tang and Song tea-horse trade policies.

Garrison	Native Official					Monastic Official	Entitled Monk
	Tibetan	Han	Mongol	Salar	Others		
Xining	6	1	7	1	1	1	over 40
Hezhou	5			2	1	4	
Taozhou	3	5				5	
Minzhou	8				1	1	

Chart 1 — Native officials, monastic officials, and entitled monks in Mdo smad⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Wylie 1980, 339.

⁴⁷ In the reign of Chenghua (1465–1487), the emperor bestowed various titles on 437 Tibetan monks. See *MSL* Xiaozong: j4.56–57.

⁴⁸ Zhang 1974: j330.8540–8541, Rossabi 1970: 136–168.

⁴⁹ These authorities are the only traceable ones. The data is from *MSL*, Wu 2008, Liu and Long 1993, Wang and Tian 2008, Yang 1990 and Zhang 1970.

In an imperial memorial, Grand Secretary Qiu Jun 丘濬 (1421–1495) summarized contemporary officials' opinion on the Ming tea-horse policy:

Since the Tang dynasty, the Uyghur (Huihu 回鶻) paid tribute and exchanged horses for tea. Henceforth the northwestern enemies (*lu* 虜) were addicted to tea. As the enemies mostly liked milk, channels and collaterals were blocked and stagnant. While tea has the unobstructed character and can remove greasiness [...] the Song initiated to set up tea-horse bureaus. Our Celestial Dynasty levies tea-tax on *min* that does not benefit its revenue. The former dynasties' so-called market matters included various categories such as *tieshe* 貼射, *jiaoyin* 交引, and *chayou* 茶由 [...] that took the resources of people's livelihood and everyday use for the state's revenue. There is no such thing nowadays. Only a tea-horse bureau was established in Sichuan and three in Shaanxi [...] for utilizing horses from abroad as a war reserve in the borderland.⁵⁰

It was a common notion among Ming officials that "Fan people love tea and regard it as life. Exchanging tea for horses is not only supporting wars, but also controlling their lives."⁵¹

In 1383, Zhu Yuanzhang issued an edict to institutionalize the border commerce and further the civilizing project with the Chinese hierarchical political-cultural order and agriculture-based taxation standard:

Xifan people have pledged allegiance for a long time while [I] have not ordered them to pay tribute and tax. It is said that there are many horses in their land. It is better to count the amount of their land and levy tax. For instance, three households [in a *zu*] of 3,000 households pay a horse; four households of 4,000 households pay a horse. Set it up as a native tax (*tufu* 土賦) so as to let them know to honor the emperor, respecting the superiors, and following the rite of the court.⁵²

Ideally, the tea-horse policy monopolized tea, constrained enemies, lightened the burden of *min*, and was thus not regarded as trade by Confucian officials. Based on this rationale, the Ming established tea-horse bureaus in Hezhou (1374), Taozhou (1383), Xining (1397), and Minzhou (which separated from Taozhou in 1595).⁵³ In 1392, the Ming also set up the bronze tally system (*jinpaizhi* 金牌制) to regulate border

⁵⁰ The memorial to the throne is quoted in *Hezhou wei zhi*, see Wu 2008: j2.3a–4a.

⁵¹ Qiao 1568: j4.1a–b.

⁵² *MSL* Taizu: j151.3181.

⁵³ Li, Xu and Shen 1988: j37.1a, 11b–20a.

trade. It distributed 41 tallies to 48 *zu* that were ruled by the early Ming appointed native officials. Some 29 *zu* managed by the Bili 必里 Guard of northern Khams and Hezhou Guard shared 21 tallies. In Taozhou, Huobazang 火把藏 and Sinangri 思囊日 the *zu* received four tallies. The final 16 tallies were taken by the *zu* managed by the Quxian 曲先, Arui 阿瑞, Handong 罕東, and Anding 安定 Guards, or “Four Guards in Steppe” 塞外四衛 somewhere in middle Mdo smad.⁵⁴

These *zu* were large confederations consisting of many smaller *zu*. They were selected as official suppliers to exchange horses for official tea (*guan cha* 官茶) at tea-horse bureaus once every three years. They were registered as horse-payers (*nama fanzu* 納馬番族) in the Ming records. Ming officials treated the Tibetans trading at tea-horse bureaus as horse-tax payers (*mafu* 馬賦). The guard authorities played the role of tax collector and spared no effort to fulfill their duty and profit from it. For Mdo smad Tibetans, it was the only channel to obtain Chinese products after the fall of the Mongol Empire. To gain the imperial reward—tea, more and more Xifan trading representatives requested to pay horses as the *min* paying land tax.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, the Ming demand for horses continued to increase while the court set horse prices lower than market rates (see Chart 3). Yet, as more and more smugglers began to sell tea at lower costs, fewer and fewer *zu* were inclined to trade with the state. In the 1400s, the emperors received frontier memorials that reported some horse-payer *zu* were impoverished due to the demand for horses. Some *zu* such as Xining Aji 阿吉 and Alagu 阿刺谷, Hezhou Qieyang and Zhenzhu 珍珠, Taozhou Wuzang 惡藏, Shala 沙刺, Sinangri, and Halun 哈倫 *zu*, as well as several federations in Handong, escaped to distant steppe or the Hexi Corridor to dodge the horse-taxes. The Shibazu confederation even revolted against the Taozhou and Minzhou commanders.⁵⁶

Location	Large <i>zu</i>	Small <i>zu</i>	Population Estimation
Xining	19	170	1,0950
Hezhou		47	74,780
Taozhou	54	118	17,350
Minzhou	43	194	5,735
Xigu		159	21,943
Guide		11	unknown

Chart 2 — Zu and population in Mdo smad⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Li, Xu and Shen 1988: j37. 11b–12a; Zhang 1974: j80.1947–1955.

⁵⁵ MSL Taizu: j176.2672, j220.3222.

⁵⁶ MSL Taizu: j250.2616, j251.3635–3636; MSL Xuanzong: j19.511–512, j80.1849–1850; MSL Yingzong: j91.1834, j164.3181; Zhang 1970: 961–962.

⁵⁷ Zhang 1990: j9.

As a result, the guard officers directed troops to subdue the tax dodgers and force them to make supplementary payments. In extreme cases, they “induced and abducted [Fan] in the military camp, cut down [horse] prices, exchanged low-value [tea] for the high values. It resulted in the resentment and even suicide of Fan *cu*.”⁵⁸ These reported cases of horse-payers fleeing elsewhere and corruptive Ming officers in Xifan indicate that the state-led border trade became a burden for some horse-payers. The bronze tally system proved itself problematic and was banned in 1415. Although it was shortly resumed in the Xuande reign (1425–1435) and the Hongzhi reign (1487–1505), the system was abolished in both instances. In the 1490s, the government started to issue licenses (*chayin* 茶引) of commercial tea (*shangcha* 商茶) to the Ming traders. The court allowed certified traders to purchase tea, transport to tea-horse bureaus, and keep an additional portion to sale to Tibetans. The practice became less about taxation and more about trade. Up to the 1540s, the horse-payers increased to 98 *zu*.⁵⁹

Fourth, following a similar political agenda to bridle Tibetans, the court promoted the tribute system (*chaogong* 朝貢) to build a Ming-centric political and cultural order in Xifan. Since the Yuan officials surrendered and paid tribute to the Ming emperor in the 1370s, Mdo smad authorities started the tributary practice when renewing imperial ratification or congratulating a new emperor. In 1383, the Ministry of Rites 禮部 enacted rules and stipulated imperial rewards to Xifan tributary delegations, affiliated tributaries, native officials, and Ming commanders who enlisted and escorted the tributary crowds. Horses were given as local presents to the throne, and tea was the imperial reward. Yet, the majority of 1,000 *zu* in Mdo smad were excluded from this official channel of trade or the rare opportunity to pay tribute (see Chart 2). Instead, they traded with *shufan*, smugglers, Ming settlers, and garrison officers. In these transactions, lamas often served as middlemen. Since some Mdo smad people occasionally looted the Ming garrisons, Ming officials documented them as raw, wild or remote Tibetans (*shengfan* 生番, *yefan* 野番 or *yuanfan* 遠番).⁶⁰

To undermine the threat of these unpredictable raiders, the court instructed frontier officials to recruit *shengfan* to pay tribute, or trade in accordance with Tibetan understanding of the practice.⁶¹ Due to the quick collapse of the bronze tally system and the decrease of horse-tax

⁵⁸ MSL Xianzong: j131.2479–2480.

⁵⁹ MSL Taizu: j176.2672; Zhang 1990: j9; Zhang 1974: j80.1947–1953.

⁶⁰ Chen, Xu and Song 1962: j56, j76, j106, j115, j149, j234, j381, j383, j461; An 2008: j17.7b–13a.

⁶¹ Wylie 1980: 335–340.

revenue by the mid-Yongle reign (1402–1424), Ming China launched a long-lasting campaign to “open up barbaric region and trade horses” 開番中馬. The campaign led to a boom of raw Tibetan tribute in the early 15th century. Whilst, it was uneasy for the guard officers to enlist *shengfan*. The court could hardly ignore the influence of eminent lamas over Tibetans in interior Mdo smad. Owing to Tibetan monasteries’ role as local markets, influential lamas joined the tributary business without hesitation. They enlisted one to several *zu*, led delegations to Beijing, returned with Chinese commodities, and distributed goods through the monastery-based trading network.⁶² In the Yongle reign, they could pay tribute every year. More and more *zu* were recruited by Tibetan Buddhist authorities. The *shengfan* tributaries grew rapidly. By the 1540s, around 700 Mdo smad *zu* were registered as horse-tributary Tibetans (*gongma fanzu* 貢馬番族).⁶³

Overall, Ming China designed these policies to achieve the political goal of *jimi*. Tea played a significant role in the exertion of state control.⁶⁴ Although Ming officials demonstrated that exchanging tea for horses was a form of native tax collected from Tibetans who “wholeheartedly yearned for civilization” and horse-tribute was a way to “cherish people from afar,” as will be described in the next section, Tibetans treated paying the horse-tax and tribute as different means of trade. These policies were intertwined in practical terms and inevitably altered the social-political structures and trading patterns in Mdo smad. It was indeed hard for the imperial court to maintain the frontier garrisons and manage *nama* and *gongma* Tibetans. Yet, the most serious threats were triggered by the tea-horse trade and ultimately came from people who lived outside Mdo smad.

4. Tea, Mdo smad Zu and the Kokonor Mongols

Due to the low official horse prices set by the Ming government, tea smuggling became prevalent in western Shaanxi. Ming frontier officials, Chinese merchants, and Tibetans authorities all profited from smuggling, sometimes in direct collaboration with each other. On the one hand, the horse-tax payers usually sold license-less horses (*sima* 私馬) to the garrison officers or merchants inside the Ming border in

⁶² Shajia 1829: 4–6 *pin*; Zhao 1997: 678–690; Gu 1977: j27.38, 24–39, 50–1, 58–77, 94–107; Zhang 1970: j3.273.

⁶³ MSL Taizu: j154.2402, j225, 3295–3296; MSL Taizong: j27.493, j59.858, j99.1295, j121.1532, j168.1869, j196.2055, j220.2186, j240.2286; MSL Xuanzong: j25.656–657; Zhang 1990: j9; Zhang 1970: j16.928.

⁶⁴ Zhang 1970: j16.508.

return for license-less tea (*sicha* 私茶). On the other hand, given that every representative of the horse-tributary *zu* was allowed to purchase tea for their own use, native and monastic officials took advantage of the *kaifan* policy, enlisted “raw” Tibetans and enlarged the tributary missions.⁶⁵ Even “cooked” Tibetans and horse-tax payers used the identity of *shengfan* to participate in paying tribute. Chiefs ruling several thousand households worked with monks to register their *zu* (confederation) as many small horse-tributary *zu* as possible in order to get more quota of tributary representatives.⁶⁶

Horse-Payer				
Year	Location	Horse amount	Tea (<i>jin</i>) ⁶⁷	Average horse-price (<i>jin</i> of tea per horse)
1383	Hezhou			30
1392	Bili, Hezhou	10,340	300,000	30
1398	Hezhou	13,528	500,000	36
1410	Hezhou	7,714	278,460	36
1435	Xining, Hezhou, Taozhou	13,000	1,097,000	84.4
1447	Xining, Handong, Arui Anding	2,946	125,430	42.6
1500	Xining, Hezhou, Taozhou	4,000	400,000	100
1508	Shaanxi	9,000	782,000	86.9
1580s	Xining			138
Horse Tributary				
Year	Location	Reward of each horse apart from the horse price and 50 <i>jin</i> of tea per person		
		High quality	Middle quality	Low quality
1425	Xifan	250 <i>ding</i> 錠 of cash, 1 <i>pi</i> 匹 of Boehmeria nivea silk	200 <i>ding</i> , 1 <i>pi</i>	80 <i>ding</i> , 1 <i>pi</i>
1455	Minzhou	300 <i>ding</i> per middle horse		
1474	Xifan	300 <i>ding</i> , 1 <i>pi</i> of Boehmeria nivea silk per horse		
1518	Xifan	89,900 <i>jin</i> of tea		

Chart 3 – Horse prices for horse-payer and tributary⁶⁸

Moreover, some tributary monks were neither Xifan nor monks. Among Tibetan Buddhist priests, as Shaanxi and Sichuan provincial bureaus reported, there were many lay, deserted and unregistered people from the borderland. The investigation report of Censor Li Ji 李玘 shows that

[the] Tumin in Xining, Hezhou and Taozhou reside close to Fan people

⁶⁵ MSL Taizu: j254.3670; MSL Taizong: j39.658; MSL Xuanzong: j98.2207–2208; Li, Xu and Shen 1988: j37.3b–20a.

⁶⁶ In this case, the raw Tibetans were mainly nomads. MSL Taizong: j59.858.

⁶⁷ A *jin* 斤 was 500 grams.

⁶⁸ MSL Taizu: j156, 2425; MSL Taizong: j110.1412–1413; MSL Yizong: j152.2983, j264.5618; MSL Xianzong: j141.2633; Li, Xu and Shen 1988: j37.1a–20a.

and mostly speak Fan language. The runaway soldiers and civilians from every province gather in numbers of tens of thousands and collaborate with Fan to buy horses. They hire Tumin as translators and guides, group together, and mutually support each other to enter deeply into the *Fan* region and hide themselves. Not only soldiers and civilians do this, but also military officers below the rank of commander let family members and friends collaborate with the *Fan*.⁶⁹

Knowing the Tibetan language, some Han frontiersmen not only deceptively used monastic names and titles to join Tibetan tributary missions, but also simulated Xifan people and organized tributary delegations to trade in interior China.⁷⁰

Given that the court imposed few restrictions on these Xifan tributary missions before the 1440s, over 700 *zu* paid tribute regularly. A tributary delegation was a long-distance caravan in nature. Tibetan religious leaders often requested the throne to give tea as alms (Skt. *dāna*) for monks' usage. The emperors could grant 10,000 to 90,000 *jin* of tea to a leading lama. Meanwhile, Xifan delegations made requests for imperial permits or tea licenses to buy huge amounts of tea in the tea-planting provinces like Huguang 湖廣 or tea-horse bureaus in Shaanxi and Sichuan. The tributary envoys also privately traded with the *min*, purchased license-less tea, utilized the corvée labors of the courier system, and smuggled (*jiadai* 夾帶) the goods across the Ming border. Then, tea, grains, silk, paper, handicrafts, and so on were transported to the regional markets such as monasteries and bases of native chiefs for further distribution.⁷¹ The excessive growth in the size and frequency of tribute missions, along with the increasing amount of imperial rewards, became a huge burden for the Ming. In the 1440s, 2,000 to 3,000 tributaries gathered in the border guards to be trained in the imperial rite for presenting tribute, and then continued from Minzhou—the main checkpoint for Tibetan traders and tributaries—to enter into China proper.⁷²

Hence, the court set restrictions on tributaries from Xifan. Before the mid-1430s, the *jiadai* activities were fully tolerated. The throne's rhetoric was to "cherish people from afar." At the same time, the punishment for *min* who smuggled tea across the border, traded with Tibetan delegations in tea-producing areas or faked tea license was as severe as the death penalty according to the Ming law.⁷³ From the

⁶⁹ Yang 1820: j3.12b–13a.

⁷⁰ MSL Yingzong: j97.1942–1943; j177.3407–3408.

⁷¹ MSL Yingzong: j70.1352–1353, j76.1501, j196.6311, j232.5078–5079, j305.6437–6438; MSL Xianzong: j150.2741; MSL Wuzong: j25.2503–2504, j162.3124–3125; Zhang 1990: j9; Wang 1706: j2.52b–53a.

⁷² Chen, Xu and Song 1962: j461.17a–b.

⁷³ MSL Taizu: j254.3670; MSL Taizong: j39.658; Li, Xu and Shen 1988: j37.3b–4b.

1430s onward, the court introduced regulations to control tea smuggling. In 1439, the Ministry of Rites declined the request of the monk Wenbushen Jianzang 溫卜什堅藏 to buy 6,000 *jin* of tea. In 1440, the Ministry of Rites prohibited Chan Master Gezang 葛藏 from transporting more than 100,000 *jin* of private tea through the courier system. In 1443, the rite officials alerted the emperor to the fact that State Preceptor Nange Zangbu 喃葛藏卜 of Xining Qutan Monastery 瞿曇寺 (Tib. Gro tshang lha khang) requested to buy 15,000 *jin* of tea. Such cases in *MSL* continued up to the 1450s, showing that Tibetan smugglers were pardoned and permitted to buy a certain amount of tea instead of being handled as the rite officials suggested to the emperor.⁷⁴

In the 1460s, the business of tea-horse bureaus was almost paralyzed. The number of tributary envoys escorted from Minzhou inflated to 4,200 persons per year.⁷⁵ In 1466, the Shaanxi vice inspection commissioner reported that less than one-third of the tributary lamas were from Central Tibet. The rest were monks of Tao-Min who counterfeited Dbus gtsang lama's identity and paid weak horses as a tribute. He further remarked that these monks exchanged imperial gifts for weapons to attack official troops.⁷⁶ The court thus made a more determinative effort to tackle the issues concerning tea trade in Xifan. These efforts included installing supervisory censors (*jiancha yushi* 監察禦史) and inspectors (*xingren* 行人) to survey official trade and smuggling in western Shaanxi and ordering horse-tributaries to pay tribute once every three years. In addition, a small *zu* was allowed to only send one to two envoys, a large *zu* could send three to five, and each envoy was allowed to cross the border with only 200 to 300 *jin* of tea. The quota of corvée labor used by Dbus gtsang delegations was standardized (up to 150 men). To stop Mdo smad *shufan* and non-Tibetan impostors of *shengfan* and Dbus gtsang lamas, the tributary entrance for central Tibetan delegations was changed to Sichuan. The court even specified that a tributary envoy sent from Sichuan got 60 *jin* of tea while one from Tao-Min received only 50 *jin*. These restrictions on *jiadai* culminated in 1490 after the emperor issued a statute that instructed frontier officials to confiscate license-less tea of Mdo smad tributaries.⁷⁷

As a consequence of the Ming's tightened tributary policy, Mdo smad Tibetans experienced a shortage of tea and plundered the four

⁷⁴ *MSL* Xuanzong: j115.2583; *MSL* Yingzong: j55.1056–1057, j66.1268, j101.2047.

⁷⁵ Zhang 1974: j330.8543.

⁷⁶ *MSL* Wuzong: j25.2503–2504.

⁷⁷ *MSL* Yingzong: j76.1501, j97.1942–1943, j196.6311, j232.5079–5080, j305.6437–6438; *MSL* Xiaozong: j63.1207, j194.3579–3580; Li, Xu and Shen 1988: j37.3b–20a.

garrisons. In 1468, the Shaanxi supervisory censor reported that 160 headmen of 30 “raw” *zu* and 91 chiefs of 24 “cooked” *zu* assaulted Minzhou with a joint force.⁷⁸ Up to the late 15th century, over 100 such cases were reported to the emperor, along with the tighter tributary regulations being put into action. Those *zu* within the same religious, social, and trading networks usually allied into a raiding force, consisting of 2,000 to 10,000 warriors that outnumbered or matched a Ming garrison force. They made trade demands, looted Ming settlements, and then fled into deep valleys and dense forests. The frontier officials often enlisted them again, awarding imperial gifts, particularly tea.⁷⁹

When western Shaanxi was harassed by Tibetans, the court did not expect that the new tea-horse policy affected Mongols in the northern Hexi Corridor. In 1502, Shaanxi Governor 巡撫 Yang Yiqing 楊一清 (1454–1530) learned that Taozhou had private tea in abundance. “The remote, near, raw and cooked Tibetans in Hezhou and Xining trafficked in [tea] and connected external region, being hard to ban.”⁸⁰ Shaanxi Vice Inspection Commissioner Zheng Luo 鄭洛 asserted that Mongols relied on Tibetan smugglers to trade. The record of Xifan tributary products also confirmed this point. From 1436 onward, Tibetans frequently paid camels as tribute to the throne. Camels were the domestic animal extensively bred by Mongols but never by Tibetans. Mongol and Tibetan groups bypassed the Ming garrisons in the Hexi Corridor and traded for decades before the court paid attention to the issue.⁸¹

In 1509, the Eastern Mongolian (Dada or Right Wing) ruler Dayan Khan 達延汗 (1464–1517) defeated the Oirat (*Wala* 瓦剌, or Left Wing) leader Iburai 亦卜剌 in the ongoing Mongol civil wars. The defeated Oirats of 10,000 tribesmen withdrew to Guanxi 關西 from Hetao 河套. Iburai surrendered to the Ming and requested the Zhengde Emperor to open a border market in Suzhou 肅州 and allow his people to graze animals near the guard. The Ming had been long cautious about granting the access of trade and tribute to various Mongol groups, and the court declined the request. Notwithstanding, the Ganzhou and Suzhou officials expected no trouble with Oirat Mongols. After Iburai “borrowed road” (*jiedao* 借道), namely, the Ming border passes in Guanxi, to enter northern Mdo smad, they granted free pass to Oirat Mongols. In doing so, Ming officials intended to direct Iburai to cross

⁷⁸ MSL Xianzong: j64.1298–1299; Zhang 1974: j330.8843.

⁷⁹ MSL Yingzong: j404. 4337–4348; Zhang 1974: j330.8845–8846.

⁸⁰ Yang 1820: j3.1b.

⁸¹ MSL Yingzong: j32.627; Chen, Xu and Song 1962: j405.23a.

the Qilian Mountains and loot raw Tibetans troubling western Shaanxi.⁸²

Furthermore, Dayan Khan elbowed Taishi 太師 Burkhai 卜兒孩 out of his court around 1510. The latter trekked to Guanxi and joined Iburai with another 10,000 Mongols. They defeated the Tibetans near lake Kokonor, wrecked the Four Guards in Steppe, and settled down in western Mdo smad. They roved from Xining to Songpan and “coerced and drove Fanzu” to loot Tibetans near Four Guards in Xifan. The court and Iburai seemingly had a mutual understanding of the raid. The court only instructed frontier officers to protect crucial sites along the border. It disregarded the Mongol looting cases as long as its garrisons were not offended. The Jiajing Emperor (1521–1567) even issued an edict to the Mongols and asserted that they were allowed to raid raw Tibetans but were prohibited from looting the Ming subjects and subordinated Tibetans (*shufan* 屬番).⁸³

Later, the Right Wing crossed the Qilian Mountains to subdue the Oirats and seek trading opportunities on the Ming western border. In the early 1530s, Dayan Khan's grandson Günbileg Jonon 吉囊 (1502–1546) vanquished Iburai. Jonon's younger brother, the Tümed ruler Altan Khan 俺答汗 (1507–1582) defeated Burkhai and integrated the Kokonor Oirats into Eastern Mongolia in 1540. He requested the Ming to open border fair. The court turned down his demand yet continued to ignore his raids in Mdo smad. Then, Altan Khan returned to Hetao and persistently plundered the Ming until a Sino-Mongol treaty was reached in 1571. Apart from the 11 markets on the Ming northern border, the court opened Ganzhou, Suzhou, Zhuanglang, Xining, and Taozhou markets to the Mongols. Recognizing Tibetan Buddhism as a sophisticated religion and a political symbol, Altan Khan established Yanghua Monastery 仰華寺 near the Kokonor in 1575.⁸⁴ To “translate religious unity into political unity” of Tibetans and Mongols, as Morris Rossabi elaborates, Altan Khan established his legitimacy by bonding the patron-priest relation with the Dge lugs sect in 1578.⁸⁵

In the following decades, Altan Khan relocated several thousand Tümed Mongol yurts to the Kokonor region. His successors managed the region until Khoshut Mongols moved into Mdo smad in the final years of the Ming. In the 1630s, the Khoshut ruler Gūshi Khan 固始汗

⁸² Chen, Xu and Song 1962: j404.1a–8a. For an illustration of the Ming-Mongol relationship, see Rossabi 1998: 221–271. For the discussions of Ming economic relations with Inner Asia, see Rossabi 1970.

⁸³ Gu 2012: j60.911–935; *MSL* Wuzong: j126.2528–2529; *MSL* Shizong: j4.201, j14.474, j124.1976–1978.

⁸⁴ Gu 1977: j60.911–934; *MSL* Shenzong: j61.1383; Zhang 1974: j330.8545–8546.

⁸⁵ Rossabi 1998: 237–239.

(1582–1654) conquered the Tümed Mongols. He suppressed the Tibetan dissidents of the Dge lugs order for the 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1682) and founded the Khoshut Khanate. His soldiers settled down as far as the southern bank of the Yellow River. These diverse Mongol groups were recorded as West Sea Mongols (*Xihai menggu* 西海蒙古) or Sea Raiders (*hailu* 海虜) in the Ming sources and referred to themselves as Upper Mongols.⁸⁶

However, granting a free pass to Mongols in return for weakening “raw” Tibetans ended up being a disastrous strategic mistake for Ming China. From 1522, Mongols who were supposed to only loot *shengfan* repeatedly plundered *shufan* and Ming settlers in eastern Mdo smad. When Tibetans reported the Mongol raiding cases, as Zheng Luo indicated, frontier officials intimidated by *hailu* usually punished Tibetans to please Mongols. This led to many *zu* between the Kokonor and Shaanxi to yield to the Mongols. They paid tribute known as *tianba* 添巴 to the Mongol overlords and turned against the Ming. Only a few powerful Tibetan *zu* aligned into large confederations and worked with the Ming guard officers for the purpose of self-preservation.⁸⁷ This Mongol-Tibetan collaboration grew over time. Shaanxi Governor Li Wen 李文 (1535–1609) stated that the Huangshui Valley had become a nest for the Mongols, who often employed Tibetans as spies, guides, and vanguards in attacking the Ming garrisons.⁸⁸ As a result, the Ming reformed the tea-horse policy to ease Ming-Tibetan tension and prevent Tibetans from joining the Mongol foes.

Based on field investigations in Xifan, Ming officials suggested to “enlist Tibetans and counterattack Mongols.” They regarded the four garrisons as the inner border (*neibian* 內邊) between Shaanxi and Mdo smad and treated the horse-payer and horse-tributary *zu* as the “outer fence” (*waili* 外籬) to protect the inner border. Since smugglers were blamed for sabotaging the *jimi* strategy, the revised tea-horse policy often aimed at eliminating private trade. The court raised the price of official horses, employed certified merchants to transport tea, increased penalties for smugglers, and strengthened its supervision over Shaanxi. However, Ming traders repeatedly used the same commercial tea licenses or excessively bought tea with one *chayin* to gain more profit. The policy, in fact, raised smuggling activities to a new level, leading the Ming to completely lose control over border

⁸⁶ Gu 1977: j10.127–150, j32.471–476; Wei 1978: 340b, 352b–354a; Zhwa sgab pa 2010: chapter 7.

⁸⁷ MSL Shizong: j110.2601; An 2008: j17.7b–13a; Wang 1706: j40.157–158; Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po 1773: 197.

⁸⁸ MSL Shenzong: j144.2680, j308.5770–5771; Chen, Xu and Song 1962: j405.26b–27a; Zhang 1974: j330.8544–8545.

commerce. With the Ming dealing with trouble from Mongols, peasant revolts, Manchu invasion, and so on, the state-directed trade was never able to recover. To secure western Shaanxi, the systematic fortification proved more reliable for Ming officials.⁸⁹

5. *The Landscape Transformation*

Unlike the Great Wall separating the steppe and northern China, there was no artificial border between Shaanxi and Mdo smad by the late 14th century. The Ming built the *weisuo* system to solidify the western borderland and defend against Tibetans from the outset. When Mongols entered Mdo smad, the early Ming defensive constructions were renovated and expanded throughout the 16th century. Combining local geographic features with a complex set of fortifications, the Ming defensive system eventually took shape. From 1377 to 1386, the Ming regular troops constructed the Four Guards in Xifan and started the primitive urbanization in eastern Mdo smad.

The Chinese geometric (*fengshui* 風水) tradition played a role in designing the guarded city. In Hezhou, the walled city was designed in the shape of a blade instead of a rectangle to quell Tibetans. In Taozhou, Ming troops dug apart the “dragon vein” (*longmai* 龍脈) of the local *zu* before the city was constructed. Based on local gazetteers and steles, the guard was normally encompassed by eight to nine Chinese miles (*li* 里) of the rammed wall. The city gates were intentionally named as “Quelling Fan” 鎮番, “Subduing Qiang” 伏羌, “Cherishing the Far Ones” 懷遠, and “Harmonizing Fan” 和番.⁹⁰ The cities were fully equipped with military facilities. Since Tibetan and Mongol raiders damaged the guards several times, the garrison generals reinforced the city walls, dug trenches, and deepened the moats from the mid-15th to the 16th century. Being the garrison headquarters, the guarded city contained official bureaus 公署, Confucian and Yinyang schools 儒/陰陽學, sacrifice altars 壇, temples 寺觀, markets and lodges to exert state control and satisfy the educational, economic and religious needs of the Ming subjects.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Wei 1978: 346b–357a; Chen, Xu and Song 1962: j404.1a–8a.

⁹⁰ “洮州衛城竣工碑,” “岷州衛建城碑文,” see Wu 2008: j1.12–13; Liu and Long 1993: 146.

⁹¹ An 2008: j16.1a–2b.

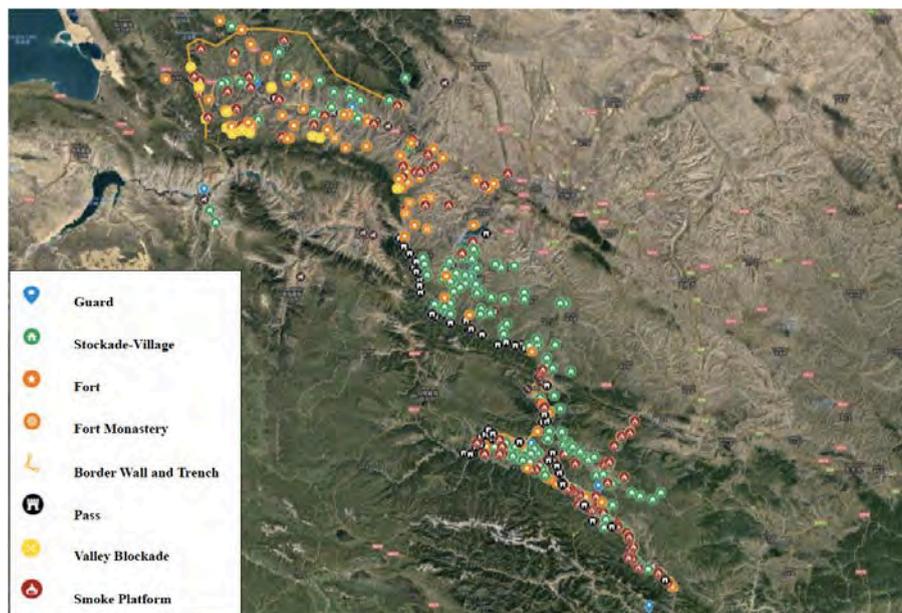


Fig. 2 — The Ming defensive constructions in Mdo smad during the late 16th century⁹²

The court required that a guard (5,600 soldiers) administrated five battalions, and each battalion (1,200 soldiers) commanded ten companies. A company (70–120 soldiers) governed two chief banners (*zongqi* 總旗, one chief banner leader, five small banner leaders, and fifty soldiers) which respectively controlled five small banners (*xiaoqi* 小旗, one leader, ten soldiers).⁹³ However, this regulation was flexibly executed in accordance with the specific local needs in Xifan. The Ming built 24 battalions (two defense battalions or *shouyu qianhusuo* 守禦千戶所, two military-civilian battalions and 20 regular battalions often named as “left, right, front, back and middle *suo*”) in Mdo smad. Xining Guard ran five regular battalions and Nianbo Defense Battalion (1465–87). Hezhou Guard managed six regular battalions and the Guide Defense Battalion (1375). Taozhou Guard commanded five battalions and Jiucheng Fort. Minzhou Guard controlled four regular battalions, and the Xigu 西固 Defense Battalion (established in 1375, changed into a military-civilian battalion in 1582). Normally, regular battalions were the defensive satellites of a guard.

⁹² The data is based on Zhang 1990: j3.47a–84a, j4.1a–9a.

⁹³ Zhang 1974: j76.1874.

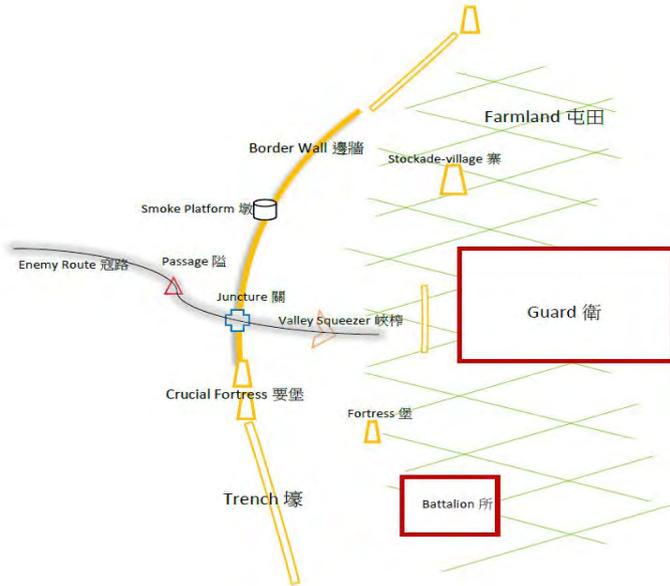


Fig. 3 — The Ming defensive system in Mdo smad

The military-civilian and defense battalions served as Ming outposts in the Tibetan-dominated areas. Each battalion was located near a crucial military route and encircled by two to three *li* of rammed walls.⁹⁴

The company and banner were built into a fort or stockade-village. Forts served as military outposts responsible for defense and reclamation. Being in the interior area of a garrison, stockade-villages had more residents, and were often the larger colonies or domestic markets. The Ming established over 530 fortresses and stockade-villages in Xifan. Some of these low-level defensive components were constructed shortly after the Ming integration of western Shaanxi, but most were built much later.⁹⁵ The perimeter of these fortresses ranged from 500 to 1500 meters. The distance between two adjacent forts was kept within five to ten *li* for reciprocal defense. All forts had smoke platforms (*fengdun* 烽墩) for early warning (see Fig. 2 and Chart 4). The crucial forts (*yaobao* 要堡) were built in strategic sites. Each *yaobao* was composed of an inner part (*neicheng* 內城) and a smaller outer part

⁹⁴ Zhang 1990: j3.47a–84a, j4.1a–9a.

⁹⁵ MSL Taizong: j39.659; MSL Xianzong: j68.1357.

(*wengcheng* 甕城), protected by 400 to 500 soldiers and equipped with a granary, a gatehouse (*menlou* 門樓), a gate-protector (*humen* 護門) and a wall-extension building (*xuanlou* 懸樓) for long-term defense.⁹⁶

Being trained in the battles against Tibetans and Mongols, Ming commanders increasingly understood eastern Mdo smad from a geo-military perspective. To block raiders, they controlled the bridges, ice bridges, and ferry-places along local rivers. They built passes (*guan'ai* 關隘) and valley blockades (*xiazha* 峽榨) on the routes that led raiders to the Ming garrisons. By the mid-16th century, 250 *li* of border wall 邊牆 (three to five meters in height) and trench 壕塹 (three to six meters in both depth and width) were constructed in Taozhou. From the 1530s to 1596, the Ming constructed over 613 *li* of the border wall in Xining. By linking the defensive constructions with geographic barriers, Ming China established a solid borderline between Shaanxi and Mdo smad (see Fig. 3).⁹⁷

Guard	Battalion	Fort & Stockade-village	Pass	Wall & Trench (<i>li</i>)	Valley Blockade	Smoke Platform
Xining	6	197	26	613	38	75
Hezhou	7	94	25			21
Taozhou	5	82	16	250		38
Minzhou	5	157	6			59

Chart 4 — The components of the Ming defensive system in 1547⁹⁸

On the eastern side of the border lay the Ming colonies built to sustain the frontier troops and overcome the logistic difficulties. The clearance for construction, reclamation, and wood fuel swept away the obstacle of lush vegetation and high trees for the Ming sentries. Ming soldiers and civilians ploughed up valley grasslands that provided natural forages to Tibetan and Mongol cavalries. They terraced the loess hills and gentle mountain meadows on a large scale. Even though many soldiers deserted their posts and large tracts of farmland remained desolate, the result of reclamation was still impressive. In the 1540s, the military and civilian population of the Four Guards numbered up to 127,824 men (*ding* 丁 or *kou* 口, excluding women and children). They were distributed into guards, forts, and stockade-villages and cultivated 1,051,641 *mu* of lands (see Chart 5).⁹⁹ Comparing this data with the statistics in the 1990s, the agricultural acreage in the region

⁹⁶ Zhang 1990: j3.47a–84a, j4.1a–9a.

⁹⁷ Wu 2008: 21a–24b, Liu and Long 1993: 192; Yang 1990: j12.1a–12b, j13.7b–16a; Zhang 1970: 191–200.

⁹⁸ The data is based on Zhao 1997; Zhang 1990; Wu 2008; Liu and Long 1993.

⁹⁹ Zhao 1997: 678–690.

historically governed by the Four Guards only increased around 30% throughout the Qing, Republican, and China's pre-reform periods. It seems that the Ming transformed the surface environment of western Shaanxi into an agricultural landscape.¹⁰⁰

Location	Military Population	Population (<i>hu/kou</i>)		Farmlands (<i>mu</i>)		
	1547 (original/ newly recruited <i>kou</i>)	1542		1542		
		Military	Civilian	Military	Civilian	
					Summer	Autumn
Xining	6,875/500	7,479/12,260		202,552	135,131.2	
Hezhou	7,700/2,292	4,211/ 6533	5,244/ 92,232 ¹⁰¹	344,628	292,101.3	29,061.2
Taozhou	5,622/800	1,432/3625		223,528		
Minzhou	5,913	3,113/ 5,382	442/ 562	186,036	13,920.6	43,985.8
Nianbo	575 (>1,000)					
Guide	248					
Xigu		1,110/ 3,615	410/ 3,615	44,800	5684.6	3,725

Chart 5 — Population and reclamation in the Ming Xifan Region¹⁰²

On the western side of the border, Tibetans slowly changed local landscapes. They initiated the process of fortification in response to the Mongols' frequent looting in eastern Mdo smad. The powerful Mdo smad native officials appointed by the Ming usually modeled their offices and residences on the Ming forts and *yamen* 衙門. These fortifications were concentrated in the vicinity of the four garrisons. Likewise, Tibetan monastic officials, especially those who were tributary leaders and patronized by the Ming emperors, built their monasteries in the form of fortresses, which became known as fort monasteries (*sibao* 寺堡). There were more than 100 new monasteries established in deep valleys adjoining the territories of raw Tibetans (see Chart 6). The fort monasteries, such as Honghua and Qutan *sibao*, were also divided into inner and outer parts for warding off invaders. The assembly halls, temples, and monk's quarters were encircled by the high rammed walls.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ According to the gazetteer records on agricultural acreage, the farmland of the region in the 1990s were Xining 885,000 *mu*, Linxia Hui Prefecture 2,240,000 *mu*, Lintan 300,827 *mu*, Minxian 1,145,896 *mu*.

¹⁰¹ The household number of Hezhou Guard was 5,280 *hu* and the population was 90,845 *kou* in 1546. See Wu 2008: j1.26a.

¹⁰² The data is from Zhao 1997: 678–690; Zhang 1990: j3.47a–84a, j4.1a–9a.

¹⁰³ Zhang 1990: j4.1a–9a, Mao 2016: 85–88.

Location	Before 1368	Before 1505	Before 1690 ¹
Hezhou	8	21	15
Xining	10	65	90
Minzhou	5	26	20
Taozhou	3	16	22

Chart 6 — Approximate number of Tibetan monasteries in Mdo smad¹⁰⁴

Some Tibetans also altered their ways of production. Eastern Mdo smad Tibetans became the middlemen who distributed Chinese goods to remote *zu* and sold Tibetan goods such as horses, yak-cattle hybrids (Tib. *mdzo*), herbal medicines, or fur and leather to western Shaanxi. To gain higher profits, they opened arable valleys, lived semi-sedentary life (Tib. *sa ma 'brog*), produced fodders to enlarge flocks, and exchanged grains for horses and *mdzo* with the inhabitants of the upper valleys and steppes. In central and western Mdo smad, the cold climate and high altitude restrained Tibetans from developing agriculture, and they instead bred large flocks of horses and farming ox. In the densely forested areas, Tibetans adopted slash-and-burn land clearance as a customary method to expand grasslands. Hence, the sedentary, semi-sedentary, and pastoral landscapes with the rise of elevation became more distinct from eastern to western Mdo smad.¹⁰⁵

6. Concluding Remarks

To conclude, Ming China established the four garrisons to protect China proper from the Tibetan and Mongol incursions. It developed a defensive system and established a long artificial border in western Shaanxi. It built a considerable number of Chinese and Muslim settlements in eastern Mdo smad and brought new forms of land use to the region. The Ming court used countless human and financial resources to protect this border and manage the peoples alongside it. It vested official positions and titles in Tibetan secular and ecclesiastic authorities and used tea-related trade and tributary as a political device to bridle over 1,000 *zu* in Xifan.

Meanwhile, Xifan natives shared and contested the physical space with the Ming settlers and Mongol migrants. The intertwined Tibetan-Ming-Mongol interactions changed the natural landscape in the north-eastern Tibetan Plateau. Through migration, trade, war, and politics,

¹⁰⁴ The data is based on Wu 2008; Liu and Long 1993; Brag dgon pa dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1864; Wang and Tian 2008; Zhang 1970; Pu 1990.

¹⁰⁵ Chen, Xu and Song 1962: j115; Zhang 1970: j16.925–931. For the similar deforestation practice in Songpan, see Hayes 2014: 3.

multicultural society that dominated the late imperial and modern Amdo history came into being along the Ming western border. After the demise of the Ming, the border still served as a boundary between Chinese-Muslim communities and Tibetan-Mongolian groups.

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The Monstrous and the Moral: Interpreting King Yama's Narratological Arc in Returner Literature

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Despite increased focus on the importance and role of narrative literature in Tibetan Buddhist societies, exploring the narrative complexities of King Yama—the Lord, Ruler, and Judge of the Buddhist Underworld—has remained an underdeveloped project. Although appearing first in Vedic literature, King Yama as guard or master of the underworld enters into its fullest formation in Buddhist narratives, where he provides normative Buddhist ethical guidance and advice while embodying a terror-inspiring form.¹ Such narratives played an important role in expanding Yama's function from a spirit who takes away those who mistreat their parents and Buddhist ascetics in the Pali Canon² to the head of an expansive netherworld courtroom that often involves a considerable bureaucratic system.³ Narratives and performances about Buddhist heroes who journey to hell and return—including Mulian, Phra Malai, and others⁴—also played an important role in

¹ For a full review of the “evolutionary history” of Yama as a divine figure, see Siklós 1996.

² Devadūta Sutta 1995: 1029–1036; Messengers 36.6 2012: 332–343.

³ One of the most complete elaborations of this phenomena is found in *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*, where Yama is only one of ten netherworldly kings who must be propitiated with the help of Buddhist monasteries to secure a favorable rebirth for one's loved ones. For more information, see Teiser 2003.

⁴ Mulian and Phra Malai are two of the most prominent Buddhist heroes whose narratives describe as descending to hell to save suffering beings. Most popular in China, Mulian—the Chinese rendering of the Buddha's disciple Maudgalyāyana—saves his mother from hell with the help of supernatural powers gained through his extensive meditative prowess and the Buddha himself. After his journey, the Buddha initiates the Chinese Ghost Festival, during which families make offerings to Buddhist monastics as a way to feed their own suffering ancestors. See further, Cole 1998 and Teiser 1988. In contrast, Phra Malai descends to hell repeatedly not to save a specific suffering being, but rather anyone who calls for his assistance. Although relatively unknown outside of Southeast Asia, his narrative has extensive ritual use at weddings, funerals, and other major life events. See further Brereton 1996.

making the narrative figure of King Yama both increasingly detailed and an increasingly important figure in the Buddhist imagination.⁵

Beginning in the 16th century, one particular thread of post-mortem narratives—Tibetan Returner (*'das log*) literature—became especially popular throughout the Himalayan Plateau. In these stories, people die, receive judgment from King Yama, and then return to tell the tale to the living. While these narratives are inherently interesting and have been the subject of numerous recent studies,⁶ they also provide the opportunity to consider the role Yama plays in the Buddhist popular imagination. Yama here appears exceedingly complex—a veritable Janus figure who inspires in the judged on one hand terror, but on the other offers detailed ethical instruction with prescient reminders of karmic morality.

When trying to make sense of the figure of Yama in the Buddhist imagination, however, scholars usually rely on one of two interpretations—first, an evaluation of his role that overlooks or otherwise obfuscates the terror he inspires in figures who meet him, or, second, a simplistic identification of Yama as somehow analogous to the figure of the Devil in Christian mythos. Turning to the first interpretation, many scholars and Buddhist thinkers have explained fearful evaluations of Asian deities, including King Yama, as largely foreign to the Asian tradition or as somehow a misunderstanding of the figure's deeper significance. This interpretation is in large part a reaction to the previous Euro-American cultural denigration of Asian religious figures for their terrifying visage. In the late 19th- and early 20th-century scholarship on Asian religions, the monstrous qualities of Hindu and Buddhist deities were highlighted to demonstrate their cultural and spiritual inferiority to (Protestant) Christianity. On his trip around the world described in *Following the Equator*, Mark Twain labeled the Hindu gods of Varanasi, "a wild mob of nightmares."⁷ Twain's remarks were not especially unique for his time. Protestant assumptions about the appropriate nature, purpose, and appearance

⁵ These narratives typically divide protagonists into two categories, what I call "saviors" and "sojourners" in hell. Saviors are individuals who travel to hell of their own volition and their own agency to specifically free individuals suffering there. Among these saviors, Mulian looms large and potentially represents something of an urtext or originary text for Buddhist saviors in hell upon which local concerns and narrative tropes are written. For more information, see Berounský 2012; Brereton 1996; Kapstein 2007. In contrast, "sojourners" are revenants who die, visit hell, and then are specifically sent back. While this article discusses one such narrative in detail, further information can be found in Cuevas 2008; Grant and Idema 2011; Pommaret 1997.

⁶ See especially Prude 2011, Pommaret 1989 & 1997, Cuevas 2008 & 2007.

⁷ Twain 1898: 504.

of religion thread throughout late 19th- and early 20th-century scholarship on Asian religions.

Contemporary scholars have sought, therefore, to salvage Asian religious traditions from these reductionistic critiques either by situating such critiques as entirely manifestations of culturally-specific realities or by dismissing them as misunderstandings of what are wholly psychological phenomena. Diana Eck deconstructs what she terms Twain's "Hebraic hostility" towards Hindu deities and links it to the suspicion of graven images found in some Jewish and early Christian sources.⁸ Similarly, scholars of Tibetan religion frequently explain away the terrifying and bloody images of wrathful buddhas as psychological manifestations used to destroy one's own afflictive emotions. When a tantric figure possesses "long sharp fangs, rolling bloodshot eyes, clenched teeth, and terrifying weaponry," scholars like Judith Simmer-Brown emphasize that these traits are not an inherent feature of the figure, but rather are "a wrathful appearance to awaken the individual practitioner from arrogance, intellectual opinionatedness, or laziness."⁹ Such grotesque images represent, therefore, nothing more than a transmutation of "the practitioner's emotional obscurations and thoughts in co-emergent wisdom."¹⁰ This rhetorical move preserves the religious acceptability of the divine figures from a Protestant perspective, but at the cost of sanitizing their terrifying aspects.

In proving that these divine figures have substantial value as powerful religious entities, many scholars overlook not only that these figures *are* terrifying or grotesque, but also that the religious tradition's presentation of them as horrifying is intentional and, therefore, important. The potential for horror engendered within some Asian religious figures is especially apparent in the figure of Yama, who takes a particularly active role in a variety of popular journey-to-hell literature about Returners, Mulian, King Gesar, and others. Their stories demonstrate that while a psychological interpretation of King Yama is emic to these traditions, being scared of or horrified by the underworld king is as well.

When Euro-American interpreters do acknowledge Yama's frightening visage, however, there is frequently an unstated assumption that Yama's terror is a tactic intended to "scare straight" the reader or listener.¹¹ In this way, Yama becomes something closer to

⁸ Eck 1981: 18.

⁹ Simmer-Brown 2002: 267.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 151.

¹¹ Indeed, the very idea of hell—Christian, Buddhist, or otherwise—does not strictly require a netherworld figure to scare a reader into moral action. The punishments of hell themselves generally suffice.

the Devil in Christian mythos—an otherworldly punisher who exists solely to terrify by representing the potential result of one's sins or ethical missteps. The "scared straight" assumption is not only overly simplistic, but also by its nature ethnocentric. Terror-inspiring figures in torturous afterlife regions are not the same the world over. Yama is certainly scary, but he acts very differently than the Devil. In Tibetan underworld narratives, King Yama discusses karmic realities, Buddhist practice, and dispenses ethical advice. He represents both the authority and reality of the Buddhist institution in the in-between state of *bar do*.

If Yama is to be interpreted as neither a purely psychoanalytical phenomenon nor the "Tibetan Devil," how ought we to proceed? This paper argues that there is an interconnected relationship in these stories between Yama's representation of Buddhist morality and his representation of netherworld terror—a relationship that fundamentally goes deeper than simply the fact that one may be more inclined to listen to moral instruction when one is scared. By using the burgeoning field of Monster Theory¹² to analyze Yama's portrayal as a "monster"—an etic, second-order category—who inspires terror while also representing the full authority of the Buddhist institution, this paper seeks to move beyond simply reducing Yama's fearsome appearance to a Euro-American misunderstanding or to something functionally analogous to the Devil. For the Returner—and through that, the individual reading or listening to the narrative—Yama's monstrosity causes a boundary-shattering destabilization of both self and society. This experience provides the opportunity to ultimately reform the observer through Yama's ethical instruction as an agent sensitive to the Buddhist ethical agenda.

The argument of this paper is not intended to be one based on psychology, but rather a narratological one; it investigates how the characters and plot structures of Returner narratives function to guide the reader towards specific conclusions and ideas. From a narratological perspective, the monstrosity and terror-inducing nature of Yama ultimately serves as a foil to reveal who stands outside the boundaries of the Buddhist ethical world. Because monstrosity is ultimately relative, the ability of Yama to inspire terror serves as a means to reveal who the true monster is—who fits and who does not fit in the Buddhist moral world, so to speak. By tracing the experience of fear in various individuals confronting King Yama, Returner narratives introduce the idea that perhaps it is the karmically-negligent observer, and not the apparently monstrous Yama, who is

¹² Monster Theory uses the category of "monsters" as a framework of analysis to study the nature and function of fantastic creatures in art, literature, and society. See further, Weinstock 2020, Halbertsam 1995, and Cohen 1996.

the one truly outside the boundaries of the Buddhist cosmological schema.

1. *Monster as an Analytical Category*

It is important to emphasize at this point that monsters—like the majority of conceptual tools scholars employ—are second-order categories. There is no clear Tibetan word that easily fits the classification of “monster,” though Tibetans certainly have had a variety of disturbing and discomfiting creatures that exist at the boundaries of “normative” human society.¹³ Secondary-scholarship on the deployment of monsters as a category often does not define the term “monster.” This is due neither to intellectual laziness nor to ethnocentric blindness that assumes such a definition is both obvious and apparent. Rather, monsters represent a specific type of cultural deployment that is defined not by its essence, but by its relation. Judith Halbertsam has discussed monsters as “meaning machines” that fundamentally challenge the “divisions of identity” between humans.¹⁴ W. Scott Poole explains that monsters “do not mean one thing, but a thousand”¹⁵ and emphasizes the shared social history of monsters as:

Ciphers that reveal disturbing truths about everything from colonial settlement to the institution of slavery, from anti-immigrant movements to the rise of religious fundamentalism.¹⁶

In this, Poole is building on Douglas E. Cowan, who emphasizes horror and monstrosity as necessarily socially-constructed and, therefore, revealing more of the meaning structures of individual societies than of some sort of fundamental human substrate.¹⁷

Monsters, therefore, are a way to designate those creatures that—from the perspective of the speaker—incite fear, terror, and unease due to their being neither a part of society nor apart from it. Consequently, the deployment of the term “monster” is inherently subjective and the definitional boundaries between monster and deity or demon are

¹³ The closest Tibetan term that may fit the category of “monster” would likely be *gdon 'dre* which generally indicates a non-human entity causing evil. The term, however, largely lacks the linguistic variance we see with the term “monster” in English, as it is considered a thing unto itself and not a categorical term under which other types of monsters congregate.

¹⁴ Halbertsam 1995: 22.

¹⁵ Poole 2011: xiv.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 18.

¹⁷ Cowan 2016.

fuzzy at best. While employing this categorical analysis perhaps opens myself to a critique of importing Euro-American analytical terms to a Himalayan context, Jonathan Z. Smith has written eloquently on the scholarly usefulness of second-order categories and the resulting comparisons that can arise from their use.¹⁸ By identifying King Yama as a monster, I am making a specific intellectual designation that will hopefully reveal something previously overlooked about the role Yama plays in the narrative. Thinking about Yama from the perspective of monster theory also represents a potential corrective to the two problematic interpretations identified earlier—one that attempts to remove the terror of the figure entirely by psychologizing it away and one that tacitly identifies him as a Devil-like bogeyman with no deeper significance in the narrative than to scare the reader into ethical action. Rather, applying the category of monster to Yama and considering him within the larger framework of monster theory, allows for new interpretations of Yama narratives in which Yama is understood as both a visibly terrifying figure and one of central doctrinal import.

2. *An Introduction to Returner ('Das log) Narratives*

As noted previously, Tibetan Returners are individuals who reportedly die and come back to life several days later, having had dark visions of both the tortures of hell and King Yama's courtroom. When considering Returner narratives, this paper is admittedly focusing on the written tradition, which deviates a great deal from the experience of contemporary living Returners. While the Returners featured in literary works have fairly equal representation in terms of gender, ordination, and social class, Alyson Prude and Françoise Pommaret have found that the majority of contemporary Returners are non-ordained women with limited education.¹⁹ The potential reasons for this difference between lived and literary traditions are multifarious and complex, but outside the purview of the discussion here; with greater research into this topic, hopefully, more insights will come to light.

Like portrayals of heaven and hell in Euro-American media, Returner narratives are particularly interesting as windows into "popular" perceptions of the afterlife. Indeed, some scholars have linked the 16th- and 17th-century rise in popularity of Returner narratives to growing Dge lugs institutionalization in central Tibetan

¹⁸ Smith 1982 & 1998.

¹⁹ Pommaret 1997 and Prude 2011.

regions; this consolidation of power resulted in more localized, non-institutional practices like Returners being marginalized and pushed to border regions.²⁰ While potentially an accurate analysis that seems to reflect larger patterns of the increasing centralization of power in religious environments, Bryan J. Cuevas notes that such an analysis is based largely on speculation and has little concrete data.²¹ Additionally, this particular line of argument has at its core certain assumptions about the types of religion practiced within monastic, institutional settings versus those practiced without. While the term “popular” can be problematic for its potential privileging of ordained, literary, or institutional viewpoints as the Buddhist “norm,” it can also designate widespread beliefs held by both ordained and non-ordained individuals that generally do not perfectly map onto larger institutional doctrines. Indeed, Cuevas and others have demonstrated that “popular” beliefs are often still as widespread within monastic environments, so to think of these beliefs as a phenomenon solely of the laity, the uneducated, or the enigmatic “folk” would be a mistake.²²

Returner narratives are also important for their regional focus; such narratives often reference local landmarks and families, while giving in the process detailed personal information about the Returner’s upbringing and early life. These trends indicate that—at least initially—these narratives likely had a local readership and were quite possibly composed by someone who knew or saw the Returner personally.²³ Based on publication history, however, these narratives spread relatively rapidly to communities outside of their origin. Returner narratives frequently were tucked away into biographical collections of Buddhist men and women, gathered into small collections of three to four narratives, or even into larger publications like the late 19th-century *Ka shod mkhar kha* (“Castle of the Ka shod Clan”).²⁴

Due at least in part to this rapid spread, Returner narratives as portrayed in literary outlets follow a remarkably standard structure,

²⁰ Pommaret 1989: 102 and Epstein 1982: 22–23.

²¹ Cuevas 2008: 51.

²² Cuevas 2008: 136–139 and Company 2012.

²³ Cuevas 2008.

²⁴ Possibly the largest collection of Returner narratives, the *Ka shod mkhar kha* (full title: *Bya bral pa kun dga’ rang grol dang sprang byang chub seng ges gcos chos kyi rgyal pos bka’ phrin lon pa sky abo pho mo’i rnam thar*), largely came to academic attention through Cuevas 2008, where it provided an important resource for evaluating the larger patterns prevalent in Returner narratives. A poorly preserved text, Cuevas notes that it is only held in three collections: one in Japan, one at the Collège de France and as microfilms at the University of Washington library. However, a recent 2002 edition was published in Lhasa under the name *Das log skor gyi chos skor phyogs sgrig thar* (“A Compilation of the Teachings of Returners”).

which Cuevas traces back to the narrative of returner Gling bza' chos skyid.²⁵ All Returner literature begins, unsurprisingly, with an introduction of the protagonist and their death. The individual remains ignorant of their newly post-mortem state and continues to try and interact with family members. During this period, they look back upon their corpse, but only see it as an animal—often a pig or a dog—dressed in their clothes. Eventually, the deceased begins to make their way towards King Yama's court by passing through a landscape that is bleak and uninviting. Along the way, a spirit guide often appears to lead them, and eventually, the Returner will have grotesque visions of hell and the judgments of King Yama. The scenes in front of Yama's throne will be explored in more detail in the following section, but they generally are terrifying, theatrical affairs, with detailed descriptions of King Yama's bull-headed form, as well as the plaintiff's flowing tears and pleas to take messages back to the living. In some narratives, there is a scale of justice upon which two spirits weigh the victim's good and bad deeds. Other times, Yama holds aloft a mirror or a book of judgment that displays one's misdeeds and subsequent fate. Once the Returner has their own judgment before King Yama, they are sent back to the living. Sometimes this is because the plaintiff's death was in error, but other times it is with the express purpose of communicating a message on the realities of Buddhist karma to their community.

3. Yama as Source of Terror in Returner Narratives

As noted above, the Returner's trial before Yama represents a narrative peak generally flanked by terror and horror. While the outlines and plots of these narratives have been well explored in Cuevas' recent work on Returners,²⁶ I want to highlight the characters' fearful reactions to Yama to ground the discussion of Yama's persona as potentially "monstrous." Due to the structure of Returner narratives—where the individual observes numerous trials before they themselves are called before Yama's throne—the reader has ample opportunity to witness the terror Yama inspires. In the biography of Gling bza' chos skyid, we see several trial scenes where individuals express fear and cry before King Yama. In one particularly famous scene, a young woman who refused the tantric advances of a Lama Gzhon nu rgyal mtshan and subsequently gossiped with her girlfriends about the event is condemned to the Howling Hell. As her judgement is read,

²⁵ Cuevas 2008: 17.

²⁶ Ibid.

the young lady loudly trembles with fear and tears fall down her face.²⁷ Indeed, Yama's role as a source of terror is especially evident here when he uses the young woman's tears as inspiration for her placement in the Howling Hell (*dmyal ba ngu 'bod*), and his minions use their iron hooks to pierce the young woman and drag her away, all while screaming "Kill! Kill! Strike! Strike!"²⁸ An earlier trial sees a yogi who masqueraded as an accomplished Dharma practitioner while seducing a queen being sentenced to the Most Tortuous Hell (*avīci, mnar med pa*), where 1,000 iron hooks will pierce his body.²⁹ The yogi cries in contrition and begs all who watch to hold tight to their vows, but his fate is already sealed. Both scenes reveal that meeting Yama is a fundamentally frightening and distressing experience.

The terror that surrounds Yama is related not only to his own person, however, but also to his veritable army of animal-headed servants who do his bidding. In the narrative of *Kar ma dbang 'dzin*, the young female Returner encounters several people on her route to Yama, including an older woman being cruelly driven forward with spears by Yama's servants. In response to her treatment by Yama's entourage, the woman cries bitterly and beats herself.³⁰ Such a scene of fear before Yama's servants is repeated on a larger scale in the Returner narrative of *Byang chub seng ge*, where he sees sinners running from Yama's workers "like children being pursued by hawks," and he becomes extremely frightened in response.³¹ During *Kar ma dbang 'dzin's* trial itself, Yama himself acknowledges and celebrates the terror-inducing visage of his servants, asking her if she saw "the terror of my messengers?"³²

While this article focuses exclusively on Returner narratives as a way to highlight widespread popular views of Yama, it should be noted that Yama's presentation as terrifying is not unique to this particular Tibetan genre. In the 15th-century *Bar do thos grol chen mo* ("Liberation through Hearing During the *Bar do*"), we see a vision of Yama's judgment, which describes "at that time [of judgement], you will be frightened and alarmed, shaking and trembling with fear."³³ While Returner narratives may highlight the terror of seeing Yama in particularly personal and evocative ways, this presentation of Yama is

²⁷ *pu mo 'dar khri li li mchi ma shar shar gtong* (Don 'grub rdo rje 1977a: 503–504).

²⁸ *sod sod/ rgob rgyob zer zhing/* (Ibid: 504).

²⁹ Ibid: 456–457.

³⁰ Skal bzang dbang phyug 1981: 61–62.

³¹ *sdig can dpag tu med pa rnas ni byis chung khra rded pa ltar brded nas song ngo/ (Spyan ras gzigs kyi sprul pa 'das log byang chub seng ges* 1976: 44).

³² *gshin rje'i pho nya'i 'jigs skrag yang mthong ngam* (Skal bzang dbang phyug 1981: 211).

³³ *de'i dus su khyod shin tu bred pa dang/ dangangs pa dang/ 'dar bar byas nas* (Mkhan po rdo je 2003: 108).

not unique to these stories, and Yama is seen as a figure of horror and fear throughout a variety of Tibetan Buddhist literature.

As noted above, the Returner narratives described in this section have all been well explored in other publications. The remainder of this paper, therefore, will examine Yama's monstrosity in a largely unexplored Returner narrative—that of Long wa Adrung found in *A Message from Dharma King Yama* (*Gshin rje chos kyi rgyal po'i gsung phrin*).³⁴ It should be noted that this is intended to serve as a preliminary exploration of the text with particular focus on the portrayal of the figure of Yama as both a source of terror and ethical guidance; it is not meant to represent the final scholarly word on the text, and it is my hope that this article encourages further study. That caveat aside, through this case study, this article will build on the prior observations of Yama's incitation of horror and terror in Returner narratives as a category, while also exploring how Yama's bifurcated roles as both a monster and as a representation of the Buddhist institution works together to instill in the Returner and the reader a greater sensitivity towards normative Buddhist ethics.

4. *Yama in A Message from Dharma King Yama*

For unknown reasons, Adrung's Returner narrative has been included in few collections, having only one known manuscript production and one xylograph publication. The story, however, may have circulated orally; Lawrence Epstein notes that the last Shug gseb Rje btsun Rin po che claims to have heard about the Returner Adrung from the Royal Chaplain of Ladakh.³⁵ Until its purchase via the PL-480 text exchange program,³⁶ the manuscript was held at Gsang sngags chos gling, a 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud monastery in the Spiti Valley. It is unclear if that is where it was produced or if it came to the monastery by some other means. The manuscript colophon is rather sparse, but indicates that the text was made under the auspices of the Dharma king of Gung thang, Khri Bdud 'dul mgon po lde.³⁷ In his brief analysis of the text,

³⁴ A previous significant work on *A Message from Dharma King Yama* can be found in Epstein 1982, where he briefly examines the text as part of the arc of other Returner narratives.

³⁵ Epstein 1982: 65.

³⁶ Initiated in 1954 and amended in 1962, the PL-480 text exchange program allowed the American Library of Congress to collect books and periodicals from participating countries in exchange for food commodities. Through this program, many American universities developed extensive Tibetan-language collections. See further Canary 2018.

³⁷ O rgyan rdo rje 1975: 261.

Epstein uses this to trace the text to the early 16th century, in 1533.³⁸ If true, this would make *A Message from Dharma King Yama* an especially early example of a Returner narrative. I have no reason to doubt Epstein's dating, though locating such an early example of a Returner narrative that has not undergone previous significant study is surprising.

The text had two Indian publications in the 1970s via two different PL-480 text exchange collections. First, the manuscript entitled "A Message from Dharma King Yama" was published in 1975 by O rgyan rdo rje. In this edition, it is published together with a biography of Mitrayogi also found in the Gsang sngags chos gling Monastery. Whether or not these texts had any relationship prior to their publication as PL-480 texts is unclear, but O rgyan rdo rje identifies both as "obscure texts of the Avalokiteśvara cult from Spiti."³⁹ While the Indian siddha Mitrayogi is indeed said to have received the Six Yogas from Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva does not make an explicit appearance in *A Message from Dharma King Yama*. Unsurprisingly, however, Avalokiteśvara's mantra is prevalent throughout the manuscript as an expression of praise, as a plea when facing the judgment of King Yama, and in Yama's own exposition on the Dharma. Additionally, when he returns from hell, the text's protagonist takes Avalokiteśvara as his tutelary deity and the colophon of the text claims that it was the power of Avalokiteśvara that led the Returner from Yama's palace. As a text, *A Message from Dharma King Yama* shows significant in-line corrections by what appear to be multiple hands, indicating a possible second copy which was used to correct the one now published in the 1975 edition. This 1975 PL-480 edition serves as the primary source used by this paper.

Beyond this publication in *Two Obscure Texts of the Avalokiteśvara Cult from Spiti*, Adrung's Returner narrative was published a second time in the 1977 collection *Three 'Das log Stories: Three Accounts of Visions of After Death by Bla ma Byams pa bde legs, Khams pa A krung, and Gling bza' Chos kyid*. Here the text appears to be a photographic reproduction of a xylograph, as indicated by the decorative woodcut pattern on the first page. Although the text in this collection is identified only by the name of the protagonist—Khams pa Adrung—it is an almost exact reproduction of *A Message from Dharma King Yama*. The preface of the publication identifies the manuscript as originating from the library of the Lha khang sprul sku. This second PL-480 publication demonstrates that at least two copies—one manuscript and one xylograph—of the text circulated among readers in Tibet.

³⁸ Epstein 1982: 82.

³⁹ O rgyan rdo rje 1975: Preface.

Unlike other Returner narratives, which generally provide significant detail on the lives of the main character, the protagonist of *A Message from Dharma King Yama* is a bit of a mystery. Called Adrung—due to his work as a stable boy for a local lama—he was born in the village of Mda' phug, which editor O rgyan rdo rje places in western Tibet in a region called Gsang po che. Within the text, however, Adrung describes his home as located in Dmar 'khams zil. Adrung's given birthplace could potentially be a misspelling of Smar kham rdzong in Chab mdo and would link the Returner narrative to Kham.⁴⁰ This argument is supported by the identification of the Returner as "Khams pa A drung" in the title of the 1977 publication. Indeed, Returner narratives seem to be largely an eastern Tibetan phenomenon, lending credence to this particular theory. Epstein notes that local informants were themselves unable to identify the place of Adrung's birth and stated that it no longer existed.⁴¹

Providing the source for his name, Adrung works as a stable boy and is subsequently referred to throughout the text as Adrung even by King Yama himself. In an unspecified Male-Water-Dragon Year, when he was 16, he dies due to the obstruction of his five channels.⁴² After his death, he encounters all the usual marks found in Returner literature of one who has died—seeing his body as a dog's corpse,⁴³ the rain of blood and pus,⁴⁴ the divine spirit guide,⁴⁵ and so forth—as well some post-mortem phenomena that appear unique to this text, including the earth becoming muddy and impossible for Adrung to move through.⁴⁶

The text, however, gives prominence to King Yama. Almost a hundred pages of the text—more than 80 percent of the total length—is spent in Yama's palace, observing his judgments, his explanation of karmic sins, and visualizing the tortures of hell for those he condemns. Unlike other Returner texts, Adrung does not specifically travel through hell and all of the narrative action is centered directly on Yama's courtroom. Throughout the early portion of Adrung's post-mortem journey, therefore, Yama's power and prestige as a Buddhist deity are particularly highlighted. When Adrung enters the city of King Yama's palace complex, the first thing he sees is piles of wealth and offerings.⁴⁷ Good spiritual friends and guides are sitting on

⁴⁰ O rgyan rdo rje 1975: 153.

⁴¹ Epstein 1982: 82.

⁴² *rtsa lnga'i bkag thog* (O rgyan rdo rje 1975: 153).

⁴³ Ibid: 155.

⁴⁴ Ibid: 164–165.

⁴⁵ Ibid: 165.

⁴⁶ Ibid: 154.

⁴⁷ O rgyan rdo rje 1975: 163. For another depiction of Yama's realm using these particular human features of cities and towns, see the Returner narrative of Byams

thrones and conversing together as a divine Buddhist sangha, while men and women dressed in red, blue, and green robes form yogic postures in the courtyard as if they are dancing. While it was previously noted that this text follows other Returner literature closely, this scene seems to be very unique to this text, and I have not seen it in any other Returner narrative. Based on this entrance, however, the text clearly intends to portray King Yama as someone prominent, respected, and powerful within the Buddhist spiritual hierarchy.

As Adrung draws closer to his audience with King Yama, however, he moves through a land of growing unease and dread. Outside the entrance of Yama's palace, Adrung sees individuals undergoing torture and torment, which seems to escalate the closer he gets to Yama. One of the more interesting visions is where Adrung sees a yogin being repeatedly crushed by a mountain of *rtsam pa*,⁴⁸ as well as a man being ripped in two by bulls breathing flames, all while simultaneously being flattened by a religious book as large as a mountain.⁴⁹ Closer to the palace, Adrung sees the workers of Yama beating individuals with hammers (*thos bas brdung gin 'dug*), threatening them with axes and iron hooks (*lcags skyu dang sta ri thogs pa*), and cutting them with saws (*spu gri gzhor*) and razors (*sog le 'breg*).⁵⁰ Adrung frequently faints from fear at the sight of these and other tortures on his journey to Yama's throne; the text states, "[Adrung] fainted on account of his fear of that [of Yama], then revived and continued to tremble."⁵¹ Along the way, he meets many of Yama's workers, who explain that it is not they, but rather King Yama who decides the punishments.⁵² The realistic, geographical nature of the place is repeatedly emphasized with descriptions of Yama's iron palace and the various, physical paths by which petitioners are leaving.

As he approaches towards Yama's throne, Adrung describes the netherworld king's visage as terrifying to behold, literally calling him "Yama who is fearsome."⁵³ Despite Adrung's exclamations of fear, it is noteworthy that the presentation of Yama in *A Message from Dharma King Yama* does not include many of the more violent and non-human components often seen in iconographic portrayals of Yama:

pa bde leg (Don 'grub rdo rje 1977c) or the English summary in Cuevas 2008: 55–70.

⁴⁸ O rgyan rdo rje 1975: 173.

⁴⁹ Ibid: 173.

⁵⁰ Ibid: 174.

⁵¹ *de lta bu'i 'jigs pas brgyal bas dang/ dran pa rnyed nas 'dar bshin du* (Ibid: 174).

⁵² *rgyal pos skos pa'i bar gyi khrims chung ba yin* (Ibid: 177).

⁵³ *'jigs su rung ba'i gshin rje* (Ibid: 174).

As for the Dharma King Yama, his body was as tall as three men, with a golden color that was inwardly and outwardly luminous. On his head was a great crest and his hands were held in meditative equipoise. His feet were in an indestructible cross-legged posture. His dharma robes were embroidered as if with the leaves of a tree and an umbrella made with a variety of precious stones was above him. In front of him, an inconceivable pile of offerings was arranged, and on either side of that two lion-headed men dressed in white stood.⁵⁴

Here we see Yama portrayed as the full representation of Buddhist power and prestige. While the Yama of *A Message from Dharma King Yama* is not explicitly described in Adrung's first meeting with the bull's head and the necklace of skulls common to other representations of the figure,⁵⁵ the text highlights that Adrung is still frightened by this otherworldly visage and feels terror advancing towards Yama's throne. Adrung's fear at his approach is heightened by the netherworldly accoutrement and retinue that surrounds Yama. Around him are animal-headed workers carrying a veritable armory of polearms and swords, all of whom await Yama's command. Other animal-headed workers have vats of ink and pens the size of spears to write down his proclamations and punishments.⁵⁶ Before Yama there is an imposing scale described as "wide as 50 trees, with a weighing stone the size of a comet and balance pan as large as a field," where one's sins and virtues are weighed.⁵⁷ Upon seeing Yama, Adrung immediately faints from fright again, only to shake uncontrollably when he regains consciousness and awaits his judgment before the Lord of the Underworld.

Having beheld this terrifying visage of King Yama, Adrung remains to the sidelines to watch a stream of karmic judgments. Each case follows a roughly similar structure: first, the plaintiff comes forward—often trembling with fear and with a shaky voice—and makes three prostrations to King Yama. The actual judgement then follows, which proceeds along with a four-fold pattern:

1. The deceased gives a small statement of their failings and the good they tried to do.

⁵⁴ O rgyan rdo rje 1975: 179–180.

⁵⁵ This bovine head is most notably found in the representations of Yama from the Vajrabhairava tantra and associated artistic traditions. However, Siklós (1996) notes how the relationship between Yama and bulls has a long history spanning back into Vedic and related Iranian literature.

⁵⁶ *la las snag bum khal brgya tsam shong ba bkang nas/ snag por re re'i rtsar mi lus sprul gyi mgo can snyug gu mdung tshad re khyer nas las dge sdig gi yi ge 'bri yin 'dug* (O rgyan rdo rje 1975: 181).

⁵⁷ *rgya ma ni shing 'dom lnga bcu tsam la srang rdo phod tsam pa/ srang mthil zhing zho gcig gi rgya tsam* (Ibid: 181).

2. This is followed by a much longer analysis of the person's individual moral turpitude by the white and black spirit figures who analyzed the individual's actions throughout their life.
3. King Yama gazes into his mirror of deeds to confirm the tenor of the person's life himself.
4. Finally, King Yama passes his judgement on the deceased, generally accompanied by a lengthy discussion of Buddhist ethics and morality.

The narrative tension is high in these scenes, alternating between the good the plaintiff accomplished and detailed descriptions of the evils committed by the plaintiff. During these episodes, Yama either weighs on his scale the individual's good and bad deeds as represented by white and black stones or views their actions in his karmic mirror. While determining the plaintiff's fate, Yama's workers begin to circle around him or her, at the ready to rush in and grab the plaintiff if it goes poorly. Yama uses this opportunity to pontificate further on the karmic merits or demerits of the plaintiff, then finally gives his verdict by telling the individual what path they must go on for their future rebirth—the white, the black, or the variegated.

Adrung witnesses at least seven judgment cases in Yama's court, and, of those, a fair number go well for the plaintiff. It is the cases which go poorly, however, that take up the majority of narrative space and focus the reader's attention on Yama in his most terrifying role. If the plaintiff is condemned to hell, then the tortures they will soon experience are witnessed by everyone in the court, while Yama explains in detail the karmic sins committed by those individuals. During these scenes, the rampant fear affects everyone around the plaintiff. At one point, someone vomits, a surprisingly human acknowledgement of the horror being portrayed in the narrative. The ethical instruction Yama gives during these hell visions is fairly standard for non-tantric Buddhist texts—the importance of generosity, the importance of financially supporting the Buddhist sangha, the importance of human life, and so forth.

Eventually, Adrung himself goes forward, where he promptly faints from fear once more. After regaining consciousness, black and white spirits emerge from his body and argue about his post-mortem fate. It is here we learn that Adrung has not been a good servant to his lama, nor has he sufficiently engaged in merit-making activities like offering butter, reciting mantras, and contributing alms.⁵⁸ In the

⁵⁸ *'dis yar bla ma dkon mchog la mchod pa dang/ zhabs tog ma byas/ bar du phyag dang bskor ba sgom bzlas ma byas/ mar sdug phongs la sbyin pa ma btang/* (O rgyan rdo rje 1975: 233–234).

process of these proceedings, Adrung faints several times from fear, until his white spirit argues that Adrung's life was in fact not supposed to have run out quite yet and that he has more time allotted to him in the human realm.⁵⁹

After deliberating, Yama decides to send Adrung back to the human realm, but not before giving a lengthy speech advocating for Buddhist moral and ethical conduct. This speech builds on the moments of karmic judgement spread previously throughout the narrative, in which Yama provides the voice of normative, non-tantric Buddhist ethical wisdom. Such wisdom includes admonishing people for not sufficiently supporting monks and lamas, not engaging in meditative and mantra practice, and living hedonistic lifestyles in unsavory professions. Here we see Yama also offering unique ethical advice to a variety of specific individuals—including those in power, tantric practitioners, and beggars—while also reminding everyone to remember the excellent Buddhist doctrine, to have compassion for all living beings, and to make significant offerings to buddha statues.⁶⁰ Adrung is then charged with telling everyone about the realities of Yama's court, the judgment that awaits them, and the precious opportunity of human rebirth. Upon waking, the authenticity of his hell journey is confirmed by a lama, and Adrung immediately rededicates himself to his Buddhist practice and communicating the realities of Yama's courtroom.

5. King Yama as a Monster and Moral Guide

Following closely the model found in other Returner literature, *A Message from Dharma King Yama* reveals the netherworld judge as a terrifying figure. With his larger-than-life visage, his army of sword-wielding half-animal workers, and his immense power to determine someone's next rebirth, plaintiffs come before him trembling with fear and fainting; in short, the text reveals what we can classify as a monster due to the terror he engenders. As noted earlier, monsters are a term defined not by their essence, but by their designation relative to other things. Monsters, therefore, are creatures largely found at the boundaries outside of what one identifies as "normative" society, creatures that push their way into one's habitual, everyday perception of society and force a reevaluation. As a result of this chaotic thrust into an ordered world and their uncertain status as both a part of and apart from society, monsters inspire terror and fear.

⁵⁹ *a drung bya ba 'dis mi yul brang ma khang nas tshe ma zad* (O rgyan rdo rje 1975: 234).

⁶⁰ *Ibid*: 234–245.

Because of their liminal formation at social and cultural boundaries, however, monsters reveal the unspoken or suppressed power structures that underlie social systems and, for this reason, represent anxieties we cannot express within the bounds of normal society. Through “monstrosizing” these anxieties, therefore, social communities reaffirm their own validity and sense of identity. As seen with Yama, however, boundaries are not only physical and social but temporal as well. His placement at the boundary of life and death undermines and challenges how karmically-negligent individuals imagine society to work. In the *bar do*, Yama erupts into one’s vision as a terrifying reminder that your actions in this life have very real effects and consequences on your next rebirth.

Despite Yama’s role as a monster, however, he is also a representative of the Buddhist institution. He instills terror, but does so not as an alien beast, but rather as, perhaps, the most complete representative of institutional karmic norms.⁶¹ Through his judgments, Yama dispenses ethical instruction that is not radically different than that found in other Buddhist narratives.

While these stories of the afterlife surely add entertainment value to Yama’s otherwise normative ethical instruction, I maintain that Yama’s monstrosity fundamentally contributes to his moral aims. He is not simply a terrifying underworld being “scaring straight” Buddhist readers and listeners. In his book *Religion and its Monsters*, Timothy Beale identifies “deified monsters” who are

an envoy of the divine or the sacred as radically other than “our” established order of things. It is an invasion of what we might call *sacred chaos* and disorientation within self, society, and world. [...] it puts us in a world of religious disorientation and horror.⁶²

While the specific terminology utilized by Beale belies his academic home in Old Testament and early Christian scholarship, reading Yama as a deified monster suggests a connection between his monstrosity and his moral instruction. It also demonstrates what makes these Tibetan narratives unique and *not* simply equivalent to similar hell journeys in Christian mythos, where individuals are threatened by the Devil. Through representing the reality of the Buddhist cosmology, the authority of the Buddhist institution, and the consequences of karma with a monstrous figure like Yama, it destroys Returners’ comfortable and complacent perception of how the human world works—of who has power, what has value, and what sort of life one should live. This

⁶¹ This role as representative of karmic norms is seen in a variety of netherworld literature outside of Returner narratives. See further Mikles 2016.

⁶² Beal 2002: 6.

terrifying destruction of complacency allows them to be rebuilt in line with the karmic vision of the Buddhist institution. Yama's monstrosity, therefore, destabilizes both the Returner and the reader, creating room for a different framework to guide one's life—a framework that puts Buddhist considerations of the reality of karma at the front and center.

This interpretation reveals the fundamental distinction between Yama and the figure of the Devil in Christian mythos. In the Christian worldview, the Devil is seen as a fundamental "other" to God—an adversary that must be challenged and who terrifies you into morality for fear of meeting him. Yama, instead, acts as the embodiment of the Buddhist institution and Buddhist ethical conduct and in this role is a source of transformative terror. To merely dismiss him as a means to "scare you straight" is to overlook how the narrative structure of Returner literature like that of *A Message from Dharma King Yama* works. Confronting the monstrous changes someone. In his work on rituals, Victor Turner writes about monstrous masks used by the Ndembu tribe of the Congo in an adolescent rite of passage that turned boys into men. Confronting these monstrous figures, he argues, facilitated the rite of passage not so much through fear but by forcing a re-assessment of the symbolic order.⁶³ When Yama gives extended moral instruction in the form of a monster, he is similarly forcing the Returner to transform their understandings of their human life and, through that, their worldview. The Returner, and through them the reader, then leaves as a fundamentally changed agent with a greater dedication to and sensitivity for the Buddhist ethical world.

However, Yama's monstrosity works in more ways as well. While previously stated that everyone approaches King Yama trembling with fear, it could perhaps be noted with greater accuracy that *almost* everyone does. *A Message from Dharma King Yama* spends most of its narrative energy on those whose lives do not warrant a good rebirth and are condemned to hell. Sandwiched within those cases of judgment are plaintiffs who are almost an afterthought, who approach Yama's throne without fear and who are quickly offered the white path to divine rebirths and realization. For them, Yama is not a monster and inspires no terror. Yama is monstrous only for those who themselves are monstrous—from a Buddhist perspective—those who exist outside the boundaries of the Buddhist world. Those who possess a true understanding of the centrality of karma and how a Buddhist world should function do not see a monster when they look at Yama. Rather, it is only those whose karmic failings have put their future rebirths in jeopardy that undergo the traumatic destabilization of the

⁶³ Turner 1967: 106.

deified monster. They do not realize that they themselves have been outside the boundaries of an appropriate Buddhist society and karmically-sensitive worldview this whole time, and it takes confrontation with a monster to realize that they themselves were, we might say, karmic monsters. Perhaps in the end, therefore, it is only a monster that can reveal one's own monstrosity.

6. *Conclusions*

This paper uses the analytical category of the "monster" to evaluate the Tibetan Buddhist figure of King Yama and demonstrate how he, and the Tibetan narratives that feature him, are unique from other netherworld figures with which he is often compared. Through examining Yama as a figure that incites terror and fear while also representing the full power and weight of the Buddhist institution—what Timothy Beal calls a "deified monster"—we as scholars of Tibetan culture can understand how the internal structure of Returner narratives works to instill in the reader greater ethical sensitivity. This literature does not operate by merely presenting the punishments of hell as an ultimatum for the reader to consider in a "cost-benefit" analysis of ethical behavior. Rather, drawing the reader into a vicarious encounter with the terror of Yama appeals to a deeper stratum of thought in which one's entire life is re-evaluated. In this way, fear and the monstrous have a real and important role in creating new Buddhist agents.

But in the context of these Buddhist Returner narratives, the fear one experiences in front of Yama becomes a mark not of his monstrosity, but rather of the plaintiff's own. This transformation demonstrates the rhetorically-powerful nature of the category "monster." As discussed previously, "monsters" cannot be given a traditional definition because they are by essence relative, defined solely by the boundaries of social normalcy and the fears that arise when such boundaries are crossed. In the Returners' confrontations with Yama, therefore, the boundaries of the Buddhist ethical world are drawn and subsequently enforced through the emotion of fear—and it is those who are fearful before Yama that remain outside the boundary of appropriate Buddhist conduct.

Besides the construction of such boundaries, Yama also serves as a corrective to the interpretative move to psychologize away the fear and terror that are components of some Asian religious figures. Analyzing King Yama as a monster helps to interpret, rather than ignore, emotional reactions of anxiety that are entirely emic to the tradition. In fact, his ability to inspire terror is a foundational

component of his Buddhist instruction. It is not something that must be explained away or contextualized, but rather something that enhances and enriches the figure of King Yama. Contextualizing Yama as a monster allows us ultimately to move beyond the either/or paradigm that underlies much contemporary scholarship on Asian religions and replace it instead with a both/and paradigm, a “tradition of the more,” to use Robert Orsi’s term.⁶⁴ Yama is both a monster that terrifies the reader *and* a psychological representation to destroy afflictive emotions, is both a wild nightmare *and* a Buddhist figurehead. Becoming comfortable with the duality of the monster, the ontological ambivalence that is inherent to their very nature, will only enrich our academic and analytical frameworks.

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⁶⁴ Orsi 2011: 99–105.

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***The Tibet Mirror* and History Spinning in the 1950s and 1960s¹**

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 Although *The Tibet Mirror*² was started as a small media project on the Indo-Chinese borderland, the newspaper aimed to make a big impact on its Tibetan-speaking readership, not only in India and China, but anywhere it could find readers.

Those in power or reaching out for power want to control the narrative past as a powerful resource. History is fostered by the state and conveniently communicated to the public by reliable agents or, on the contrary, is compromised by the independent ones. One can hardly find unbiased media today, and it must have been even more so during the time of the ongoing ideological battle between capitalism and communism in the mid-20th century. This was exactly the time when the chief mastermind of *The Tibet Mirror*, Dorje Tharchin Babu³ (1890–1976), a man of many talents and quite a few secrets, attempted to use his newspaper to shape the opinion of Tibetans and to construct a strong nationalist version of the Tibetan past, present, and future. Tharchin's agenda usually took the form of discourse-charged statements, which propagated stories of a historically independent Tibet and a unified Tibetan nation. Since at that time there were but few alternative sources of information in the Tibetan language regarding the establishment of communist rule in Tibet, *The Tibet Mirror* surely had its certain share in the process of constructing a modern Tibetan nationalism.

¹ I am very grateful to Franz Xaver Erhard and Daniel Wojahn for their kind support, insightful editing suggestions and scrupulous formatting that helped this article become a much better version of itself.

² *The Tibet Mirror* (1925–1963) is also known as *Yul phyogs so so'i gсар 'gyur me long*, or just *Melong*. All publications from *The Tibet Mirror* cited in the present article can be accessed through the Columbia University Libraries Digital Collections at http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_6981643_000/. Accessed May 20, 2020.

³ Rdo rje mthar phyin Sba bu. In the English layout of *The Tibet Mirror*, Tharchin referred to himself as “G. Tharchin,” where “G.” stood for *dge rgan* (the Tibetan term for a “teacher”).

This article provides a selection of publications in *The Tibet Mirror* from the 1950s–1960s and presents a preliminary analysis of the newspaper from the perspective of its input in the formation of a nationalist historical narrative popular among the Tibetan exile community.

1. History of Tibet and the Political Discourse

The historian Marc Ferro believes “to control the past is to master the present, to legitimize dominion and justify legal claims.”⁴ In many countries, histories “superimpose” themselves upon each other, which results in conflicting versions of historical narratives.⁵ The history of Tibet is no exception.

Competing readings of Tibetan history are inextricably entangled with politics and the notion of the 1959 Sino-Tibetan conflict. The interpretation of the historical facts pertaining to the nature of Sino-Tibetan relations prior to the official incorporation of Tibet into the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1951, as well as the history of the so-called peaceful liberation of Tibet and the flight of the Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetans into exile, differs depending on whether an author decides to support the Tibetan pro-nationalist claims for independence or the Chinese claims for the territorial and national integrity of the PRC. The Tibet issue, i.e., the sensitive question of whether Tibet was a part of China before 1951 and to whom the “legitimate ownership of the Tibetan Plateau” belongs,⁶ has become an invariable part of discussions on the history of Tibet, especially after the Tibetan uprising in March 1959.

Modern histories are not written exclusively by historians. Journalists are not less involved in interpreting historical events and in constructing historical narratives.⁷ While *The Tibet Mirror* was published, the polarized discourse-charged views on the Tibet issue had not yet been shaped clearly. Therefore, it is interesting to explore how the political status of Tibet and the history of Tibet in general were constructed in *The Tibet Mirror*, which was issued from 1925 to 1963 and hence was a contemporaneous chronicle of many of the events contested until this day.

This article focuses on the historical picture laid out in *The Tibet Mirror* during the period from January 1950—the year which the

⁴ Ferro 2003: X.

⁵ Ferro 2003: X.

⁶ Powers 2004: 4.

⁷ Vanina 2014: 10–11.

editor of the newspaper designated as the starting point for his anti-communist campaign for Tibet⁸—until November 1963, when its last issue was published.

2. Background Information on The Tibet Mirror

Founded in the mid-1920s, *The Tibet Mirror* was not the very first newspaper in the Tibetan language. Yet among a few early periodicals in Tibetan, it stands out perhaps as the first—and in the 1950s, also the longest-running—edition launched by an editor of Tibetan origin.⁹ Despite the fact that the newspaper was published in India, *The Tibet Mirror* enjoyed the privilege of pioneering the media discourse on the Tibet issue in Tibetan and, in this way, exerted its influence on later generations of Tibetan media in exile. The vehement anti-communist and strong pro-Tibetan editorial policy followed in *The Tibet Mirror* conditioned the fact that the newspaper is remembered among the Tibetan exile community but is apparently “banned from collective memory” among Tibetans in the PRC.¹⁰

Before discussing the historical narrative constructed in *The Tibet Mirror*, it is necessary to provide some background information on the newspaper’s editor.

In 1925, Dorje Tharchin Babu spearheaded his newspaper project in Kalimpong, a busy city in the northwest of India situated close to the Indo-Tibetan border. At the time, Tharchin worked at the Scottish Mission, and in the first years, *The Tibet Mirror* was printed under the auspices of the Church of Scotland. However, in the 1950s–1960s, *The Tibet Mirror* was reported to function as an independent media enterprise of Tharchin, the chief architect of the newspaper’s editorial policy.¹¹ During these years, *The Tibet Mirror* made a decisive turn towards conducting persistent anti-communist propaganda and galvanizing the image of a unified Tibetan nation-state.

Tharchin’s biography and his contemporaries’ recollections of him reveal some peculiarities in his personality and career

⁸ In a letter to the Political Officer of Sikkim dated December 16, 1963 Tharchin wrote: “My paper is an Anty-Communists [sic] one since from the beginning of the year 1950” (Tharchin Collection; series 2, subseries 3, box 3, folder 5).

⁹ For more information about the history of early Tibetan newspapers, see Erhard 2015 and Erhard & Hou 2018.

¹⁰ Sawerthal 2018: 316. For more information, see Sawerthal 2018: 308–319.

¹¹ Since July 1946, Tharchin published *The Tibet Mirror* on his own. For more details, see Sawerthal 2011: 77–82.

endeavors. Firstly, while Tharchin constructed his imagined Tibetan community and invigorated the spirit of the people of Tibet, he presented himself in *The Tibet Mirror* as a Tibetan devoted to Tibet. Although, in fact, Tharchin was a Christian convert and a native citizen of India, his self-perception seemed to be often shifting. Sometimes he claimed to be a loyal British and later Indian citizen¹² and at other times, he was a Tibetan loyal to Tibet.¹³ Similarly, he appeared in turns either a “profoundly sophisticated Christian” proselytizing in the name of God¹⁴ or a brother of Buddhist Tibetans propagating the importance of Buddhist religion in Tibet.¹⁵

Secondly, beginning from the mid-1920s, Tharchin lent himself to British and later Indian intelligence and secretly reported on Tibetans stopping by his house.¹⁶ According to H. L. Fader, Tharchin’s biographer, Tharchin never ceased his intelligence services.¹⁷ Moreover, his undercover work was done “so subtly and carefully” that over the years none of Tharchin’s regular associates at the Tibet Mirror Press nor any of his friends, relatives, and family members were “ever aware that such an ongoing intelligence-gathering and -disseminating activity had ever taken place.”¹⁸

Thirdly, although Tharchin advocated for the independence of Tibet and expressed anti-communist remarks in most of his publications in the 1950s–1960s, some materials in *The Tibet Mirror* corroborate his simultaneous pro-Kuomintang sentiments. Since the Kuomintang government, no less than the Chinese communist government, saw Tibet as an integral part of China, Tharchin’s support of the Kuomintang looks ambiguous. Neither is it clear why the editor of *The Tibet Mirror* called the Kuomintang government the

¹² E.g., “I am a loyal British subject” in Tharchin’s letter to Sir Charles Bell dated 1937 (Fader 2009: 332). Tharchin’s Indian identity is documented, for example, in his letter dated November 1962, written at the time of the Sino-Indian Border Conflict: “Due to this cause all we Indian citizens ... are all united into one; and we will fight and turn the aggressors [out] in the near future” (Fader 2009: 430).

¹³ E.g., “This was humbly written by the publisher of a newspaper who is immensely loyal to Tibet” (*Melong* vol. XVIII, no. 10, Sep. 1, 1950: 5). Or: “We, [...], followers of Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan language speakers, the people [... of] the thirteen *khri skor* of Tibet [...].” (*Melong* vol. XX, no. 7, Oct. 1, 1952: 8. Translated by McGranahan 2001: 248).

¹⁴ Norbu 2002: XI. Fader comments: “Tharchin made the Christian conversion of Tibet and its people a specific daily matter of prayer for many, many years” (Fader 2009: 333).

¹⁵ E.g., see Tharchin’s letter to the Political Officer of Sikkim dated June 19, 1950 (Tharchin Collection; series 2, subseries 3, box 3, folder 5).

¹⁶ Fader 2009: 330 and Sawerthal 2011: 74.

¹⁷ Fader 2009: 415.

¹⁸ Fader 2009: 347.

“true Chinese government”¹⁹ and why he favored this party in his publications, if the Kuomintang’s aspirations for Tibetan territory were no different from those of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Nor it is fathomable now how Tharchin imagined Tibet’s being independent if the Kuomintang officials were to come to power in China.²⁰ Answers to these questions could only be speculative, but it is evident that Tharchin omitted any mention of the similarity of the Kuomintang’s official policy on Tibet to that of the CCP in *The Tibet Mirror*. Instead, he created an image of the Kuomintang government as the ally of Tibetan pro-independence fighters.

Even though there is no official proof of the financial support of the newspaper by the Kuomintang or the U.S. government, Anna Sawerthal argues that in the 1950s, *The Tibet Mirror* was most likely involved in the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency’s program of assistance to the Tibetan resistance movement.²¹

There is also compelling evidence that before publishing some articles concerning Tibet, the editor of *The Tibet Mirror* sought approval from Indian government authorities. Tharchin’s archive contains his letters to the Political Officer of Sikkim, inquiring if the latter had any objections regarding a specific publication on Tibet²² or asking for “instructions and guidance on the right news for the benefit and protection of Tibet”²³ to be published in *The Tibet Mirror*. The communication ran both ways, and in reply, Tharchin was sent the requested instructions.²⁴ Given Tharchin’s service for the Indian intelligence, this correspondence at the very least suggests that the editor cared about the opinion of his Indian employers concerning the anti-communist/pro-Tibetan narrative he constructed in *The Tibet Mirror*. The broader speculation would be that Tharchin’s consultation with government authorities compromised the deemed independence of his editorial policy.

From these short biographical notes, it is obvious that Tharchin was an intelligence officer and an activist for the Tibetan cause at

¹⁹ *rgya nag gi gzhang ngo ma*. See, for example, *Melong* vol. XXVI, no. 1, Jun. 1959: suppl. 2.

²⁰ For instance, Tharchin wrote in June 1959 that, according to the Kuomintang newspapers, when the Kuomintang returns back to mainland China, it will grant independence to Tibet and the Tibetan government will return to Tibet (*Melong* vol. XXVI, no. 1, Jun. 1959: suppl. 2).

²¹ Sawerthal 2018: 122–123.

²² See Tharchin’s letter to the Political Officer of Sikkim dated June 19, 1950 (Tharchin Collection; series 2, subseries 3, box 3, folder 5).

²³ See Tharchin’s letter to Harish Dayal, the Indian Political Officer for Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, dated December 5, 1949 (Fader 2009: 417).

²⁴ See Harish Dayal’s letter to Tharchin dated December 7, 1949 (Fader 2009: 418).

the same time. His network was refined over the years and included personal informants and channels for distributing his newspaper in Tibet. Despite his Tibetan origin, Tharchin's education and socialization in the British Raj are clear indicators for the anti-communist bias that is shown in *The Tibet Mirror*, the discussion of which follows in the third part of this article.

3. The Tibet Mirror *and Its History of Tibet*

3.1. *Framing the Discourse*²⁵

Regarding the Seventeen Point Agreement signed between Tibet and the PRC in 1951, Dorje Tharchin Babu once commented that it "reminded him of an old Tibetan proverb to the effect that it was all wool with a hard stone in the center."²⁶ The editor of *The Tibet Mirror* frequently voiced this type of skepticism in regard to the assumed aspirations of the Chinese communist government. Beginning from the 1950s, Tharchin openly protested against the establishment of the communist rule in Tibet, propagating an image of Chinese communists as "bandits"²⁷ and "enemies of the Buddhist teaching."²⁸

It is, therefore, not surprising that publications in *The Tibet Mirror* during this period tend to be rather biased and persuasive. In a number of articles on China and Tibet in the 1950s and 1960s, one quickly notices the so-called *conflict* frame of Tharchin's discourse in the form of a clear opposition of the Other (i.e., communist China) versus the Self (i.e., Tibet) even in those publications which do not

²⁵ Discourse is a very broad term, which explains its relative vagueness and the differing definitions accepted within separate branches of science. Considering the so-called linguistic turn of the 20th century, in the broadest sense, everything is discourse (Derrida 1978: 280). In the present article, by discourse I refer to the employment of a specific narrative style, which involves a diverse combination of linguistic means, extralinguistic aspects of communication, and rhetorical techniques aimed to accentuate the pragmatic function of the language and the persuasive function of the text. By discourse I indicate the distinctive, expressive way of rendering information deliberately chosen by an author. Furthermore, I argue that this particular media discourse initiated by Tharchin was public and related to power. Therefore, it was used as an authoritative source for disseminating a wide array of pro-nationalist ideas. For more information on discourse analysis and the specifics of media discourse, see, for example, van Dijk 2001 and Hart & Lukeš 2010.

²⁶ Engelhardt 2012: 201.

²⁷ *jag pa*. See, for example, *Melong* vol. XXVII, no. 1, Aug.–Sept., 1960: 2.

²⁸ *bstan dgra*. See, for example, *Melong* vol. XVIII, no. 12, Nov. 1, 1950: 3 or *Melong* vol. XXV, no. 9–10, Feb.–Mar., 1959: 3.

touch upon the topic of any real confrontation. This kind of polarization sets the stage for the linguistic, stylistic, and semantic structure of the text. The opposition *us* versus *them* affects the perception of facts by emphasizing the antagonistic relationship between the two groups and by turning the narrative into the simplified judgmental black-and-white categories of *right* and *wrong*.

The sphere of the Other is usually associated with fear, violence, and cruelty, while the sphere of the Self is a familiar, safe place for everyone included within this category.²⁹ It is often the case that the Self is constructed by distancing from or playing off against the Other. The Self versus the Other opposition resembles a classic fairy tale: there is a hero, a villain, a crime, and a victim.³⁰

The domain of the Self in *The Tibet Mirror* was rendered through the concept of the Tibetan nation, whose representatives resided both inside Tibet and beyond its borders. Moreover, it also included all of Tibet's supporters and allies, for example, some of the British officials or later the Indian government. As for the Other or Tibet's *enemies*, Tharchin primarily focused on Chinese communists and communists in general, such as the Russian communist government.

3.2. Reconsidering the Past

In line with pro-Tibetan historians, the editor of *The Tibet Mirror* stood his ground that Tibet was independent before 1951 when the Seventeen Point Agreement was signed. Tharchin constructed his narrative in support of this position accordingly and dove into the interpretation of Tibetan past and Sino-Tibetan relations as far back as the 7th century.

Among the numerous examples of Tharchin's commentaries on Tibetan history, the following excerpt elaborating on the "[Role of] Patron in the Priest-Patron [Relationship]"³¹ provides ample evidence for his original reading of Sino-Tibetan relations. Tharchin writes:

For the sake of [his] followers, a lama by means of religion makes offerings to the Three Jewels and benefits this life and the next. For that, a devout patron—via the idea of the Three Jewels or the real Buddha—acts with faith and hope according to the lama's orders

²⁹ Chernyavskaya & Molodichenko 2014: 33–37.

³⁰ Lakoff 2004: 71.

³¹ *mchod yon sbyin bdag*.

and holds [him] as [his] head. As Panchen Nāropa said: "In a time before there were lamas, there was not even the term 'Buddha.' Even the Buddhas of a thousand eons sought [refuge] in lamas." Thus, is the lama more precious, or is the patron more precious?

In the past, when the Mongolian emperors resided in China, a deity of the Land of Snow—the great all-knowing victorious bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara—was the religious guru of the emperor and the emperor was the devout patron. Accordingly, communities of monks of the main monasteries, the emperor of China, Chinese and Mongolian people [were engaged in] the priest-patron [relationship]. Therefore, the Chinese and Mongolian people were the spiritual subjects of Tibet, and hence China reverently made offerings [to Tibet].

In order to [make it so] that the Dalai Lama was a genuine religious guru of the emperor, [who] received the religious prayer services, representatives of the emperor shook the golden urn. Except for that [measure], the selection of the new lama by the emperor was not coercive. At that time, the amban with security guards was placed by the emperor in Lhasa. That also was only for the protection of the service of the emperor's religious guru, and not because [Tibet] was under the power of China.

In the past, *dharmarājas*³² and the *dharmarāja* Srong btsan sgam po waged war against China many times and controlled many Chinese territories. For the sake of friendly relations between China and Tibet in the future, [the emperor] even sent a Chinese wife to Tibet. Furthermore, in addition to friendly relations between China and Tibet, oaths on the mutual nonaggression were written in letters on stone pillars and set up. Up to now, there is [still] an inscription on the great stone pillar in Lhasa. Therefore, it seems like Tibet [was no] other than an independent country [and] never came under the power of China.

However, gradually [China] forcefully ate [i.e., incorporated] many Tibetan territories in Amdo and Kham. After [the Chinese people] brought down [their] own emperor as a result of the rebellion, [they] also sent troops to Tibet and attacked. Because of that, the all-knowing 13th Dalai Lama, who underwent hardships and ignored difficulties, had to go to India.

Nevertheless, gradually—by the power of karmic retribution—the Chinese soldiers were cut off,³³ and, as all know, up to now, the religious and secular government of Tibet has not degenerated but progressed, [while] the Chinese emperor [became] numb. Because

³² *Dharmarāja* (Tib. *chos rgyal*), or the "virtuous king," is a title given to the kings who were protectors of Buddhism (Goldstein 2004: 377). The term can be also translated as a "religious king" or a "Dharma king."

³³ *rgya dmag rnams ltag chu ltar chad*. The usage of the idiom *ltag chu chad* "to cut something off" (Goldstein 2004: 465) in this case is not clear, but I believe that Tharchin meant that the advancement of the Chinese army on Tibet was stopped.

[the Chinese army] attacked Tibet, the past oaths were violated, and not only until now, there has been no peace, but even in the future, it will be difficult for a peaceful lot to come. If the Tibetan Religious State is left [alone] in [its] full righteous freedom, [if] the new oaths of reverence are sworn and the past oath-breaking is repented, it is possible that the peaceful lot will come to China.

Therefore, You—the new and the old Chinese governments and all people—think well! If, in the same way, all Tibetan Buddhists residing in Chinese territories strive hard to [carry on] a loyal service beneficial for the improvement of their Religious State, [they] will surely accomplish [their] goal in this life and the next.³⁴

Tharchin addresses the topic of Sino-Tibetan relations from the point of view of the *mchod yon* (priest-patron) tradition and appeals to Tibetan Buddhists in congruent terms of proper religious conduct and moral principles. He presents a simplified version of the history of Sino-Tibetan relations highlighting those historical events that support his claim of Tibetan independence and the wrongdoing on behalf of the Chinese state. The timeline is not linear, and the interpretation of the facts is a little twisted.

According to the article, as early as in the 13th century, the Chinese and Mongolian people became part of the Tibetan religious community. While nothing is mentioned regarding Tibet's tribute to China, Tharchin focuses on China making offerings to Tibet. He tries to present Tibet as a religious hegemon and the stationing of the ambans (i.e., the Chinese imperial governors-general) and a Manchu army in Lhasa as an act demonstrating the pious service of the Chinese emperor.

In reality, the Qing emperor established the Amban institute after the 1727–1728 civil war in Tibet, in order to strengthen his control of the political situation on the Tibetan Plateau.³⁵ Although at first, the duties of the ambans mainly consisted of holding command of the small Chinese garrison in Lhasa and keeping the Qing emperor informed on Tibetan affairs, by the end of the 18th century, their power was greatly increased.³⁶ In 1751, the ambans got a broad right of supervision of Tibetan officials, which in 1792, was reformed into the right of direct participation in the Tibetan government.³⁷ Since ambans officially supervised Tibet until the fall of the Qing empire, this period of Tibetan history is usually termed as the time of Chinese protectorate. However, Tharchin insists that

³⁴ *Melong* vol. XVIII, no. 10, Sept. 1, 1950: 3. This and the following translations from Tibetan in the present article are mine, therefore, any mistake is mine too.

³⁵ Schwieger 2015: 439 and van Schaik 2011: 142–143.

³⁶ Petech 1972: 256.

³⁷ Petech 1972: 256, 260.

the ambans' service in Lhasa did not imply that Tibet was under the power of China.

Then, going back a few centuries, Tharchin reminds his readers of the Tibetan king Srong btsan sgam po, the Dharma king, who ruled Tibet in the 7th century, and that Tibet warred with China and seized "many" Chinese territories. Tharchin further reinforces his pro-Tibetan narrative with some additional facts: "for the sake of friendly relations,"³⁸ a Chinese bride was sent to Tibet, and the oaths declaring mutual nonaggression were engraved on the pillars. This cursory journey into the distant past of Tibet ends with a definitive conclusion that "Tibet [was no] other than an independent country [and] never came under the power of China."³⁹

Turning to the historical background of the described events, historians generally agree that in the 7th–9th centuries the Tibetan state constituted a strong political entity that successfully played against its neighbors in Central Asia and, indeed, every so often dominated in conflicts with neighboring China, especially during the reign of Srong btsan sgam po. It is also a fact that as a diplomatic measure procuring the peacekeeping on the Sino-Tibetan border, Chinese princesses were dispatched to Tibet: the princess Wencheng in 640–641 and the princess Jincheng in 710.⁴⁰ As for the oaths, they were sworn by Tibet and China in 822, and the bilingual treaty of "Uncle and Nephew" was engraved on three pillars: one in Lhasa, one in the Chinese capital Chang'an and one on the Sino-Tibetan border in Qingshui.⁴¹

Nevertheless, although Tibet was not subordinate to China during the imperial period,⁴² while presenting the facts aimed to support the claim of Tibetan independence, Tharchin omits a long period of political disintegration of the Tibetan Empire that followed in the 9th–13th centuries when Tibet's "imperial glories were a thing of the past."⁴³ He also mentions neither those parts of Tibetan history when Mongols played their role in Tibet's administration during the rule of the Yuan dynasty and later again—in the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries,⁴⁴ nor the episode when the Chinese Emperor Kangxi's (1654–1722) army "arrived victorious in Tibet"⁴⁵ in October 1720 and Tibet was

³⁸ *rgya bod gnyis kyi dbar mthun lam gyi ched du.*

³⁹ *bod rang btsan gyi rgyal khab las rgya'i mnga' 'og tu nam yang tshud tshod mi 'dug.*

⁴⁰ Powers 2004: 31; Kapstein 2006: 55, 63; Grunfeld 1996: 35.

⁴¹ van Schaik 2011: 42; Kapstein 2006: 78; Grunfeld 1996: 37.

⁴² Goldstein 1997: 1.

⁴³ Kapstein 2006: 84.

⁴⁴ Kapstein 2006: 123.

⁴⁵ van Schaik 2011: 140.

subsequently “transformed from the battleground of competing Mongol factions” into a protectorate of the Qing dynasty in the first half of the 18th century.⁴⁶

Following Tharchin’s narrative, a reader jumps from the 9th century straight to the beginning of the 20th century. Tharchin downplays the actual role of Chinese power in Tibetan politics and creates the narrative of a strong Tibetan Empire that was betrayed by its “Uncle” China. He portrays China as an aggressor that forced the abdication of the last Chinese emperor, attacked Tibet, and violated the oaths sworn during the imperial period. In this paragraph of the article, Tharchin refers to the 1910 military march to Lhasa of Zhao Erfeng, the Qing special commissioner, who was sent to secure the Chinese control in Tibet.⁴⁷ In the sight of the advancing Chinese army, the 13th Dalai Lama decided to flee to India. Factually, Tharchin distorts the timeline as these events preceded the 1911 Xinhai revolution in China and the abdication of the Qing emperor, respectively.

Tharchin’s stories of the past and present of Tibet and China often went side by side with a description of the future and usually ended with a gloomy forecast or a warning to readers in the form of a discourse strategy called “modeling the alternative future.”⁴⁸ In the article, Tharchin acts as a prophet and predicts that not only now there could not be any peace in China, but “even in the future it will be difficult for a peaceful lot to come” to the PRC.⁴⁹ However, Tharchin defines a condition upon which the alternative result could be achieved: if the new and the old Chinese governments, having repented their improper behavior, leave “the Tibetan Religious State” in freedom, “it is possible that the peaceful lot will come to China.”⁵⁰

The article is interwoven with Buddhist terms aimed specifically at Tibetan Buddhist readers: “the Three Jewels,” “Panchen Nāropa,” “Buddhas of a thousand eons,” “the great all-knowing victorious bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara,” “by the power of karmic retribution,” “*dharmarāja*,” etc. This type of narrative evokes religious imagery and makes it hard to believe that the Chinese state would not eventually deserve the “karmic retribution.” A reader is

⁴⁶ Kapstein 2006: 146.

⁴⁷ Goldstein 1997: 27.

⁴⁸ Modeling the alternative future is a political discourse strategy that addresses a discourse recipient with an alternative version of the future depending on the certain steps taken or not, see Chernyavskaya & Molodichenko 2014: 108.

⁴⁹ *slad du’ang bde ba dang ldan pa zhig yong dka’ba yin.*

⁵⁰ *gal srid bod chos ldan rgyal khab la cog ge cam mer rang dbang du bzhas nas gus bkur zhabs ’deg sogs zhu rgyu’i dam bca’ gsar pa dang / sngon chad dam ’gal la ’gyod bshags byed na rgya nag tu bde ba dang ldan pa zhig yong yang srid pas.*

also being primed to perceive communist China not just as a betrayer or an aggressor, but as a religious antagonist, i.e., an enemy of the Buddhist faith.

In the same newspaper issue, Tharchin continues elaborating on the history of Sino-Tibetan relations in the article entitled in English "Humble Proposal for Admittance into the U.N.O.":

[No matter whether] Tibet was or was not independent in ancient times, earlier in 1856, there was a war between Nepal and Tibet. The Tibetan government decided on its own to negotiate an agreement with the Nepalese government. Because the points of that agreement are lived up to till present, Tibet seems to have been paying and is still paying to the Nepalese government 100,000 rupees every year.

Later on, in the Wood-Dragon Year, the year of 1904 according to the Western style, England—the country which has power in the world, [which has] wealth, prosperity and strong weapons—sent a military expedition to Tibet. At that time, the Tibetan government [had] very poor troops and weapons and was, by all means, weaker in [terms of] military drills and military strategy. However, all know that in order to defend their motherland, [their] independent country, [Tibetans] bravely attacked the army of this powerful and wealthy country. Please take a look once more at the old news in the newspaper issue from the previous month. [I] published [there] what was written in a book regarding the situation when England attacked Tibet. The treaty signed between England and Tibet when English soldiers arrived in the Tibetan state is also proof that Tibet was independent.

Although at that time, a Chinese imperial amban with security guards remained in Lhasa for the protection of the Dalai Lama, owing to [the fact that] Tibet was independent, not only did [the amban] not provide [any] military support but [he] also did not interfere in the [process of] signing the treaty.

What is [wrong] with the [the Chinese state] paying the [Tibetan] indemnity to England? Since the Dalai Lama was the religious guru of the [Chinese] emperor, China belonged to his religious subjects. If for the root guru, in whom [one] seeks refuge in this life and the next, one has to sacrifice even one's own life, what is to be surprised at in the indemnity payment?

After—as a result of the national uprising in China—the great emperor was brought down from the throne, the amban with [his] soldiers and retinue placed by the emperor to protect the Dalai Lama were expelled from Tibet.

Also, in 1914, representatives of the British government of India, the Chinese and Tibetan states gathered in Shimla. When [they] were signing the agreement, the reason why England had to perceive Tibet in the shadow of China—or what is called "suzerainty" in English—is [because] at that time, this kind of perception [of Tibet]

was needed for the own benefit of England. Nevertheless, the meaning of "suzerainty," perhaps, did not render [the meaning] that [Tibet] was a part of the Chinese territory or that it was a subject territory of China.

The Chinese government neither determined [the conditions] of that agreement [nor] even alter it. Moreover, the Chinese government did not act according to the points of the agreement, and in 1918 and later—quite a lot of times—there was even fighting on the Sino-Tibetan border. Besides, [the] communities in the Kham region, which were included in the Chinese territories, also many times rebelled and fought against China.

All know that in Tibet, there were foreign offices of independent countries and defense forces, as well as own national coins, banknotes, and postal stamps—all issued by the Tibetan state.

After the Chinese people made the emperor abdicate, China was no longer the patron in the priest-patron relationship. However, in 1934—after the death of the 13th Dalai Lama—the Chinese government, having sent its representatives for the [purpose of] friendly relations with the adjacent countries [and] in order to honor the death [of the 13th Dalai Lama], established a [Chinese] office in Lhasa. In the same way, there was also established an office of the Indian government. Last year [1949], according to the [Tibetan government's] order to deport [representatives of] the Chinese office, [the Chinese officials] were sent back.

In short, it is certain that Tibet is an independent country. Therefore, would it not be good if foreign countries, having considered [well], think of a way to admit [Tibet] into the United Nations and provide help and support so that there will not be any harm done to the Religious State?

This was humbly written by the publisher of a newspaper who is immensely loyal to Tibet. If there is a mistake, please forgive [me].⁵¹

Tharchin continues to unveil his perspective on the most crucial details in the history of Sino-Tibetan relations. He presents a compilation of nine additional facts aimed to support his claim of Tibet's independence, after which he ends with the same assertion as in the previous article: "it is certain that Tibet is an independent country."⁵²

Some of the facts offered as proof do certainly not look so definitive as Tharchin would like to present them to his readers. For instance, Tharchin avers that since the amban neither provided the military support to the Tibetan government during the British military expedition to Tibet in 1903–1904, nor did he interfere when the Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904 was signed, this treaty serves

⁵¹ *Melong* vol. XVIII, no. 10, Sept. 1, 1950: 5.

⁵² *bod rang btsan rgyal khab yin nges brtan*.

as proof of Tibetan independence. However, the events depicted by Tharchin should be supplemented with some additional historical facts.

First of all, the 1904 Convention was signed by the Tibetan officials left in charge by the 13th Dalai Lama, who, instead of negotiating with the British expedition, decided to flee to exile in Mongolia. Secondly, the Lhasa amban is reported to refuse to sign that convention. Thus, since Tibet was not Britain's dependency or a recognized independent country, the legitimization of the Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904 had to be secured from China.⁵³ This being so, two years later, Britain and China—not bothering to run their decision by the Tibetan government—signed the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1906, which reaffirmed “China's legitimate authority over its dependency Tibet.”⁵⁴ Moreover, according to this new convention, China took upon itself the fulfillment of the provision of the Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904 and paid the indemnity to Britain instead of Tibet. For the declining Qing empire at the time, this was hardly a gesture of pious service to its spiritual leader, but rather a practical measure ensuring a swift withdrawal of the British troops from Tibet. It is also important to underline that for his decision to go to exile in Mongolia the Dalai Lama had been stripped of his titles by the Chinese emperor and was summoned to the Qing court in 1908 before he could return to Lhasa.⁵⁵

A similar ambiguous episode interpreted by Tharchin in favor of Tibet's independence is a reference to the Shimla negotiations. The tripartite talks in 1913–1914 did not result in the legal recognition of Tibet as an independent state. The main points of the negotiated convention dealt with the promise of Britain not to annex Tibet and the division of Tibet into Inner Tibet, which was subordinate to China, and autonomous Outer Tibet under the Chinese suzerainty.⁵⁶ As the final agreement was not reached and the draft of the convention was not ratified, the British and Tibetan representatives signed a bilateral note that bound them to the terms of the unsigned Shimla Convention, but, naturally, China neither recognized nor followed it.⁵⁷

Among other misleading parts of Tharchin's narrative, one may notice the ten-times exaggerated digit of “100,000”⁵⁸ for the Tibetan indemnity paid to the Nepalese government after the 1855–1856

⁵³ Goldstein 1997: 25.

⁵⁴ Goldstein 1997: 25.

⁵⁵ Kapstein 2006: 170.

⁵⁶ Kapstein 2006: 172 and van Schaik 2011: 194.

⁵⁷ Goldstein 1997: 34.

⁵⁸ *khri phrag bcu tham pa*.

war. Obviously, the bigger the numbers, the more impressive they appear. Accusing Chinese communists of exaggerating the facts,⁵⁹ the editor of *The Tibet Mirror* did not run short of regular overstatements himself.

All in all, the article presents a very abridged version of Tibetan history and says nothing regarding the delicate intricacies of almost every historical fact that Tharchin cites as proof of Tibet's independence. Tharchin's journey into the past ends with an image of Tibet as a humble Religious State, which, in order not to be harmed by China, now needs the support and help of the international community.

3.3. Narrating the Present

As far as current events were concerned in *The Tibet Mirror*, news from Tibet in the 1950s–1960s presented an emotional story of the “brutal” Chinese aggression and the “oppressed” Tibetan nation “rightfully” fighting back against the communist regime.

Some of Tharchin's articles on Tibet and China from that period are overly metaphorical,⁶⁰ some appear naive and seem heavily charged with moralization. But there are also publications in *The Tibet Mirror* which are complemented with references to such modern socio-political concepts as “violation of international law,” “human rights,” “a self-sufficient state,” “a secular legal system,” etc. As an example, one can read the article entitled “Attack of the Chinese Communist Government on the Tibetan Religious State”:⁶¹

Lately, after the negotiations between the representative of communist China and representatives of the Tibetan government, Tibetan delegates went to Beijing. Even though [Tibetans] decided to negotiate and settle [the dispute], communist China suddenly ordered the troops to advance on Tibet. Is this not a deed that contradicts international law?

If the Chinese communist government does not withdraw soldiers [from Tibet] and conduct negotiations only peacefully, will [this] not become a public provocation against the [whole] world?

North Koreans, the followers of communist Russia, suddenly attacked South Korea. All know well that the followers of communist Russia got embarrassed because by the time they owned almost all southern areas, [it was] as if they went against the current

⁵⁹ E.g., see *Melong* vol. XXV, no. 12, May 1959: 5, 8.

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the numerous figurative means used by Tharchin in his narrative, see Moskaleva 2018.

⁶¹ *rgya dmar gzhung nas bod chos ldan rgyal khab la dpung 'jug.*

and now, they are on the verge of losing all northern areas.

To resume, the sudden attack of Chinese communists—the followers of Russia—on the Tibetan Religious State is not the [big] goal of [this] big country. Is not [their] task [to do so that] there is no religion and there is no karmic retribution?

The statement that “Tibet is the Chinese territory” is not true. Saying that “Tibet will be freed from [its] fetters” is also an inappropriate talk. Tibet has not been bound by anyone. Atheist communist China wishes to bind with a rope the independent Tibetan Religious State, is “liberation” not a brazen expression for that?

The English and Indian governments acknowledge that Tibet is merely under the shadow of China. However, if all clearly recognize that Tibet is also a state [with] its own government which manages domestic and international affairs [on its own], what is the purpose of going on with the attack [on Tibet]?⁶²

This article from November 1, 1950 discusses the marching of Chinese communist troops into Tibet. Tharchin is indignant that Chinese communists did this despite the fact that Tibetan delegates went to Beijing for negotiations. The article raises five rhetorical questions. The first presuppositional question conveys that there was a breach of international law: is not the sudden attack of communist China on Tibet “a deed that contradicts international law?”⁶³

The second question addresses a larger audience beyond the range of Tibetan readers: “If the Chinese communist government does not withdraw soldiers [from Tibet] and conduct negotiations only peacefully, will this not become a public provocation against the [whole] world?”⁶⁴ Tharchin accuses Chinese communists of the military pressuring of negotiations and plants the seed for eliciting the public outcry on behalf of the global community.

Tharchin argues that the plan of the Other is not simply to intimidate “the Tibetan Religious State.” With the help of the third presuppositional question, the author inquires if the Chinese communist government’s goal is not to go further and destroy the Buddhist religion: “is not [their] task [to do so that] there is no religion and there is no karmic retribution?”⁶⁵ The question implies the positive answer, what else could the atheist Other want? Thus, a threat to the religion and “the Religious State” accordingly is created.

⁶² *Melong* vol. XVIII, no. 12, Nov. 1, 1950: 3.

⁶³ *rgya dmar nas glo bur du bod la dpung 'jug byas pa de ni 'dzam gling spyi khirms las 'gal pa min nam.*

⁶⁴ *gal srid rgya dmar gzhung nas dmag mi phyir then thog zhi ba'i sgo nas bka' mol ma gnang na 'dzam gling spyi 'khrugs kyi rkyen du 'gyur mi yong ngam.*

⁶⁵ *chos med las 'bras med pa'i las ka ma red dam.*

Alongside references to international law, Tharchin touches upon the topic of ethics and integrity. The Other is accused of lying that “Tibet is the Chinese territory”⁶⁶ and of “inappropriate talks”⁶⁷ of “freeing Tibet from [its] fetters,”⁶⁸ when in fact, the atheist Other does the opposite, i.e., binds independent Tibet with “a rope.”⁶⁹ Thus, with his fourth question, Tharchin suggests that the term “liberation” is “a brazen expression”⁷⁰ for what communist China is actually plotting in Tibet. He counterposes the metaphor of freeing from the fetters with that of bondage with a rope. The metaphors redirect the interpretation of the narrative into the sphere of emotional comprehension and, by turning on the imagination, make further factual arguments redundant.

The article ends with the fifth and final question: “if all clearly recognize that Tibet is also a state [with] its own government which manages domestic and international affairs [on its own], what is the purpose of going on with the attack [on Tibet]?”⁷¹ The presupposition in Tharchin’s question entails that “all clearly recognize,” that firstly, Tibet is “a state,” secondly, that Tibet has “its own government,” and thirdly, that Tibet “manages domestic and international affairs” on its own. Therefore, the logical conclusion should be that there is no valid reason to attack Tibet. The end of the article once again points out the implied violation of international law.

In his publications, Tharchin tried to persuade readers that Chinese communists were worse than the traditional Tibetan government or any Chinese government which exercised its power in Tibet earlier. In an article from October 1952,⁷² Tharchin predicts that even if Tibetans are being treated well now, everything will change in the near future. For this reason, he insists, “it is better to suffer at the hands” of Tibetan officials (because despite their wrongdoings, they still belong to the Self) than “to destroy your own people and religion while being deceived by others,”⁷³ i.e., the Other or Chinese communists. The editor makes an appeal that

⁶⁶ *bod rgya’i sa khongs yin.*

⁶⁷ *’os min gyi skad cha.*

⁶⁸ *bod bcings pa nas grol bar byed rgyu yin.*

⁶⁹ *bod rang dbang rang btsan chos ldan rgyal khab de la rgya dmar chos min gyis thag pas bcing ’dod yod pa.*

⁷⁰ *de la bcing grol brjod pa ngo mi tsha’am.*

⁷¹ *bod rang gzhang phyi nang ’tsho ’dzin gyi rgyal khab yin pa’ang tshang mas ngos len gsal red na ga re don la dpung ’jug byas pa red.*

⁷² *Melong* vol. XX, no. 7, Oct. 1, 1952: 8. For a full translation, see McGranahan 2001: 247–248.

⁷³ *gzhan gyi g.yo thabs kyi mgo bskor thog rang rigs dang rgyal bstan rtsa rlag tu btang ba las rang dpon gyis sdug po btang ba de yag pa.*

readers “strive to gain independence”⁷⁴ and protect Tibetan history: “it is very important that [all of] you think well in order [to be] loyal to [your] kinsmen and people and so that [your own] history does not [become] *impaired* [emphasis added].”⁷⁵

Tharchin repeatedly linked Chinese communists to the annihilation of the Tibetan people and argued that all steps taken by the Chinese communist government in Tibet aimed to deceive Tibetans:

These days, communist China has established many institutions—such as, [for instance,] loan [offices]—all over Tibet. An evil policy on attempting to trap Tibetans into these institutions has been initiated.

For example, [the establishment of] bank offices is a means of collecting all Tibetan gold and silver, [the establishment of] offices for aiding the hunger or improving the living standards is a means to comprehend how much Tibetan arable land, grain, and resources there are. Handing out hundreds of thousands of white *da yang*⁷⁶ for the procurement of Tibetan grain and property now is a means to make Tibetan people starve and catch [them] with a lasso trap. The construction of roads now is a means to transport many soldiers and weapons and gradually put Tibetans behind the secure iron fence. Sowing of many fields now is a means to bring in and gradually settle there many Chinese. Gradually, the Tibetan nation will surely be annihilated.

For example, what is the purpose of the so-called increasing of the scarce population in Tibet now? The establishment of schools with instruction in the Tibetan language now is a trick. Saying that no damage will be done to the religion now is a trick. Whether it is a trick or not, one can understand if one takes a look at the Chinese soldiers that arrived in Tibet [and] whether or not [they] have a religion. Being good and friendly to aristocrats now is a trick too. When a long period of time passes, all will certainly see whether it is so or not. All know well what was done to the Amdo region.⁷⁷

The first part of the article is built on the parallelism of five statements conveying that anything done by Chinese communists “is a means to ...”⁷⁸ covertly achieve the opposite of the proclaimed objectives of the official development program. The second half of

⁷⁴ *tshang ma gcig mthun thog rang btsan lon thabs la 'bad dgos.*

⁷⁵ *khyed rnams rang rigs mi rigs kyi lar rgya dang / rgyal rabs mi nyams pa'i ched du dgongs pa chen po bzhes dgos pa shin tu gal chen yin no.*

⁷⁶ The term *da yang* refers to the Nationalist silver dollar or silver yuan, the currency used by the Chinese communist government in Tibet after its incorporation into the PRC, see Shakya 2000: 95.

⁷⁷ *Melong* vol. XXI, no. 2, May 1, 1953: 3.

⁷⁸ *thabs red.*

the article is built on the parallelism of three similar claims: anything done by Chinese communists, in reality, is “a trick.”⁷⁹ The accuracy of the presented judgment (“whether it is a trick or not”) is suggested to be evaluated based on whether the Chinese soldiers that arrived in Tibet “have a religion.”⁸⁰ Tharchin’s forecast for Tibet under the PRC is unvaryingly gloomy: “gradually,” Tibetans will be “put behind the secure iron fence”;⁸¹ “gradually,” many Chinese will be settled in Tibet;⁸² and “gradually, the Tibetan nation will be surely annihilated”⁸³ by the Other.

In Tharchin’s narrative, one can find regular examples of the discourse strategy of creating a unique threat,⁸⁴ which made readers feel that all that was going on in Tibet at the time had never happened before. For instance, an article from June 1959 reads:

Although earlier, lamas and aristocrats slightly mistreated [Tibetan citizens], there has never been such oppression as now. Earlier in the times of lamas and aristocrats, it has never been like [it is] now that a person does not have a right to food, a right to clothes, a right to freedom of movement, a right to talk, a right to make religious offerings to the Three Jewels, a right to one’s own accumulated wealth, a right to strive [to accumulate] one’s own wealth, as well as [it has never been] that [a person], after having done hard work all day, does not have enough of the distributed food to eat. Although there may have been similar hardships [earlier], there has certainly never been such oppression as that of communist China in Tibet now.⁸⁵

Even though the editor of *The Tibet Mirror* admits in the article that earlier Tibet was not a perfect place, he is sure that Tibetan aristocracy and clergy minorly mistreated the citizens, and “there has never been such oppression as now.”⁸⁶ The almost identical line is repeated at the end of the article again: “Although there may have been similar hardships [earlier], there has certainly never been such

⁷⁹ *mgo skor red.*

⁸⁰ *mgo skor yin min bod du bslebs pa’i rgya mi chos yod med bltas na ha go thub kyi red.*

⁸¹ *bod kyi mi rnams la rim pas lcags ri btsan po’i nang la bcug.*

⁸² *rim pas rgya mi mang po ’khrid de ’jog.*

⁸³ *rim pas bod rigs rtsa med gtong nges red.*

⁸⁴ Creating a unique threat is a political discourse strategy that intensifies the extent of a threat coming from the Other and underlines the uniqueness and the extraordinariness of this particular threat, see Chernyavskaya & Molodichenko 2014: 117.

⁸⁵ *Melong* vol. XXVI, no. 1, Jun. 1959: suppl. 2–3.

⁸⁶ *sngon du bla sger khag gi phran bu re sdug po btang rung /da lta lta bu’i btsan dbang nam yang byung yod pa ma red.*

oppression as that of communist China in Tibet now."⁸⁷ Between these two lines, there is a very similar third one reiterating that "earlier in the times of lamas and aristocrats, it has never been like [it is] now."⁸⁸ Thus, a unique threat is created. The reader is bound to understand that there is something extraordinary going on. Tharchin specifies what is different now. He avers that, at present, Tibetans are not only oppressed with the hard work but are denied all basic human rights.

3.4. Alienating the Other

Continuous antagonism towards Chinese communists played a very important part in Tharchin's discourse. Alienation of the Other was accomplished both verbally through a number of discourse strategies and visually with the help of regularly published drawings and political cartoons.⁸⁹ The Other was characterized by the brutality, disrespect for religion and traditions, and an inhumane attitude even towards children, women, and elderly people.⁹⁰

Tharchin emphasized that Chinese communists were doing such outrageous things in Tibet that they were to be described with the metaphor of "flesh-eating demons."⁹¹ A long article entitled in English as the "Rocket for Assailing the Red"⁹² from September 1960 provides an emotional discourse-charged account of "an absolutely unbearable, desperate situation"⁹³ created in Tibet by "Chinese communist bandits."⁹⁴

The article draws a distinctive dividing line between the *violent* Other and the *peaceful* Self. Communist China is reported to have "violently invaded and seized"⁹⁵ the "state of the beloved ancestors"⁹⁶ of Tibetans. By "slaughtering a countless number" of Tibetan "peaceful and virtuous parents, relatives and close friends,

⁸⁷ *ma gshis rdab bsigs 'dra byung yod srid kyang da lta'i rgya dmar gyis mnar spyod ltar nam yang bod du byung med nges gtan red.*

⁸⁸ *da lta bu'i [...] sngar bla sger khag gi dus su nam yang byung yod pa ma red.*

⁸⁹ For more information on the political cartoons in *The Tibet Mirror*, see Engelhardt 2012.

⁹⁰ E.g., see *Melong* vol. XXI, no. 5, Aug. 1, 1953: 6; *Melong* vol. XXV, no. 9–10, Feb.–Mar. 1959: 11; *Melong* vol. XXVI, no. 1 Jun. 1959: 3–4.

⁹¹ *srin po.*

⁹² *dmar por rgol ba'i me shugs 'phur mdel* (*Melong* vol. XXVII, no.1, Aug.–Sept. 1960: 2).

⁹³ *'u thug bzod thabs rbad bral gyi gnas su gyar.*

⁹⁴ *rgya dmar jag pa.*

⁹⁵ *drag po'i btsan 'dzul byas pa nas bzung.*

⁹⁶ *dga' zhing gces pa'i pha mes kyi rgyal khab.*

young and old [people],”⁹⁷ the Other “filled every part of the pure and beautiful Tibetan land with blood and tears.”⁹⁸

According to Tharchin, Tibetans used to enjoy “peace and good manners,”⁹⁹ but the Other made them “eat manure and dirt”¹⁰⁰ and enforced “severe oppression, which had doubled in comparison to earlier [times].”¹⁰¹ One also cannot help but notice the excessive description of the means used by the Other to subjugate the Self: Chinese communists expose Tibetans to “the unbearable pressure of twines, iron chains, horsewhips, sticks, bullets, and explosives.”¹⁰² Furthermore, using the strategy of magnification of the enemy’s aggression,¹⁰³ Tharchin hyperbolizes and accuses the Other of oppressing not only Tibetans but “ruthlessly harming the human race”¹⁰⁴ in general.

The article describes Tibetans as “the nation fond of peace,”¹⁰⁵ who “never practiced [any] violent and abusive manners”¹⁰⁶ and who “have compassion and love for [all] animate beings including insects.”¹⁰⁷ However, the “righteous anger”¹⁰⁸ of Tibetans has heaped up, and, therefore, they started attacking Chinese communists, but “all understand that this objective is lawful and right.”¹⁰⁹ The almost identical statement is repeated a few lines further in the article and is alleged to belong to the supreme Tibetan leader—the 14th Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama confirms that the “principled and peaceful people”¹¹⁰ know that Tibetans’ “objective is lawful and right.”¹¹¹

Tharchin persuades his Tibetan readers that they should act “with pristine altruistic intentions, like the white snow of Mount Everest atop the world” and, having united for the common good,

⁹⁷ *zhi dul dge sems can gyi pha ma spun nye rgan gzhon grangs las 'das pa dmar gsod btang.*

⁹⁸ *gtsang zhing yid du 'ong ba'i bod sa gang sar khrag dang / mig chus khengs pa zhig bzos.*

⁹⁹ *zhi bde lugs bzang la dga' ba'i bod mi mangs.*

¹⁰⁰ *sa lud thal ba zas su byed.*

¹⁰¹ *btsan gnon drag po sngar las ldab 'gyur gyis shugs cher btang.*

¹⁰² *lus la rtsa thag dang / lcags thag rta lcag dang / rgyug pa/ me mdel 'bar rdzas kyi reg bya mi bzod pa myong.*

¹⁰³ This discourse strategy aims to expand the scope of conflict and to create the effect of global aggression on behalf of the Other, see Chernyavskaya & Molodichenko 2014: 134.

¹⁰⁴ *mi'i rigs rgyud dang bcas par ya nga bral ba'i gnod 'tshé byed.*

¹⁰⁵ *zhi bde la dga' ba'i mi rigs.*

¹⁰⁶ *drag cing rtsub pa'i bya spyod lag len nam yang mi bstar ba yin.*

¹⁰⁷ *srog chags 'bu srin yan chod la snying rje dang brtse sems yod.*

¹⁰⁸ *bden pa dang ldan pa'i khong khro.*

¹⁰⁹ *dmigs yul 'di yang lugs mthun yang dag cig yin pa kun gyis rtogs gsal ltar yin.*

¹¹⁰ *'dzam gling ya rabs zhi sems can gyi mi mangs.*

¹¹¹ *khong rnam pas rang tsho'i dmigs yul de lugs mthun yang dag yin pa mkhyen yod.*

“persistently support” their “ethnic groups of kinsmen who joined fighting” against communist China.¹¹² The lengthy narrative ends with an appeal to take “stronger steps towards the glory of what is called ‘independence’ and ‘freedom’”¹¹³ and the projection that “it is determined” that Tibetans “will certainly be victorious.”¹¹⁴

While the Chinese communists are repeatedly marked as “demons” (seven times) and “bandits” (four times) in this article, Tibetans are marked as “peaceful” people (three times) with a “lawful and right” objective to fight Chinese communists. The pejorative terms describing the Other are counterbalanced by the employment of semantic amelioration for the Self. This article gives one of the many examples in *The Tibet Mirror* of using the strategy of demonizing the enemy. The strategy intends to intimidate discourse recipients with the image of a particularly cruel, unprincipled, and treacherous enemy.¹¹⁵

The graphic representation of Chinese communists as the violent Other is pervasive in *The Tibet Mirror* issues from the 1950s—1960s. Many more examples, unfortunately, could not be included here due to the scope limitations of the present article.

3.5. Conceptualizing the Self

A few more words should be said about the image of Tibetans constructed in *The Tibet Mirror*. In Carol McGranahan’s translation, Tharchin defines Tibetans as: “the tsampa eaters, chuba wearers, dice players, raw and dried meat eaters, followers of Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan language speakers, the people from Ngari Korsum, U–Tsang Ruzhi, Dokham Gangdrug, the thirteen trikor of Tibet.”¹¹⁶

Tharchin consistently referred to Tibetans as the nation of the

¹¹² *nga tshos 'dzam gling na mngon par mtho ba'i gangs ri jo mo glang ma ji bzhin spyi don la rab dkar lhag bsam gcig tu bsdebs pa'i mthun sgril dam bca' brtan pos 'thab 'dzings la zhugs pa'i spun rigs rnam la nus shugs gang yod kyi rgyab gnyer rgyun btud de byed dgos pa yin no.*

¹¹³ *nga tshos rang dbang dang rang btsan zhes pa'i gzi brjid [...] gyi phyogs su gom stabs shugs cher spo thub pa zhig byed dgos.*

¹¹⁴ *rgyal kha ni nges par du nga tshor thob rgyur gtan 'khel ba zhig yin no.*

¹¹⁵ Chernyavskaya & Molodichenko 2014: 124.

¹¹⁶ *tsam pa za mkhan phyu pa gyon mkhan rtsed sho rgyag mkhan sha dmar dang sha skam za mkhan skad yig gcig pa theg chen gyi rje su 'brangs mkhan stod mnga' ris skor gsum dbus gtsang ru bzhi mdo khams sgang drug bcas bod khri skor bcu gsum gyi spun zla rnam (Melong vol. XX, no. 7, Oct. 1, 1952: 8. Translated by McGranahan 2001: 248).*

thirteen Tibetan *khri skor*.¹¹⁷ According to Tibetan historical sources, in the 13th century, Khubilai Khan (1215–1294) presented the thirteen *khri skor* to the Sa skya leader 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235–1280) for his service.¹¹⁸ The thirteen *khri skor* are assumed to be originally confined to the territory of Central Tibet (namely, U–Tsang).¹¹⁹ However, in *The Tibet Mirror*, this term seems to have a different meaning, denoting the three regions of Ngari in the west, the four regions of the central provinces U–Tsang, and the six ranges of Amdo and Kham in the east. Tharchin's thirteen *khri skor* thus occupy the territory of the so-called Cultural Tibet¹²⁰ and are comparable to the three bigger regions of Tibet now known among the Tibetan exile community as the *chol kha gsum*.¹²¹

Although the *chol kha gsum* concept has a complicated story of origin and could be traced back to the 14th-century historical sources, after 1959, it has become “a postexile conceptual configuration of the three areas that Tibetans consider to constitute their land.”¹²² At present, the *chol kha gsum* or the three regions model unites the population of U–Tsang, Amdo, and Kham as “Tibetan nation and state” and being “a cultural and political organizing force” has become particularly efficient in presenting “a strong, united front” of the Tibetan exile community.¹²³

The editor of *The Tibet Mirror*, however, chose to encapsulate the image of the population of Tibet within the thirteen *khri skor* model

¹¹⁷ As a term denoting the Tibetan administrative units, *khri skor* was introduced in Tibet by the Mongols during the Yuan dynasty and referred to a myriarchy of households (Yang 2016: 557). Although *khri sde*, the equivalent of the term *khri skor*, is mentioned in the documents dated as early as the 8th–9th centuries, at that time it was not used to denote the subdivisions of Tibet proper (Petech 1990: 50).

¹¹⁸ Yang 2016: 561.

¹¹⁹ Nor brang o rgyan 2008: 2798.

¹²⁰ Germano 2013.

¹²¹ The term *chol kha* is most likely a translation of the Mongolian word *čiyulyan*, which is an equivalent of the Chinese term for an administrative unit *lu* (Chin. 路). The exact time of origin and the initial meaning of the Tibetan term *chol kha gsum* is not known. Starting from the 15th century, this term referred to another additional part of the Tibetan territory assigned by Khubilai Khan to the Sa skya leader 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan for his religious initiation. However, as the scope of the territory defined by the *chol kha gsum* differs in the sources, it is possible that this term did not mean the three regions of U–Tsang, Amdo, and Kham back at the time, see Yang 2016: 553, 559, 561.

¹²² Powers & Templeman 2012: 147.

¹²³ McGranahan 2010: 51. At the same time, the *chol kha gsum* model is argued to offer a “central Tibetan perspective” and to reflect the influence of the U–Tsang people in the Central Tibetan Administration. Since the natives of Kham and Amdo “were never consulted about this notion,” it has been largely rejected by them (Powers & Templeman 2012: 147).

as early as 1950. It was almost a decade before the establishment of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and the subsequent naturalization of the modern reading of the *chol kha gsum* configuration in their official narrative. According to a preliminary analysis, at least in one publication from the 1960s, Tharchin's thirteen *khri skor* merged into the *chol kha gsum* model, which consisted of "Dbus gtsang *chol kha*," "Mdo smad a mdo'i *chol kha*" and "Khams bod *chol kha*."¹²⁴ Further research on Tharchin's coining of the new reading of the *chol kha gsum* term is forthcoming.

The following excerpt from *The Tibet Mirror* provides an early example of Tharchin's introduction of the thirteen Tibetan *khri skor* model:

In the single Tibetan Religious State, there are so-called thirteen Tibetan *khri skor* of Stod, Dbus, Gtsang, Mdo smad, etc. However, all of them are one Tibetan nation. Therefore, [even though] I am called a *dbus pa*, you are a *gtsang pa*, he is a *stod pa*, they are *khams pa*, [Tibetans as] one nation with a single language and a single religion, having distinguished [some] differences do not break up into factions, [but] thinking of all [as] one nation or the ones tamed by the Tibetan deity—the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, all live in mutual agreement. Would not it be good if nowadays the separated [factions] in many countries use Tibet as an example accordingly?¹²⁵

Tibetan unity is presented through the concept of nationhood based on the geographical affiliation to the thirteen Tibetan *khri skor*, the Tibetan language, and the Buddhist religion. In line with the narrative, Tibetans were "tamed"¹²⁶ by the bodhisattva of compassion and "all live in mutual agreement"¹²⁷ thus setting an example for other countries in the world.

The article was published in September 1950, when the Chinese communist officials had already taken over some of the eastern areas of Cultural Tibet and when it was obvious that the advancement of the People's Liberation Army into Central Tibet was merely a question of time. In this respect, it seems to be a questionable statement that the entire population of U-Tsang, Amdo, and Kham did see themselves at the time as one nation-state sharing a bond of mutual agreement. Due to limited contact with people from distant parts of the Tibetan Plateau prior to the exile, many Tibetans have reported that back then, they used to perceive themselves primarily as "residents of a particular area" in Tibet or

¹²⁴ E.g., see *Melong* vol. XXVI, no. 12, Jun.–Jul., 1960: 10.

¹²⁵ *Melong* vol. XVIII, no. 10, Sept. 1, 1950: 6.

¹²⁶ *'dul bya yin*.

¹²⁷ *phan tshun tshang ma gcig mthun du bzhugs*.

as “members of a certain clan.”¹²⁸ The sense of the shared pan-Tibetan identity was actively promoted among the exile community by the CTA.

4. *Legacy Left by The Tibet Mirror and Tharchin*

To conclude the article, I would like to give an example of what Dorje Tharchin Babu wished *The Tibet Mirror* was for Tibetans and how it was expected to shape public opinion:

Question 1. What is bigger than the power of a thousand soldiers?

[Question] 2. What is bigger than the power of an atomic bomb?

[Answer 1]. The first [is] the distribution of the newspaper to the people.

[Answer 2]. The second [is] the dissemination of one’s own country’s history and the origin of [its] independence through the distribution of effective news in newspapers and on the radio in [different] countries.¹²⁹

This rhetorical riddle was published in November 1950. Ever since Tharchin made anti-communist discourse-charged materials a regular feature of practically every issue of *The Tibet Mirror* for the years to come. One can see that Tharchin expected his narratives of the “unimpaired” history of Tibet to produce an effect more powerful than that of an atomic bomb.

Tharchin is remembered as a popular figure among his Tibetan contemporaries, some of which even claimed that the little they knew about Westerners they learned from him.¹³⁰ Thus, being an influencer who earned the trust of Tibetans, Tharchin was particularly well-equipped for enabling the persuasive function of the newspaper he produced.

In Tharchin’s correspondence with the Political Officer of Sikkim in December 1963, one can read that *The Tibet Mirror* was greatly enjoyed by the Tibetan exile community that had “great confidence” in the word of the newspaper editor:

Although now there are several Tibetan papers yet all the Tibetans in India as a refugee [sic] even H.H. the Dalai Lama likes my paper very much and they request me to continue its publication as they have a great confidence on [sic] the news published in it, and I am

¹²⁸ Powers 2004: 156.

¹²⁹ *Melong* vol. XVIII, no. 12, Nov. 1, 1950: 4.

¹³⁰ McGranahan 2001: 244.

trying my best to do so.¹³¹

Reading through secondary literature, I found those who share similar views on the role of *The Tibet Mirror* for the exile community. According to the opinion of a Kalimpong citizen, the Tibetan community considered Tharchin “indispensable” to the Tibetan cause vis-à-vis the PRC.¹³² Carol McGranahan maintains that Tharchin’s “editorial nationalism” in *The Tibet Mirror* in the 1950s is “an important part of the story of how we now tell the history of this period in Tibet.”¹³³ Besides, Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa believes that *The Tibet Mirror* was instrumental in “championing a transnational Tibetan identity.”¹³⁴

Based on my preliminary observations, I contend that imagining the unified Tibetan nation as the population of *chol kha gsum* and the areas of “Great Tibet,”¹³⁵ as well as many other arguments and narratives in support of Tibet’s independence diffused among Tibetan exiles and were repeated in their versions of Tibetan history at least partially owing to Tharchin and his pioneering articles in *The Tibet Mirror*.

To compare Tharchin’s narrative with that of representatives of the Tibetan exile community, one can read, for example, *China’s Tibet Policy* by Dawa Norbu. Among other things, the author engages in a lengthy discussion of the British term “suzerainty” in the context of Sino-Tibetan relations. Similar to Tharchin, he argues that Chinese “suzerainty” did not mean their “sovereignty” in Tibet.¹³⁶ Alongside with it, Dawa Norbu also shares Tharchin’s opinion that the Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904 was a sign that “Britain recognized Tibet’s treaty-making power.”¹³⁷ Additional cross-comparisons exceed the scope of the present article, but certainly must be discussed in future research.

John Powers stresses that the Tibetan exile community places a strong emphasis on history and producing a “coherent historical narrative” that constructs Tibet as independent before 1951.¹³⁸ In

¹³¹ Tharchin’s letter to the Political Officer of Sikkim dated December 16, 1963 (Tharchin Collection; series 2, subseries 3, box 3, folder 5). This letter was written in English, therefore, Tharchin’s grammar is left intact.

¹³² Fader 2009: 339.

¹³³ McGranahan 2001: 250.

¹³⁴ Holmes-Tagchungdarpa 2014: 90–91.

¹³⁵ Tharchin defined “Great Tibet” as the territory “from Ladakh in the west, Kanding in the east, lake Kokonor in the north” and Bhutan in the south, see *Melong* vol. XXV, no. 9–10, Feb.–Mar. 1959: 3.

¹³⁶ Norbu 2001: 149, 166–167.

¹³⁷ Norbu 2001: 169.

¹³⁸ Powers 2004: 147.

line with Tharchin's narrative, writings on the history of Tibet published by Tibetans in exile accentuate shared Buddhist cultural markers and make references to the period of the Tibetan Empire and Srong btsan sgam po as the argument in support of the idea of a historically independent Tibet.¹³⁹ Religious ideology framing and the concept of the priest-patron relationship, in particular, are argued to "lie at the heart" of the Tibetan exiles' claim for the independence of Tibet.¹⁴⁰

For centuries, Tibetan historical works have described Sino-Tibetan contacts in terms of the priest-patron relationship.¹⁴¹ *The Tibet Mirror* was, perhaps, among the first written media examples of adopting modern socio-political terms—hitherto unfamiliar to Tibetan historical works—for rendering the history of Tibet and Sino-Tibetan relations. For this reason, when Tharchin combined elements of traditional Tibetan historiography (e.g., underlining the sacred role of the Tibetan religious leader for the Chinese emperor or the misdeed in the form of the oath's violation) with accusations of human rights or international law violations in Tibet, some parts of his narrative look grotesque and inconsistent. Tharchin's style, however, is very similar to how the Tibetan exile community adopted Western practices of narrating nationalism and how it tried to construct its history of the Tibetan nation-state.

While analyzing the historical narrative constructed by Tharchin in *The Tibet Mirror*, one also often comes to wonder at the sequencing of events presented in his texts and the selective sampling of the facts. In some cases, it seems as if the cited facts are the replies to the possible objections from pro-Chinese supporters, who, laying out a variety of claims of their own, would try to contradict Tharchin's version of historical events. This feature was also observed by John Powers in his research on pro-Tibetan historical narratives.¹⁴²

To sum up, *The Tibet Mirror* constructed the image of Tibet as an independent state throughout various periods of its history. The selection of historical facts or "proofs" employed in *The Tibet Mirror* to advocate this view probably nourished the pro-nationalist versions of the history of Tibet which were written after 1959 and which were well-received among the Tibetan exile community.

The story of Tibet's present in the 1950s and 1960s was depicted in *The Tibet Mirror* through the frame of conflict of "treacherous" Chinese communists versus "peaceful" Tibetans. In contrast to the

¹³⁹ Powers 2004: 144–145.

¹⁴⁰ Klieger 1989: 3.

¹⁴¹ Klieger 1989: 12–13.

¹⁴² Powers 2004: 6–8.

Chinese communists' offensive, the Tibetans' fighting back was represented in *The Tibet Mirror* through lexical amelioration.

Tharchin's practice of portraying Tibetans as "helpless victims" in need of attention from the world and as "innocents" incapable of defending themselves was later continued by the Tibetan exile community in their writings.¹⁴³

Whether Dorje Tharchin Babu really saw the history of Tibet in the way he presented it in *The Tibet Mirror*, or whether it was his job to construct an image of independent Tibet and to mobilize Tibetan masses to imagine themselves as one Tibetan nation, cannot be established conclusively at this point.

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¹⁴³ See Powers 2004: 150.

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Shugs Idan and the Dalai Lama: A Conflict of Political Legitimation Processes?

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he protective deity Shugs Idan, who is nowadays a source of controversy in the Tibetan community, became popular among the Dge lugs tradition after the dissemination of his cult by Pha bong kha Bde chen snying po (1878–1941) at the beginning of the 20th century. The Shugs Idan cult was more widely promoted by the 3rd Khri byang, Blo bzang ye shes bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho (1901–1981), a student of Pha bong kha Bde chen snying po, who was the 14th Dalai Lama's tutor.

The controversy about Shugs Idan started in the 1970s after the publication by the 4th Dze smad, Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas (1927–1996) of a small book¹ which recounts stories of important lamas of the Dge lugs pa tradition, as well as some Dga' ldan pho brang officials, who have been punished by Shugs Idan for their practice of certain Rnying ma rituals. The publication of this book made the present Dalai Lama follow the Gnas chung Oracle's advice that he should stop worshipping Shugs Idan personally and generally impose restrictions (*dam drag*) on his worship.² This decision irritated some adepts of Shugs Idan who did not want to quit their practice and, therefore, strongly opposed the present Dalai Lama's authority.

Shugs Idan is regarded by both his followers and his critics as the emanation of Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1619–1656), an important Dge lugs lama of the "Upper Chamber" (*gzims khang gong ma*), a lineage founded by Pañ chen Bsod nams grags pa (1478–1554), at 'Bras spungs Monastery.³ During his childhood, Grags pa rgyal mtshan was proposed as a potential reincarnation of the 4th Dalai Lama Yon tan rgya mtsho (1589–1617), but ended up being selected as the reincarnation of Bsod nams dge legs dpal bzang (1594–1615) of the

¹ Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas 1997. It came to be called the "Yellow Book" shortly after its publication (Dreyfus 1998: 255).

² Dreyfus 1998: 255–259.

³ von Brüch 1999: 182 and Karmay 2009: 507.

Upper Chamber lineage. Grags pa rgyal mtshan died in 1656, and the circumstances of his death were contested.⁴

Nikolay Tsyrempilov notes that the death of Grags pa rgyal mtshan could have been the result of a conflict that divided the adherents of Dge lugs tradition during the rule of the 5th Dalai Lama and later on.⁵ He considers the resistance of some Dge lugs pa—which he calls “Dge lugs pa sectarians”—against the 5th Dalai Lama as an opposition to the “proto-national state” created by the 5th Dalai Lama, which was inclusive of all Tibetan Buddhist traditions.⁶ Tsyrempilov defines the two opposing groups as those defending the interests of the Dge lugs tradition on one side and those defending the interests of the Tibetan state on the other.⁷ Moreover, he writes that the Dge lugs pa who wanted to defend the interests of the Dge lugs tradition were eager to establish a *mchod yon*, or “priest-patron relationship,” with the emperors of the Qing dynasty, who in turn wanted to weaken the 5th Dalai Lama’s regime.⁸

Georges Dreyfus also notes that the rule of the 5th Dalai Lama was resented by some members of the Dge lugs tradition who wished to set up a “purely Dge lugs rule.”⁹ He agrees that the relationship between the 5th Dalai Lama and the Dge lugs clergy had been tense and that Grags pa rgyal mtshan could have been the focus of the opposition to the 5th Dalai Lama within the Dge lugs clergy.¹⁰

However, Dreyfus considers that Shugs Idan originally had nothing to do with Grags pa rgyal mtshan and the narrative of his death. He contends that the narrative of Grags pa rgyal mtshan’s death was written by the 5th Dalai Lama in order to discredit Grags pa rgyal mtshan.¹¹ According to Dreyfus, Shugs Idan is a deity

⁴ Dreyfus 1998: 230 and Karmay 2009: 514.

⁵ Tsyrempilov 2003: 54.

⁶ Tsyrempilov 2003: 55.

⁷ Tsyrempilov writes: “Many followers of the Dge lugs pa tradition thought their sect’s interests more important than Tibetan state interests, which is why they could consider the course pursued by the Fifth Dalai Lama, of rapprochement to the other Tibetan Buddhist sects, if not as a betrayal of the Yellow church, then at least as an adverse situation for the sect” (Tsyrempilov 2003: 56).

⁸ Tsyrempilov 2003: 56–57.

⁹ Dreyfus 1998: 234.

¹⁰ Dreyfus writes: “The events surrounding Grags pa rgyal mtshan’s death must be understood in relation to its historical context, the political events surrounding the emergence of the Dalai-Lama institution as a centralizing power during the second half of the seventeenth century. The rule of this monarch seems to have been particularly resented by some elements in the Dge lugs tradition. It is quite probable that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was seen after his death as a victim of the Dalai-Lama’s power and hence became a symbol of opposition” (Dreyfus 1998: 234).

¹¹ Dreyfus 1998: 239.

belonging originally to the Sa skya tradition,¹² and the narrative of Shugs ldan as an emanation of Grags pa rgyal mtshan was a late invention of Pha bong kha Bde chen snying po because he felt some resentment against the 13th Dalai Lama who imposed restrictions on the dissemination of the Shugs ldan's cult.¹³ For Dreyfus, Pha bong kha promoted Shugs ldan as the protector of the Dge lugs tradition's purity only as a measure against the non-sectarian (*ris med*) movement.¹⁴

I will show in this article that the link between Shugs ldan and Grags pa rgyal mtshan is not a late invention by Pha bong kha, but something which appeared much earlier, around the mid-18th century, together with other alternative narratives of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's posthumous fate. We can therefore wonder if the narrative of Shugs ldan's origin should not be understood in light of the opposition that Tsyrempilov describes in his research.

To answer this question, I will first go back to the 5th Dalai Lama's narrative of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's death and then present the earliest narrative of Shugs ldan's origin in order to show that this narrative was an attempt to rehabilitate Grags pa rgyal mtshan and give a different version of his posthumous fate. Finally, I will discuss the political contexts in which these two narratives were written in order to show that they are related to two different political regimes: one centered on the Dalai Lama as the sacred ruler of the Tibetan state, and the other centered on a *mchod yon* relationship between the Dge lugs tradition and the Qing dynasty.

1. The 5th Dalai Lama and Grags pa rgyal mtshan's Death

The "official" narrative of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's death is found in the 5th Dalai Lama's autobiography. The 5th Dalai Lama writes that on June 17, 1656, Grags pa rgyal mtshan became suddenly affected by a *gnyan tshad* disease.¹⁵ The 5th Dalai Lama then began preparations to

¹² Dreyfus 1998: 241.

¹³ Dreyfus 1998: 251.

¹⁴ Dreyfus 1998: 252–253. The *ris med* movement was initiated by 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820–1892) and 'Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899) who compiled the teachings of the Sa skya, Bka' brgyud and Rnying ma traditions in order to preserve them from the Dge lugs hegemony and sectarian proselytism. The term *ris med* is a short form for *ris su bcad pa med pa* ("impartial, unbiased,") and defines a non-sectarian approach towards all Tibetan Buddhist traditions. See Samuel 2003 and Deroche 2018.

¹⁵ *gnyan tshad* is a combination of *gnyan nad* ("infectious disease") and *tshad pa* ("fever"). *gnyan* also refers to a group of spirits producing this infectious disease. On spirits and diseases in Tibetan culture, see Samuel 2007.

give him a blessing (*rjes gnang*)¹⁶ to dispel obstacles, but the Regent Bsod nams chos 'phel¹⁷ sent someone from Lhasa who told him that it could be contagious, and therefore it was inappropriate to visit him.¹⁸ Grags pa rgyal mtshan recovered for a few days, but the illness later resumed. The 5th Dalai Lama then went to give him the blessing, but because Grags pa rgyal mtshan was under the influence of a malevolent spirit, he had lost consciousness, and the blessing was ineffective. Grags pa rgyal mtshan died on July 4, 1656.¹⁹

Around August 1656, the 5th Dalai Lama writes that the Gnas chung Oracle advised him not to stay in the vicinity during Grags pa rgyal mtshan's funeral. Therefore, he stayed at the Potala for one week doing various practices.²⁰

In the middle of 1658, the 5th Dalai Lama writes:

The Great Dharma Protector said, "last year when we were at the hot spring of Stod lung, I told the Regent through the two disciplinarian monks that the stupa of the Upper Chamber, which had been affected by malevolent spirits, should be moved elsewhere. But instead of simply taking the silver pieces out and placing them [somewhere], they were left unmoved, and this mistake caused illnesses. Now the disturbance is much greater, so the Upper Chamber has to be moved."²¹

¹⁶ *rjes gnang* is a kind of tantric initiation, or empowerment. It can also be given as a blessing to dispel obstacles (*rkyen sel gyi rjes gnang*).

¹⁷ The text gives the title "*Sde pa*," which means "governor" and was given to the official in charge of a province, or of a monastic estate, as was the case for Bsod nams rab brtan at 'Bras spungs Monastery. With the rise to power of the 5th Dalai Lama in 1642, Bsod nams rab brtan became the *Sde srid* of Tibet, that is the Regent, or Prime Minister. In his autobiography, the 5th Dalai Lama keeps referring to him with the title "*Sde pa*."

¹⁸ *nyer lnga nas gzims khang gong sprul pa'i sku gnyan tshad kyis glo bur du bsnyun par rkyen sel gyi rjes gnang la yong dgos tshul byung ba ltar gtor chas gra bsgrigs pa'i 'gro rtsis yod thog/ lha sa nas sde pas mi gnang pa'i 'go nad yin 'dug pas da lam mi 'gab ces* (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009a: 366).

¹⁹ *gzims khang gong du phyin mgon po'i rjes gnang bar chad kun sel phul kyang 'byung po zhig gis brlams pa'i thugs dran mi zin 'dugs pas phan thogs med pa'i tshe bcu gsum gyi tsha rting khar zhin brjes snang* (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009a: 367).

²⁰ *chos skyong chen pos sprul pa'i sku'i pur bzhu'i dus nye skor du bsdad pa mi 'gab pas po ta lar song gsung ba bzhin nyer gnyis la 'ongs zhag bdun gyi bar 'phags pa mched kyi drung du mchod pa smon lam bzlas brjod sogs dge sbyor la brtson par byas* (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009a: 369).

²¹ *chos skyong chen pos sde par 'dre sna zug pa'i gzims khang gong gi mchod rten rnams gzhan du spo dgos tshul lo snag ma stod lung chu tshan la byon skabs dge skos gnyis brgyud de labs pas yin kyang dngul dgung tsho phral nas 'jog pa tsam las ma spos pa'i skyon gyis nad gzhi chug pa yin/ da cha 'tshub cher song bas gzims khang gong spo dgos gsung bar* (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009a: 390). Gavin Kilty, in his translation, considers this passage to mean that the Regent became ill because the silver mausoleum was left in the Upper Chamber (Kilty 2019: 62). The Regent died around the end of 1658.

The 5th Dalai Lama continues:

There was much discussion about whether something like an exorcism ritual would suffice or whether the house needed to be destroyed. True or not, some said that when the eight stupas were not yet dismantled, voices and sounds came out of the [main] stupa. Because such superstitions gave rise to demons, the rumors did not cease. The personal belongings [of Grags pa rgyal mtshan] were carried down the valley of Stod lung and the woodwork [of the house was] brought to the canyon of the Shar chu River.²²

As the 5th Dalai Lama notes in 1662, a new temple was built in place of the destroyed Upper Chamber in 1661.²³ This narrative shows that everything was done to remove any trace of the Upper Chamber. Not only the residence, but also the lineage, since the 5th Dalai Lama forbade the search of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's reincarnation.²⁴ According to the 5th Dalai Lama, Grags pa rgyal mtshan was not the genuine incarnation of the Upper Chamber and became a malevolent spirit after breaking his tantric vows. The 5th Dalai Lama's view is exemplified by the following quote:

The one who was wrongly recognized as the reincarnation of Bsod nams dge legs dpal bzang, through the manipulation of Lags a rgyal of Gad kha sa, became a *dam sri*²⁵ spirit of perverted aspiration.²⁶

This narrative is indeed an attempt to discredit Grags pa rgyal mtshan. It helped the 5th Dalai Lama justify that there was no need to look for Grags pa rgyal mtshan's reincarnation, and justified the destruction of the Upper Chamber.

²² *rgyal rdzongs lta bus go chod pa'i khang pa bshig ma dgos pa yong mi yong gi gleng gzhi mang du byung rung bden mi bden ji ltar yang mchod rten brgyad po ma phral ba'i skabs mchod rten nang nas skad dang tsi ra brgyab zer bas mtshon pa'i rnam rtog 'drer lang kyis kha mtshon ma chod pa'i sku chas tsho stod lung mda' dang shing cha rnam shar chu sbug tu bskyal* (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009a: 390).

²³ *gzims khang gong bshig shul du lo snga ma'i nang lha khang gsar du bzhangs par* (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009a: 471).

²⁴ Dreyfus 1998: 238 and Karmay 2009: 514.

²⁵ *dam sri* defines a class of malevolent spirits (*sri*) who have broken their sacred commitment (*dam tshig la gnod pa'i sri*).

²⁶ *gad kha sa'i lags a rgyal gyi 'phrul la rten sprul sku bsod nams dge legs dpal bzang po gi sku skye brdzus ma lam du song ba mon lam log pa'i dam sri gyur te* (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009c: 298). Bsod nams dge legs dpal bzang (1594–1615) is the former incarnation of Grags pa rgyal mtshan. Gad kha sa is the family name of Grags pa rgyal mtshan. Lags a rgyal is the name of his mother. On the Gad kha sa family, see McCune 2007.

These events surrounding Grags pa rgyal mtshan's death are often linked with another account by the 5th Dalai Lama, regarding the spirit residing at the spring of Dol, which is known as the "Dol rgyal."²⁷ About this Dol rgyal, the 5th Dalai Lama writes in his account of 1675:

In Dol chu mig dkar mo, a very powerful spirit of perverted aspiration was known for having harmed the doctrine and beings. This spirit had been growing stronger since the Fire-Bird Year [1657], and despite many rituals performed, it was as if I could not catch it. I performed [these rituals] often.²⁸

He continues:

A new temple was built at Dol chu mig dkar mo at the end of the Earth-Bird Year [1669], and the furniture [of the former temple] had been moved in. Although we had hoped that the spirit would come to settle in this temple, the harm increased. Recently an epidemic affected many monks and lay people, and a couple of monks died. Therefore, the monks of the monastery unanimously decided to perform rituals.²⁹

In 1669, several Rnying ma specialists were invited to perform certain rituals over the course of one week, and the 5th Dalai Lama writes:

The *dam sri* spirit was burnt together with his entourage of malevolent spirits through a fire burning ritual. They were confident that it was effective, since many wondrous signs appeared, and everyone smelled an odor of burning flesh.³⁰

²⁷ See Dreyfus 1998: 240–245.

²⁸ *dol chu mig dkar mor smon lam log pa'i dam sri mthu rtsal shin tu che ba zhid gis bstan 'gro spyi bye brag la gnod pa'i grags pa me bya nas je cher song ba'i don thog tu'ang khel ba mang rung nga la ma rag lta bu'i byed mi dkon* (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009b: 357). Dreyfus mistakenly notes that the Fire-Bird Year corresponds to the year 1636, making him think that this spirit was active before Grags pa rgyal mtshan's death (Dreyfus 1998: 270). Moreover, Dreyfus notes that this passage is found in folio n^o 157 of the second volume of the 5th Dalai Lama's autobiography, whereas it is in folio n^o 257.

²⁹ *dol chu mig dkar mor sa bya'i mjug khang pa gsar brtsigs dang ka ca sogs spos pa'i rgyal po chags rten yong la re byas na'ng gnod pa je 'phel byung zhing nye char skya ser du mar nad yams dang gra pa re gnyis shi chad byung bas rkyen byas gra tshang gi gra pa rnams mgrin gcig pa lta bu'i las sbyor byed zer bar* (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009b: 357). Here the text mentions a *rgyal po* spirit, while above, it mentions a *dam sri* spirit. *rgyal po* means "king," and here designates a class of spirits who dwell and protect a certain place.

³⁰ *sreg pa me'i las sbyor gyis dam sri 'byung po 'khor bcas bsregs par rtags mtshan gyi rigs ngo mtshar shin tu mang zhing ro bsregs pa'i dri ma lta bu kun gyis tsher [tshor?] ba'i yid ches kyi gnas su gyur ba* (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009b: 357–358).

This narrative does not link Grags pa rgyal mtshan with the spirit of Dol chu mig dkar mo. The 5th Dalai Lama just talks about a monk who had broken his vows and became this spirit. Except for the fact that the spirit of Dol chu mig started his malevolent activity in 1657, the same year the Gnas chung Oracle advised to move Grags pa rgyal mtshan's mausoleum, there is no reason to think that the 5th Dalai Lama considered the spirit of Dol chu mig to be that of Grags pa rgyal mtshan.

The link between the spirit of Dol chu mig and Grags pa rgyal mtshan is actually an invention by Shugs ldan's adepts and appears in the same text where we find the first narrative of Shugs ldan's origin.

2. The First Narrative of Shugs ldan's Origin

The *Shugs ldan be'u bum*, a compilation of texts from various authors about the deity Shugs ldan, contains a text titled "A Bunch of White Lotuses: The Short Narrative of the Origin of the Mighty Shugs ldan" (*Rgyal ba'i bstan bsrung chen po Rdo rje Shugs ldan rtsal gyi byung tshul mdo tsam brjod pa Pad dkar chun po*). This text seems to be the oldest one telling the origin of Shugs ldan.³¹ The colophon does not mention the precise name of the author, who is said to be Mchog sprul Ma ti'i mtshan can, "The Supreme Emanation Bearing the Name Ma ti." It is very likely that this Ma ti was Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1714–1762), the fourth incarnation of the Stag phu lineage, but the first one to have been recognized as such, which would explain the title *mchog sprul* "Supreme Emanation." According to the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC), Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan was also called Stag phu Ma ti.

At the beginning of the text, Stag phu Ma ti writes:

Here, concerning the short narrative of the origin of the mighty Shugs ldan, this Great Dharma Protector is, in fact, a deliberate wrathful manifestation intent on destroying all those harmful and evil [ones] who turn their anger toward the teachings of the Second Buddha [Tsong kha pa] and those who practice it. Related to this [narrative], as it is well known these days, it is also said that the subsequent rebirth of Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa, called Grags pa rgyal mtshan, was in conflict with the reincarnation of the All-knowing Yon tan rgya mtsho, and took the form of a malevolent spirit.³²

³¹ Ma ti 1983.

³² 'dir rgyal ba'i bstan srung chen po rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi byung ba'i tshul mdo tsam brjod pa la/ de yang bstan bsrung chen po 'di ni 'jam mgon rgyal ba gnyis pa'i bstan

Stag phu Ma ti then tells what he had heard from some older lamas:

During the time of Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa, Pe har, the leader of the haughty spirits, wondered which one is the immaculate teaching of the Buddha nowadays in the world, and also who is the most eminent being holding this teaching and collecting the qualities of the scriptures and realization? [He] then wandered and searched the whole world and saw that there was no purest doctrine other than the doctrine of the Venerable Master [Tsong kha pa]. [He] then did not find, among the community of those holding this teaching, a community with a greater accumulation of the qualities of scriptures and realization than the “Sublime Community” of the Great All-knowing Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa. Understanding that this Paṅ chen is a bodhisattva who has reached the highest stage of realization, [Pe har] came in front of him and said: “I have wandered the whole world and found no doctrine purer and more immaculate than the Venerable Master [Tsong kha pa]’s, and I did not find a more realized practitioner holding this doctrine than you. Therefore, I request you to unleash your pacifying, increasing, magnetizing, and destroying activities in order to eliminate all those who harm and hurt both the doctrine and practitioners of Tsong kha pa’s teaching, as well as to hold, protect, and disseminate this [teaching]. I will do whatever is in my power to help you in this [task].”³³

Then Pe har adds:

bstan 'dzin dang bcas pa la log par 'khu ba'i gnod byed gdug pa can mtha' dag tshar gcad pa'i phyir bsam bzhin du drag po'i skur bstan pa zhig stel de'i tshul yang deng sang yongs su grags par paṅ chen bsod nams grags pa'i sku skye phyi ma'i yang phyi ma sprul sku grags pa rgyal mtshan zhes bya ba thams cad mkhyen pa yon tan rgya mtsho'i sprul sku dang nor 'khrul byung ba de dregs pa'i gzugs bzung ba yin par smra zhing/ (Ma ti 1983: 178).

³³ *paṅ chen bsod nams grags pa'i sku dus su dregs pa'i sde dpon pe har gyis deng sang 'jig rten gyi khams na rgyal ba'i bstan pa dri ma med pa ji 'dra zhig/ bstan pa de 'dzin gyi skyes bu lung rtogs yon tan gyi tshogs kyi mngon par mtho ba yang ji zhig snyam du 'dzam bu gling kun tu myul te btsal pas rgyal ba'i bstan pa rnam par dag pa yang rje bla ma'i bstan pa las gzhan med par mthong zhing/ bstan 'dzin gyi skyes bu'i tshogs kyi dbus na yang paṅ chen thams cad mkhyen pa chen po bsod nams grags pa'i dpal rnam dpyod mchog gi sde zhes bya ba nyid las lung tang rtogs pa'i yon tan gyi tshogs kyi mngon par mtho ba gzhan ma rnyed cing paṅ chen nyid sa la gnas pa'i sems dpa' chen po rtogs pa mthon por byon pa zhig yin par shes nas paṅ chen gyi drung du song ste zhus pa/ ngas 'dzam bu'i gling kun tu myul yang bstan pa rnam par dag pa bsre bsalad ma zhugs pa'ng rje bla ma'i bstan pa las gzhan du mi 'dugs cing bstan 'dzin gyi skyes bu khyed las rtogs pa mtho ba gzhan ma rnyed pas sems dpa' chen po khyed kyis rje bla ma'i bstan pa bstan 'dzin dang bcas pa la gnod cing 'tshe ba mtha' dag tshar gcad pa dang/ de nyid 'dzin skyong spel ba'i phyir du zhi rgyas dbang drag gi thabs mkhas kyi mdzad pa bstan du gsol/ bdag gis de'i grogs ci nus so bgyi'o/ zhes khas blangs shing/ (Ma ti 1983: 178–179).*

Myself, I am already entrusted by the Great Master Padmasambhava to the protection of his doctrine. I promised [to do so] and I am bound by oath [to this]. Because of that, I do not have the power to develop Tsong kha pa's doctrine in particular. Please contemplate this.³⁴

After that, the author adds that Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa

deliberately manifested himself in the bodily form of the powerful protector Shugs ldan holding an obstacle-removing-vajra in order to boost the force and increase the ferocity of his enlightened activities to defend and protect Tsong kha pa's teachings and practitioners, as well as to eliminate all maleficent beings with his wrathful activity, immediately crush to dust all enemies of the doctrine, and subdue the hordes of demons.³⁵

Stag phu Ma ti does not explicitly link Shugs ldan with Grags pa rgyal mtshan, but he quotes the Regent Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705)'s *Vai dū rya Ser po*, where it is written:

The 5th Dga' ldan throne holder was Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa. His incarnation was Bsod nams ye shes dbang po, born in Stod lung. His incarnation in turn was Ngag dbang bsod nams dge legs. After him came Nang so gro lhug [Grags pa rgyal mtshan].³⁶ At first, it had been hoped he would become the incarnation of the All-knowing Yon bstan rgya mtsho. However, by becoming later the incarnation of Ngag dbang dge legs, his rebirth was unfavorable.³⁷

³⁴ *nga ni sngon slob dpon chen po mtsho skyes rdo rje'i spyen sngar de nyid kyi bstan pa bsrung zhing skyong bar sgos/ gnyer du gtad/ khas blang/ dam bca' ba yin pas de'i dbang gis dngos su rje bla ma'i bstan pa la ches cher byed nus pa min 'dug pas khyed kyis don de thugs la dgongs shig/ (Ma ti 1983: 179).*

³⁵ *bsam bzhin du rje rgyal ba gnyis pa'i bstan pa bstan 'dzin dang bcas pa bsrung zhing skyong ba dang/ gnod byed ma rungs pa mtha' dag drag po'i las kyis tshar bcad pa'i phyir 'phrin las kyi shugs shin tu myur zhing/ drag shul shin tu che ba/ bstan dgra mtha' dag skad cig nyid la thal bar rlog pa/ bdud kyi sde 'joms pa la thogs pa med pa'i rdo rje'i shugs 'chang ba bstan bsrung chen po rgyal chen rdo rje shugs ldan rtсал gyi sku'i rnam par bstan to/ (Ma ti 1983: 179–180).*

³⁶ *nang so gro lhug* seems to be a disparaging nickname given to Grags pa rgyal mtshan, since *gro lhug* mean “potbellied.” This nickname is found in the 5th Dalai Lama's autobiography, where he says: “Nang so dro lhug of Gad kha sa, who was later proclaimed as the reincarnation of *sprul sku* Bsod nams dge legs dpal bzang by Rab 'byams pa Lcag sdig, arrived that day” (*gad kha sa'i nang so dro lhug kyang slar rab 'byams pa lcags sdig sogs kyis sprul pa'i sku bsod nams dge legs dpal bzang gi sku skyer dril bsgrags pa ltar de nyin byon byung*, see Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009a: 43).

³⁷ *paṅ chen bsod nams grags pa'i sprul sku bsod nams ye shes dbang po/ de'i sprul sku ngag dbang bsod nams dge legs/ de'i sprul sku thog mar thams cad mkhyen pa yon tan rgya mtsho'i sprul sku yong du re yang rjes su ngag dbang bsod nams dge legs kyi sprul sku byas pas mthar skye gnas kyang mi bzang bar gyur to/ (Ma ti 1983: 180).* The quote is found in Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1989: 82.

Stag phu Ma ti rejects the statement that Grags pa rgyal mtshan's rebirth was unfavorable. His main argument is that Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa was an enlightened being, coming from a lineage of enlightened beings. He then gives a biography of Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa, as well as a list of the wondrous signs that appeared during his funeral.³⁸

Stag phu Ma ti then writes:

Because the 5th Dalai Lama did not approve of sectarianism, but was holding, protecting, and spreading all the new and old tenet systems, this Great Protector [Shugs Idan], in consequence of his previous aspiration and in order to increase the respect for Tsong kha pa's tradition, displayed various frightening manifestations toward the 5th Dalai Lama. When these visions appeared, [the Dalai Lama] applied different methods [to make them disappear], but it was not very effective. Then, he ordered Sa skya Rin po che to make them cease. Monks from Sa skya threw a *gtor ma*, but it was thrown back, and the harm increased. Therefore, they composed a new ritual for *gtor ma* offering and performed it. There is a lot of similar stories, but I will not develop more than that. The 5th Dalai Lama offered [Shugs Idan] a dwelling place in the region of Dol, and [Shugs Idan's] palace is still there.³⁹

This text shows that the association between Shugs Idan and the Upper Chamber lineage is not an invention by Pha bong kha Bde chen snying po, but was made much earlier, around the mid-18th century. This text is clearly an attempt to give a more positive picture of Grags pa rgyal mtshan than the one given by the 5th Dalai Lama. According to this text, Grags pa rgyal mtshan did not become a malevolent spirit after his death: the spirit who disturbed the 5th Dalai Lama, that is Shugs Idan, was as a deliberate emanation of Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa.

There were other attempts to give a better picture of Grags pa rgyal mtshan during the first half of the 18th century. One of these alternative narratives is found in the *Re'u mig* ("Chronological

³⁸ Ma ti 1983: 180–193.

³⁹ *kun gzigs lnga pa chen pos/ grub mtha' gсар rnying thams cad la phyogs ris ma gnang bar 'dzin skyong spel bar mdzad pas/ chos skyong chen po 'dis ngon gyi thugs smon gyi dbang gis 'jam mgon bla ma'i ring lugs la gces spras cher mdzad phyir/ rgyal dbang mchog la shin tu 'jigs su rung ba'i rnam 'gyur sna tshogs ston pa'i gzigs snang byung ba na/ rje nyid nas thabs sna tshogs gnang yang phan pa cher ma byung tshel/ sa skya rin po cher 'di'i zlog thabs byed dgos kyi bka' phebs pas/ sa skya pa rnam kyis gtor rgyag thongs pa'i gtor ma tshur log mthong ba dang/ gnod pa cher byung bas bstan bsrung chen po 'di la gtor chog gсар du rtsom te mchod pa byed pa sogs lo rgyus mang du gsung ba yod kyang/ 'di tsam las ma spros/ 'di'i bzhuks gnas skyabs mgon lnga pa chen pos dol gyi sa'i cha phul bas de phyogs su 'di'i pho brang yod cing/ (Ma ti 1983: 193–194).*

tables") of Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor (1704–1788). For the year 1660, he wrote:

Saying that the Tibetan demon is Grags pa rgyal mtshan of the Upper Chamber is just an expression of attachment and aversion. Actually, I wonder if it is not [the Regent] Bsod nams chos 'phel,⁴⁰ who, after passing away this year, increased his commitment to the Dge lugs tradition, clung to the protection of the Dharma, and then came to be known as a guardian of the Dge lugs tradition.⁴¹

A few lines earlier, Sum pa mkhan po mentions the birth of the "peaceful Emperor Kangxi (1654-1722), who is known to be the reincarnation of Grags pa rgyal mtshan."⁴²

We find a similar idea in a supplement to the biography of Grags pa rgyal mtshan by Dza ya pañdi ta Blo bzang 'phrin las (1642–1708/15), titled "The Scriptural Transmission of Wondrous Dream Omens" (*Mnal ltas ngo mtshar ba rnams kyi lung thob pa*). Dza ya pañdi ta writes that when Grags pa rgyal mtshan was very young, he had a vision of Sa skya Pañdi ta, Tsong kha pa, and the Pañ chen bla ma Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan, who told him:

In the future, in an Eastern city,
Disciples of Mañjuśrī's Pure Land will increase.
At that time, in the peripheral dark lands,
You should fully light the lamp of Dharma!
In summary, with lovely and compassionate aspiration,
Perfectly accomplish other's purpose to greatly benefit beings.⁴³

Some notes were added in 1924 by a Mongolian monk, 'Jam dbyangs dgyes pa'i bshes gnyen, who explains that this means Grags pa rgyal mtshan will be reborn in China, and then in Mongolia.⁴⁴ Blo bzang rta

⁴⁰ Also known as Bsod nams rab brtan (1595–1658).

⁴¹ *bod de'i rgyal po ni gzim khang gong ma sprul sku grags rgyan zer ba ni chag[s] sdang gi gtam kho nar zad do/ des na bsod nams chos 'phel ni lo 'dir 'das nas khong dge lugs la thugs zhen ches pas chos bsrung ba'i tshul bzungs nas dge lugs pa skyong zhes grags pa bden nam snyam mol* (Sum pa mkhan po 1959: 70–71).

⁴² *sprul sku grags rgyan skye bar grags pa'i khang zhi bde skyid rgyal po* (Sum pa mkhan po 1959: 70).

⁴³ *'di nas ma 'ongs shar gyi grong kyer du/ 'jam dpal zhing gi gdul bya'i tshogs rnams spel/ de nas mtha' khob mun pa'i gling dag tu/ chos kyi sgron me yongs su sbar bar gyis/ mdor na byams dang snying rje'i lhas bsam gyis/ 'gro phan rgya che'i gzhan don yang dag sgrubs/* (Dza ya pañdi ta 1983: 172).

⁴⁴ In the first sentence, it is added: "It is the sign that immediately after this life [he] will take birth in China" (*sku tshes brjes ma thag rgya nag tu skye ba bzhes pa'i rtags dang*). In the third sentence, it is added: "It is the sign that in the future, [he] will take a rebirth again in the northern country of Mongolia" (*de nas ma 'ongs pa na*

mgrin (1867–1937), in his introduction to the *Shugs ldan be'u 'bum*, considers this passage to mean that Graggs pa rgyal mtshan was reborn as the Manchu emperor.⁴⁵ Dza ya pañdi ta does not explicitly say this, but he could have inspired Sum pa mkhan po's mention that Graggs pa rgyal mtshan was reborn as the Qing emperor in his *Re'u mig*. Sum pa mkhan po's intention was certainly to refute the 5th Dalai Lama's narrative and to rehabilitate Graggs pa rgyal mtshan, giving him a posthumous fate in the person of the Emperor Kangxi. As we will see later, this mention is of great significance for the political context in which Sum pa mkhan po was writing his work.

Stag phu Ma ti's text on Shugs ldan's origin also seeks to rehabilitate Graggs pa rgyal mtshan. Stag phu Ma ti does not present Shugs ldan as the spirit of Graggs pa rgyal mtshan, but as an emanation of his previous incarnation, Pañ chen Bsod nams grags pa, one of the most famous scholars of the Dge lugs tradition. This undermines the idea that Shugs ldan is an evil spirit and does not contradict Sum pa mkhan po's argument that Graggs pa rgyal mtshan was reborn as the Emperor Kangxi. Moreover, the link between Shugs ldan and Dol rgyal assimilated Shugs ldan with a protector that was already propitiated inside the Dge lugs tradition during the first half of the 18th century.⁴⁶ This provided Shugs ldan a set of already existing rituals.

We still have to understand why, about one century after the death of Graggs pa rgyal mtshan, there was a need to produce narratives rehabilitating him and giving him a propitious posthumous fate. For this, we need to go back to the historical contexts when these conflicting narratives were written, that is the time of the rule of the 5th Dalai Lama and the time of the establishment of the Manchu protectorate.

byang phyogs sog po'i yul du yang skye ba gcig bzhes pa'i rtags yin gsungs, see Dza ya pañdi ta 1983: 172).

⁴⁵ After quoting what the Pañ chen bla ma Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan told Graggs pa rgyal mtshan, Blo bzang rta mgrin adds: "The meaning which is conveyed by many prophecies such as this one is that this master [Graggs pa rgyal mtshan] will immediately be reborn after this life as the king of China" (*ces sogs lung bstan mang du stsal ba'i don ni rje rang nyid kyis sku tshe rjes ma thag tu rgya nag gi rgyal por skye*, see Blo bzang rta mgrin 1983: 631–632).

⁴⁶ According to Dreyfus, Dol rgyal was first propitiated by the Sa skya tradition, and then the Dge lugs tradition. He writes that the Dga' ldan khri pa Ngag dbang mchog ldan (1677–1751) put an end to the practice of Dol rgyal by expelling him from Dga' ldan Monastery (Dreyfus 1998: 242–243).

3. *The Dalai Lama Institution and the Dge lugs Clergy*

The 5th Dalai Lama took power over Tibet thanks to his alliance with the Khoshut prince Gushri Khan (1582–1655) who defeated the Gtsang ruler Kar ma bstan skyong (1606–1642).⁴⁷ This enabled the Dge lugs clergy to gain control over Tibet and the 5th Dalai Lama to establish a centralized state. Although this state partly relied on the Dge lugs clergy, it also relied on other Tibetan Buddhist traditions, as well as on the lay aristocracy. Therefore, the Dge lugs clergy did not have complete control over the Tibetan state. Moreover, the 5th Dalai Lama placed himself at the head of this state, and hence most of the power was vested in his hands.

Due to this new function as the head of the centralized Tibetan state, the Dalai Lama institution became similar to a sacral kingship, but with one significant difference, namely, that the mode of succession was not hereditary, but through incarnation. Both the Dalai Lama institution and sacral kingship are based on what Dario Sabbatucci calls a “mythico-ritual association,” where royal myth empowers the king to act on every level of reality.⁴⁸

In order to become this kind of sacred ruler, the 5th Dalai Lama legitimized his institution with the myth of Avalokiteśvara. Ishihama Yumiko explains that the dissemination of the idea that the Dalai Lamas were emanations of Avalokiteśvara came in three steps.⁴⁹ The first one was through the 5th Dalai Lama’s composition of the biographies of the 3rd and 4th Dalai Lamas, where he presents them as emanations of Avalokiteśvara. The second step was the construction of the Potala Palace. The third and last step of this legitimation process was the dissemination of the idea that the Dalai Lama was an emanation of Avalokiteśvara through tantric initiations as well as mural paintings.

Since at least the 13th century, Avalokiteśvara has been considered by the Tibetans as their genitor, and the two most important

⁴⁷ On these events, see Richardson 1976, Shakabpa 1984: 100–124, Smith 1996: 105–117, and Karmay 2009.

⁴⁸ Sabbatucci 1978: 264–266. According to Sabbatucci, the myth is a symbolic institution whose cultural function is to determine what is immutable and not subject to human intervention. The rite is also a symbolic institution whose function is to act on the aspect of reality that a society perceives as mutable, subject to human intervention. There is a functional separation between the myth and the rite since the rite operates when the myth is associated with a defective order. The rite gives the opportunity to act as a historical subject on the world, even though this mythico-ritual association has the apparent effect to deny any human historic action (Sabbatucci 1978: 236–247).

⁴⁹ Ishihama 1993 & 2015.

emperors, or *chos rgyal*⁵⁰ of the Tibetan Empire, Srong btsan sgam po and Khri srong lde btsan, were also considered an emanation of Avalokiteśvara.⁵¹ The myth of the Dalai Lamas as emanations of Avalokiteśvara united the *chos rgyal* and the Dalai Lama in the same lineage and conferred on the Dalai Lamas the legitimacy of being political rulers of Tibet. This myth also helped to confer antiquity to the Dalai Lama's lineage by including different Buddhist masters who were considered *a posteriori* emanations of Avalokiteśvara.⁵² The Dalai Lama's lineage was recent at the time of the 5th Dalai Lama and certainly did not enjoy the same prestige as it does today. Extending the Dalai Lama's lineage back in Tibetan history to the time of the early *chos rgyal* increased its fame and conferred it a sacred dimension.

The Potala Palace, to which the 5th Dalai Lama moved his residence, the Dga' ldan pho brang, from 'Bras spungs Monastery, was built on the Dmar po ri, where the former palace of the first *chos rgyal* Srong btsan sgam po (617–649) was thought to have been built. Finally, tantric initiations helped the Tibetan people associate the Dalai Lama with Avalokiteśvara and to accept him as their ruler.⁵³

To strengthen the link with the ancient empire of the *chos rgyal*, the 5th Dalai Lama introduced various state rituals that were performed at Rnam rgyal Monastery, the Dalai Lamas' personal monastery.⁵⁴ One of these rituals was the 100,000 offerings to Padmasambhava (*Guru rin po che 'bum tshogs*).⁵⁵

The incorporation of the Gnas chung Oracle into the government was also a means to strengthen the power of the 5th Dalai Lama at the head of the centralized Tibetan state.⁵⁶ The Gnas chung Oracle (*sku rten*) is possessed by the deity Pe har rgyal po, who enters his body in order to advise the Dalai Lama and his government. Pe har is

⁵⁰ The Tibetan term for emperor is "*btsan po*." The term "*chos rgyal*" means "Dharma king," or "religious king," and refers specifically to the three *btsan po* who actively supported the diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet. They are: Srong btsan sgam po (617–649), Khri srong lde btsan (742–797), and Ral pa can (802–836).

⁵¹ This appears in the *Mañi bka' 'bum*, which has been used by the 5th Dalai Lama. See Kapstein 1992.

⁵² It actually also includes the mythical ruler Gnya' khri btsan po, considered as the first king of Tibet, as well as Atiśa's disciple 'Bron ston (1008–1064) (Ishihama 1993: 46).

⁵³ See Ishihama 1993 & 2015.

⁵⁴ Rnam rgyal Monastery was founded by the 3rd Dalai Lama (1543–1588), in order to perform rituals for the protection of Altan Khan (1507–1582), and was moved to the Potala Palace by the 5th Dalai Lama (Dorjee 1989: 33).

⁵⁵ The 14th Dalai Lama decided to restore this ritual in 1973, just before the publication of the "Yellow book" and the beginning of the Shugs Idan controversy. See Dreyfus 1998: 260.

⁵⁶ Dreyfus 1998: 260–261.

believed to have been one of the first deities tamed by Padmasambhava, who made him the protector of Bsam yas Monastery at the time of the *chos rgyal* Khri srong lde btsan (742–797).⁵⁷ This event not only marked an important step in the diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet but also, or maybe above all, marked the establishment of an imperial rule legitimized through Buddhism. Indeed, the conversion of Pe har to the chief of the protector deities represented dominion over the regional and clan factions that the Tibetan Empire wanted to subdue.

The same logic was at work in the 5th Dalai Lama's desire to impose his rule on the whole country. The 5th Dalai Lama's political model necessitated that he unite all the Tibetan Buddhist traditions around him. However, the unity of these traditions was not an end in itself, but a means for the establishment of a particular political regime. Therefore, via his close association with the Gnas chung Oracle, the Dalai Lama employed Padmasambhava and Pe har as symbols not just of religious tolerance, but also, or perhaps mainly, as political symbols legitimizing the new regime he established.

This political regime was characterized by the principle of *chos srid zung 'brel*, often translated as “union of politics and religion.” David Seyfort Ruegg avers that with *chos srid zung 'brel*, the Dalai Lama combined the secular and religious aspects of the *mchod yon* relationship.⁵⁸ However, I argue that *chos srid zung 'brel* introduced an important shift, I would say a rupture, in the political system of the patron-priest relationship, since the 5th Dalai Lama considered the *mchod yon* couple to be formed by the Regent and Gushri Khan.⁵⁹ Therefore, in this context, we can assume that the 5th Dalai Lama considered his institution to be above the *mchod yon* relationship.⁶⁰

The tensions between the 5th Dalai Lama and the Dge lugs clergy that both Tsyrempilov and Dreyfus mention could have been the result of the 5th Dalai Lama's monopolization of power and his use of the figure of Avalokiteśvara to increase his own charisma, as well as

⁵⁷ Shen-Yu 2010. On Pe har, also see Bell 2013.

⁵⁸ Ruegg 1991: 450.

⁵⁹ See Ishihama 1993: 39–43 and Karmay 2009: 511.

⁶⁰ Ishihama Yumiko concludes: “[F]rom 1642 onwards the political power of the Dalai Lama as it existed on a theoretical level gradually increased, reaching its culmination during the time of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, and that in the years between 1642 and 1653 the Dalai Lama took various actions presenting himself to the populace as a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara. Since Avalokiteśvara was believed already before the establishment of the Dge lugs pa school to be the bodhisattva charged with converting Tibet, it is beyond doubt that the faith engendered in the minds of both the nobility and the general populace as a result of the Dalai Lama's actions served to gradually enhance the power of the Dalai Lama and raise him to a position on a different level from that of the regent and Gushri Khan and his descendants” (Ishihama 1993: 54).

the use of Rnying ma elements to channel the prestige of the imperial time. In this context, Stag phu Ma ti's remark that Shugs Idan was disturbing the 5th Dalai Lama because he did not approve of sectarianism can be understood not as a mere stand against religious tolerance, but as an opposition to the very structure of the 5th Dalai Lama's political regime and the sacred status this regime conferred to the Dalai Lama.

It is impossible to prove that this political opposition was the cause of the rivalry between the 5th Dalai Lama and Grags pa rgyal mtshan. However, this would explain why the 5th Dalai Lama was so keen to destroy the Upper Chamber, remove its lineage from Tibetan history, and promote such a negative image of Grags pa rgyal mtshan.

The opposition to the 5th Dalai Lama's rule is more identifiable after his death. Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho concealed the 5th Dalai Lama's death until the 6th Dalai Lama was old enough to be enthroned. However, trouble arose in Tibet as the Manchus and the Dzungars were upset that the Regent concealed the 5th Dalai Lama's death. The Dzungars took the inappropriate behavior of the 6th Dalai Lama as a pretext to fight for control of Tibet and killed the Regent in 1705, while the 6th Dalai Lama died in custody *en route* to China in 1706. But the Dzungars were defeated in 1720, and the Manchus were able to bring the 7th Dalai Lama, who was then under their control, back to Lhasa and establish a *mchod yon* relationship. This did not last, as the 7th Dalai Lama was sent back to China in 1728, when Tibet was under the rule of Pho lha nas Bsod noms stobs rgyas (1689–1747), who did not want any Manchu interference in his rule. The 7th Dalai Lama was allowed to come back in 1732, but his authority was restricted to religious matters. Finally, Pho lha nas was murdered in 1747, as was his son Gyur med rnam rgyal in 1750.⁶¹ This cleared the way for a Dge lugs rule based on a *mchod yon* alliance with the Qing emperor that lasted until the beginning of the 20th century.

This new regime was certainly closer to what the Dge lugs clergy wanted to establish after Gushri Khan's victory over the Gtsang ruler. Indeed, some important lamas of the Dge lugs tradition took part in this struggle against Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho.⁶² But the hope

⁶¹ On these events, see Shakabpa 1984: 125–152 and Tsyrempilov 2003: 56–57.

⁶² Dreyfus writes: "As long as the Fifth was alive, the Dge lugs hierarchy had to endure his rule, but his death changed the situation. His prime minister Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho at first tried to conceal his death. When this proved impossible, he attempted to continue the Fifth's tradition by appointing his candidate, Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho, as the Sixth Dalai-Lama. But with the latter's failure to behave as a Dalai-Lama, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho lost the possibility to continue the task started by the Fifth. A few years later (1705) he was killed after being defeated by a complex coalition of Dge lugs hierarchs led by 'Jam dbyangs

for a powerful Tibetan centralized state, which persisted in Tibet since the collapse of the empire in the 9th century, did not disappear.⁶³ It certainly kept haunting the mind of some Tibetans during the Manchu protectorate, and each Dalai Lama has certainly been seen by some Tibetans as the potential leader of an independent and centralized Tibetan state.

In this context, Grags pa rgyal mtshan became the symbol of the opposition to the 5th Dalai Lama's regime, as well as the symbol of the *mchod yon* alliance with the Qing dynasty, as it was illustrated by Sum pa mkhan po's idea that he took rebirth in the person of the Emperor Kangxi.⁶⁴ We cannot affirm that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was the figurehead of the opposition to the 5th Dalai Lama's regime when he was alive, but it is quite obvious that he was seen as such around the mid-18th century.

The merging of Grags pa rgyal mtshan with the Dol rgyal into the figure of Shugs ldan allowed the already-existing propitiation practice of Dol rgyal to be included into the mythico-ritual system elaborated around Shugs ldan. This was a means to worship Shugs ldan as a divinized form of Grags pa rgyal mtshan and as the symbol of the opposition to the 5th Dalai Lama's regime. This was also a means to worship Shugs ldan as the symbol of the political system based on the *mchod yon* alliance with the Qing, which was seen as the best one for the interests of the Dge lugs tradition.

bzhad pa, the Dzungar Mongols and Lha bzang Khan backed by the Manchu emperor" (Dreyfus 1998: 235). On 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa (1648–1721), see also Tsyrempilov 2003: 57–58.

⁶³ About the persistence of the memory of the Tibetan Empire, see Dreyfus 2003.

⁶⁴ Sum pa mkhan po was invited twice to Beijing by the Manchu Emperor Qianlong, where he met the 3rd Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje (1717–1786). Dreyfus states that Sum pa mkhan po was a Dge lugs sectarian (Dreyfus 1998: 259). Sum pa mkhan po was recognized as the reincarnation of Sum pa bla ma by 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje (1648–1721) and was the student of the 2nd Lcang skya bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan (1642–1714). Later, he became the teacher of the 3rd Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737–1802). As Matthew Kapstein has shown, the 3rd Thu'u bkwan did not agree with his master Sum pa mkhan po's sectarianism against the Rnying ma tradition. However, the 3rd Lcang skya was close to the Manchu emperor (Kapstein 1989: 234–237). This would prove that preference for the political regime based on the *mchod yon* relationship did not necessarily imply a sectarian approach. Maria Soloshcheva identifies Sum pa mkhan po, along with the 2nd Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje (1642–1714) and the 2nd Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos skyi nyi ma (1680–1736) as Dge lugs "purists" (Soloshcheva 2014: 8). We can add Stag phu Ma ti to this group, as Stag phu Ma ti was the student of 'Jam dbyang bde pa'i rdo rje (1682–1741), who himself had for teacher 'Jam dbyang bzhad pa'i rdo rje (1648–1721). Moreover, Stag phu Ma ti was the teacher of Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po (1728–1791), who was recognized as the reincarnation of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje.

4. Conclusion

I have shown that the link between Shugs Idan and Grags pa rgyal mtshan appears in a text written in the mid-18th century, around the same time when Sum pa mkhan po expressed the idea that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was reborn as the Qing Emperor Kangxi. Both these narratives appeared precisely when a *mchod yon* relationship was established with the Qing dynasty.

Through these narratives, Grags pa rgyal mtshan was rehabilitated as a genuine incarnate lama and the *mchod yon* alliance with the Qing dynasty legitimized by the idea that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was reborn as the Qing Emperor Kangxi.

In this context, the narrative of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's becoming Shugs Idan helped to show that the political regime established by the 5th Dalai Lama conflicted with the Dge lugs tradition's interests, since the 5th Dalai Lama was not exclusively relying on the Dge lugs tradition in both his religious practice and his political structure.

Therefore, the conflict among the Dge lugs tradition can be explained as an opposition between the partisans of two different political regimes: one built on the model of the sacral kingship of the imperial *chos rgyal*, in order to reunify Tibetans of all religious traditions under a centralized state, the other built on the model of the *mchod yon* relationship, in order to unify a Dge lugs tradition that had transcended Tibetan borders, so that Tibet was included within the most powerful Asian empire of that time.

The alternative narratives of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's posthumous fate have been written not only for the purpose of rehabilitating the figure of Grags pa rgyal mtshan, but also to promote this figure, together with Shugs Idan, as a symbol of the political regime based on the *mchod yon* alliance with the Qing emperor that has been established when these alternative narratives were written.

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Tibetan Manuscript on Birchbark from the Collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts RAS

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A sing birchbark as a writing material is not extraordinary but quite unusual for Tibetan manuscript culture. Agnieszka Helman-Ważny, the author of the most comprehensive up to date study on Tibetan codicology, gives only one example of a manuscript on birchbark. However, the item she mentions is, in fact, not written in Tibetan but in the Sanskrit Śāradā script.¹ The Berlin Turfan-Collection² and the Mongolian Academy of Sciences³ hold several Tibetan birchbark manuscripts. When my colleague Kirill Bogdanov drew my attention to the text that became the subject of the present article, I realized that I had never seen anything like it before. There was a multitude of fragile slips, so thin that they resembled onionskin, covered with red and silver writing that was barely legible without a magnifying glass (Fig. 1). The *res accessoria* and the archives told a compelling story, but unfortunately, some pieces to the puzzle are still missing.



Fig. 1 — Manuscript SI 6618. Sample of a folio (recto and verso).

Other folios are written using either silver or red ink, but here two types of ink are used at the same time.
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- ¹ Helman-Ważny 2014: 63–67 and Kawasaki 2004. Another monograph written by A. Helman-Ważny in collaboration with Brandon Dotson deals with the same topic and is dedicated to early Tibetan documents, however, it does not mention birchbark as a writing material (Dotson & Helman-Ważny 2016).
- ² Taube 1980: 93–101. Texte Nr. 37–43.
- ³ Chiodo 2000: IX.

1. Provenance

The notes enclosed in the manuscript and the box in which it was kept were inscribed with the name of Nikolai Petrovich Likhachev (1862–1936). He was a prominent historian as well as a passionate collector whose interests lay beyond the scope of the Russian documents he used in his academic work. He also had an eye for any valuable and interesting written works, including the ones in Asian languages.⁴ The above-mentioned Kirill Bogdanov, a researcher at the Department of Manuscripts and Documents of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IOM RAS), prepared a short overview of all items that had previously been part of Likhachev's collection.⁵ During the preparation process, Bogdanov discovered that some of these texts, including the ones in Tibetan, were still not listed in the inventory, so he later presented me with the birchbark manuscript.

The slips (*folia*) of the birchbark manuscript were divided into two sets. I will conventionally refer to them as **Set 1** and **Set 2**. **Set 1** was wrapped into a pre-revolutionary advertising brochure, while **Set 2** was kept inside the blue folders characteristic of Likhachev's collection.

I discovered the reason for this division in the former owner's records⁶ and found notes in pencil about his acquisitions.⁷ One of the notes reads:

Thin Tibetan leaflets [**Set 1**] bought in Leningrad shortly before the [World] War [I] from one traveler, who brought them [maybe] from Mongolia and [who] was related to the Academy of Sciences [...]. A folder with similar folios [**Set 2**] was bought in 1914 from N. M. Berezovsky (what it is—[nobody] knows), [he was] not an antiquarian, [just a] traveler, it seems [that he] brought the items himself.

There was another note written in two different handwritings attached

⁴ For the detailed biography of N. P. Likhachev and information on his works and collected treasures, please refer to the exhibition catalogue "*Zvuchat lish' pis'mena...*" ("*In Written Words Alone...*") that was compiled in 2012 to commemorate his 150th birthday.

⁵ Bogdanov 2012.

⁶ St. Petersburg Branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Collection No. 246 (N. P. Likhachev), inventory No. 2, item No. 136: Information on the Provenance, Contents and Defining of the Items from the Likhachev's collection. See 132b, 133a.

⁷ I suppose that the gradual decline of Likhachev's position in the academia after the World War I and the October Revolution of 1917 hindered him to put this information into a more accessible form. Apparently, the notes were made already after 1924, because the city (formerly, St. Petersburg) is called Leningrad there.

to **Set 1** (Fig. 2). The first inscription (most likely belonging to the Tibetologist Andrei I. Vostrikov)⁸ says: "A Sanskrit text, written on birchbark (*bhūrja*) in Tibetan script (cursive), related to the Buddhist work *Mahāyāna-tantra*. Found at Khara-Khoto (Chinese Turkestan)."⁹ The second handwriting rather unexpectedly belongs to the prominent Arabist Ignaty Yu. Kratchkovsky. It reads: "Acquired by I. Yu. Kratchkovsky in 1943 in Moscow from the citizen Yu. M. Walther." How could these strange circumstances be explained?

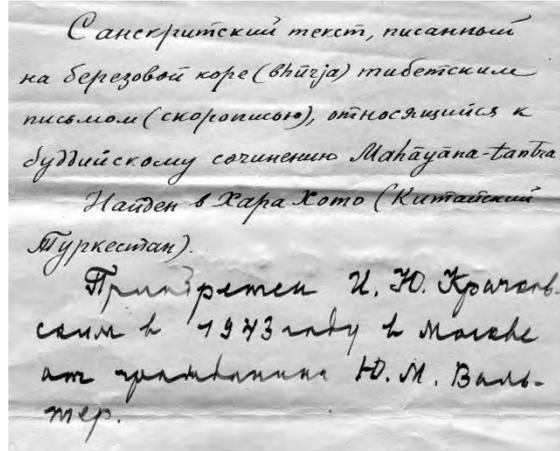


Fig. 2 — Note attached to the manuscript SI 6618. The handwriting of the unidentified person resembles that of A. I. Vostrikov (upper part) and I. Yu. Kratchkovsky (lower part).
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We should travel back in time to the year 1925 when the house of Likhachev's family in St. Petersburg, also used as a storage for his immense library, was turned into the Museum of Paleography. In 1930, Likhachev was arrested and sent into exile, and the Museum and its holdings were moved to the Library of the Academy. The Museum of Paleography was renamed into "The Museum of Books, Documents, and Writings," and was later transformed into an "Institute" in 1931. After Likhachev's death in 1936 and the dissolution of the Institute, Likhachev's collection was distributed among different museums, institutes, and individuals.

I. Yu. Kratchkovsky used to work with the Likhachev's Arabic acquisitions since pre-revolutionary times. Being familiar with the

⁸ This identification is based on the comparison of samples of A. I. Vostrikov's handwriting preserved at the Archives of the Orientalists at IOM RAS.

⁹ Khara-Khoto, the "dead city," that once was an outpost of the Xi Xia Empire (11th–13th centuries), is located on the territory of Inner Mongolia (and not exactly in Chinese Turkestan).

contents of the collection, he, much later in 1943, could identify the Tibetan items and acquire it for the Institute of Oriental Studies.¹⁰ The bargain with someone described as a “citizen Yu. M. Walther” took place in Moscow.¹¹

Yury M. Walther was a famous bibliophile mentioned several times in the memoirs of his peers, for instance: “I knew Yu. M. Walther (1919–1987) for about 15 years [...]. For many years, he worked in a sanatorium as the chief executive doctor. In the book world, he is known as one of the most eminent bibliophiles of the last decades.”¹² Ultimately, we might never be able to trace the path of the Tibetan birchbark manuscript and how it fell into the hands of the Moscow bibliophile after the dissolution of the Likhachev’s collection in 1936, and how I. Yu. Kratchkovsky managed to obtain it. Also, Anna Dolinina (1923–2017), a devout disciple of Kratchkovsky and the author of his biography entitled *Nevol’nik dolga* (“Captive of the Debt”), assured me that she had never encountered any mentions about Tibetan manuscripts in his papers.

The origin story of **Set 2** is more detailed: it was received from N. M. Berezovsky, as stated in Likhachev’s notes, and as it is verified by the visiting card of Berezovsky,¹³ which is kept together with **Set 2**. Nikolai Berezovsky (1879–1941), an architect,¹⁴ accompanied his cousin, Mikhail Berezovsky, during the expedition to the city of Kucha in East Turkestan in 1905–1908.¹⁵ After the dissolution of the Likhachev collection, **Set 2** (unlike **Set 1** that virtually ended up on the black market) was directly passed over to the Institute of Oriental

¹⁰ The Institute of Oriental Studies (IOS), the successor of the Asiatic Museum, was established in Leningrad in 1930. The Institute was moved to Moscow in 1951. However, the Department of Oriental Manuscripts (including all archives of the IOS) remained in Leningrad and in February 1956, it was reorganized into the Leningrad Branch of the IOS. On June 19, 2007, the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences ordered to transform the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies into the independent Institute of Oriental Manuscripts.

¹¹ During the siege of Leningrad in the World War II, Kratchkovsky took charge of the Institute of Oriental Studies and refused to be evacuated. Because of his deteriorating health he finally had to leave Leningrad in July 1942, and stayed in Moscow until 1944.

¹² Markov 2004: 312.

¹³ The card has Likhachev’s inscription: “Bought from him in October 1913.” This must be closer to the truth than the pencil notes made much later, which state that the bargain was made in 1914. I suppose that the inscription on the card was made at the times when the acquiring took place.

¹⁴ In 1909, Nikolai Berezovsky, in collaboration with Gavriil V. Baranovsky, created the architectural design of *Kun brtse chos gnas grwa tsang*, commonly known as Datsan, the Buddhist temple officially consecrated and opened in St. Petersburg in 1915.

¹⁵ Vorobyeva-Desyatovskaya 2008.

Studies in 1938.¹⁶

Both sets of the manuscript's folios made a rather complicated journey before they ended up at the Institute of Oriental Studies (Fig. 3). In 2018, the manuscript was finally given the call number SI 6618 and since then it is part of the Institute's Serindian collection.¹⁷

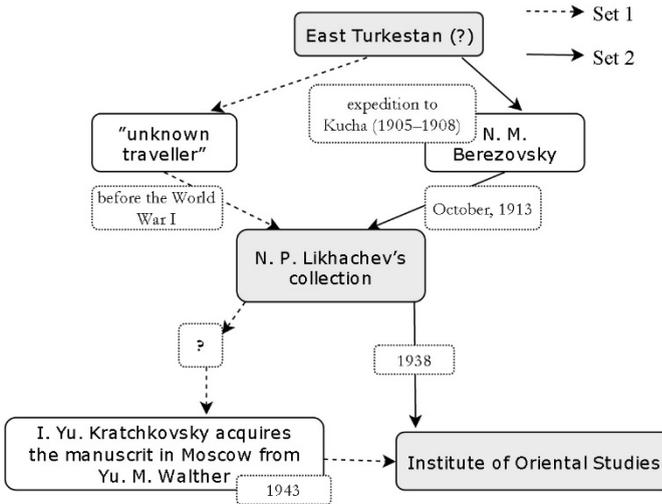


Fig. 3 — Provenance scheme

2. General Description

Both sets contain exactly 42 folios, adding up to 84 folios in total, all in the *pothi* format.¹⁸ Their length varies from 13 to 26 cm, the width is from 1 to 2 cm. Most of the pages contain three lines of text, but there are also some that consist of one, two, and five lines. The maximum line-height does not exceed 4 mm.

54 folios are written in silver ink, 29 in red ink, and one folio in both

¹⁶ "The List of Manuscripts and Documents Passed to the Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, from the Institute of Book, Document and Writing," was compiled in 1938. St. Petersburg Branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Collection No. 152, inventory No. 1a, item No. 604, folio 76. At present, the Collection No. 152 is temporarily stored at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts.

¹⁷ Tibetan items kept at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts are distributed among several units: the Collection of Tibetan Manuscripts and Blockprints, the Collection of Tibetan Texts from Khara-Khoto, the Collection of Tibetan Texts from Dunhuang. Wooden tablets, as well as some other items brought from the Serindian region, belong to the respective collection.

¹⁸ This fact made me think that someone divided the manuscript intentionally.

(Fig. 1).

Typically for the Tibetan manuscript culture, a pen (most likely a reed or bamboo pen) was used as the writing implement. Despite the overall neatness of the writing, split edges can be seen at the ends of the strokes.

Birchbark material is extremely thin and fragile. The structure of the bark naturally forms the difference of colors: one side of the folio is always darker than the other, to the point that the lenticels characteristic of the birchbark texture are not visible.

The manuscript is written in elegant *dbu med* style the accuracy of which varies in different parts. According to Sam van Schaik, this writing style developed in Tibet in the post-imperial period (after the 9th century CE) and gradually changed over time.¹⁹ The style of this particular manuscript has many similarities with the headless styles of Buddhist texts from Dunhuang (10th century) and Khara-Khoto (12th–13th centuries). However, without sufficient evidence, drawing any comparison is very tricky since the different variations of this style were used until recent times.

The manuscript is divided into different parts: each section may contain one or several texts and has its own foliation. The foliation consists of digits (Fig. 4) and letters (Fig. 5).

¹⁹ van Schaik 2012.



Fig. 4 — Manuscript SI 6618: Verses from the *Prātimokṣa Sūtra*.
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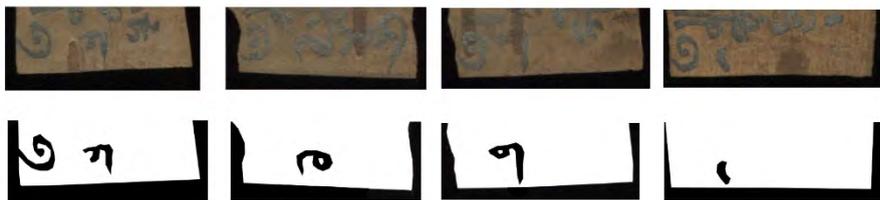


Fig. 5 — Manuscript SI 6618: Foliation using Tibetan letters

3. Contents

The passage from the *Prātimokṣa Sūtra* occupies two folios of the manuscript, the remaining 82 folios contain a variety of *dhāraṇīs* and mantras.

The *Prātimokṣa* verses start on the third line of the recto side of the first folio.²⁰ They are preceded by *Pratītyasamutpādahṛdaya* or *Rten 'brel snying po* (“The Heart[-mantra] of Dependent Origination”) and other formulae.

The verses are quoted below in its entirety to give a full picture of the features of the manuscript’s particular rendering of Tibetan.²¹ Significant variations from the corresponding canonical version²² are provided in the footnotes.

(1r3) bzod pa dka' thub bzod pa dam ni/²³
 mya ngan 'das pa mchog ces sangs rgyas gsung/
 rab tu (1v1) byung ba gzhan la gnod pa dang/
 gzhan la 'tshe bas dges sbyong ma yin no/
 myig ldan 'gro bar 'dod²⁴ pa yis/
 nyam nga bdag 'dzin ji bzhin du/²⁵
 (1v2) mkhas pas 'tsho ba'i 'jig rten 'dir/

²⁰ Folio number (Tibetan digit) is found on the left side of the recto page.

²¹ The transliteration used here differs from the Extended Wylie Transliteration Scheme in the following way: 1. Plus sign (+) is used when there's no *tsheg* separating syllables, e.g., *ba+dzra*. 2. International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) is used when necessary, e.g., *rnams*.

²² Sde dge edition of *So sor thar pa'i mdo* (D2): 20a4–20b2.

²³ In the canonical version this line has nine syllables: *bzod pa dka' thub dam pa bzod pa ni*. It is interesting that the very same variation can be found in the inscription on the back of the image of Tārā dated ca. second half of the 11th century kept at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Kossak & Singer 1998: 59).

²⁴ D2: 'gro ba yod.

²⁵ D2: nyam nga ba dag ji bzhin du.

sdig pa dag ni yong+su spong/
 skur pa mi gdab gnod myi bya/
 so sor thar pa'ang bsdam par bya/²⁶
 lhag pa'i sems la (1v3) yang dag sbyor/
 'di ni sa+ngyas bstan pa yin/
 ji ltar bung bas me tog las/
 kha dog dri las mi gnod par/
 khu [ba] zhibs nas 'phur ba ltar/
 (2r1) de bzhin thub pa grong du rgyu/
 bdag gi rigs dang mi rigs la/
 brtag par bya ste gzhan rnaṃs kyi/
 myi mthun pa dang gzhan dag gi/
 byas dang (2r2) ma byas rnam[s] la myin/
 lhag pa'i sems la bgya(! =bag) bya ste/
 thub pa'i thub gzhi rnaṃs la bslab/
 nyer zhi rtag tu dran ldan pa'i/
 skyob pa mya ngan med pa yin/
 (2r3) sbyin pas bsod rnaṃs rab tu 'phal(='phel)/
 legs bsdam dgra bsogs mi 'gyur ro/
 dges dang ldan pas sdig pa spong/
 nyon mongs zad pas mya ngan (2v1) 'das/
 sdig pa ci yang²⁷ myi bya ste/
 dges(!) ba phun sum tshogs par spyad/
 rang gi sems ni yongs su gdul/
 'di ni sangs rgyas bstan pa yin/
 lus (2v2) kyi sdom pa legs pa ste/
 ngag gi sdom pa legs pa yin/
 yid kyi sdom pa legs pa ste/
 tham-[ca]d du ni sdom pa legs/
 kun du bsdam pa'i dges(!) (2v3) slong ni/
 sdugs bsngal kun las rab tu grol/
 ngag rnaṃs bsrung zhing yid kyis rab bsdams ste/

²⁶ The following two lines are missing: *zas kyi tshod kyang rig par byal bas mtha'i gnas su gnas par byal.*

²⁷ D2: *thams cad* instead of *ci yang*.

lus kyis mi dge ba dag myi byed cing/²⁸

The text shows no signs of the old Tibetan orthography that was gradually disappearing after the standardization of the language in the 9th century, such as the reversed *gi gu*, the “strong *da*” (*da drag*) and the “supporting ‘a’” (*‘a rten*). The only feature of the old orthography is the inconsistent palatalization of the consonant *m* that occurs with *gi gu* and should appear along with *‘geng bu* as well. In this case, we have *myin*, *myi*, but at the same time, *mi* and *med*.

This particular fragment of the *Prātimokṣa Sūtra*, the so-called “patience creed” (since it starts with the word *bzod pa*), was widely used for inscriptions in the shape of Buddhist stūpas on the back of *thangkas*.²⁹ This made me think about the function of the birchbark manuscript that was elegantly written, yet so inconvenient to read at the same time. The usage of silver and red ink suggests that the manuscript was created for merit accumulation and for keeping it in a holy place.

As I have mentioned above, except for the passage from the *Prātimokṣa*, the birchbark manuscript consists only of *dhāraṇīs* and mantras. It is possible to give neither a proper description of them in the present article, nor even a complete list of the *dhāraṇīs*—some lines, especially the ones on the darker side of the folio, are difficult to read, some folios have bent edges that hide fragments of the text, some are partially lost.

Among the texts presented in this manuscript, one can find popular ones, such as the *Uṣṇīṣavijayā* and *Sitātapatrā-dhāraṇī*, and less common ones, such as the *Maitri-pratijñā-dhāraṇī*. The *Uṣṇīṣavijayā* and *Pratītyasamutpādaḥrdaya* (that preceded the *Prātimokṣa* verses and repeated other parts of the manuscript) belong to the “five classes of great *dhāraṇīs*” (*gzungs chen sde lngā*) recommended for depositing into stupas by Tibetan scholars.³⁰ Yale Bentor provides a helpful quotation from the canonical work *Vajrāvalī* by Abhayākaragupta that concerns birchbark in the context of a stupa consecration: “Whenever you wish to make a special homage to relics (*sku gdung*) of the Tathāgata, you should at the time of making [an image or stupa] leave the head or back of an image or the center of the stūpa hollow. When completed, you should write on birch bark with saffron or bezoar: *namo bhagavate* [...]; and also, special *dhāraṇīs*...”³¹

²⁸ For translation, see Prebish 1996: 111–112.

²⁹ Kossak & Singer 1998: 59; Martin 2001: 50; Heller 2005; Quintman 2013: 482.

³⁰ Bentor 1995: 256 and Bentor 2003: 24, 32.

³¹ Bentor 1995: 255.

4. Conclusions

While preparing this publication, I pursued two purposes. Firstly, it is meant as a humble tribute to N. P. Likhachev, whose collection was so diverse that “it had been only the irreplaceable personality of the founder himself which had given it [its] unity.”³²

Secondly, I considered it important to introduce a manuscript written on a relatively rare material. Despite some archaic features and its stated provenance from East Turkestan (or even Khara-Khoto), the manuscript seems to be somewhat modern, definitely not belonging to the Khara-Khoto period (i.e., until 14th century). There are no sufficient clues to date it with at least relative precision. The repertoire of texts (that I hope will be studied in detail by those interested in consecration rituals), as well as their external appearance, allow me to conclude that we are dealing with Dharma relics—sacred textual objects that were meant to be inserted inside a stupa.

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³² Kratchkovsky 1953: 157.

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A Study of the Tibetan Linguistic Picture of the World Using Computer Ontology¹

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he research presented in this article is a summary of several research projects aimed at the creation of a full-scale natural language processing engine based on a consistent formal model of Tibetan vocabulary, grammar, and semantics, verified by and developed on the basis of a representative, hand-tested corpus of texts.

The *Basic Corpus of Classical Tibetan*² and the *Corpus of Indigenous Tibetan Grammar Treatises*³ comprise 34,000 and 48,000 tokens,⁴ respectively. Tibetan texts are represented both in the Tibetan Unicode script and in standard Wylie romanization.⁵ These corpora are developed, annotated, and tested manually by Tibetologists, and in this sense, are unique.

The ultimate goal of our project is to create a formal model (a grammar and a linguistic ontology) of the Tibetan language, including morphosyntax, syntax of phrases, hyperphrase unities,⁶ and semantics, that can produce a correct morpho-syntactic, syntactic, and semantic annotation of the corpora without any further manual corrections.

This study is based on the technologies and tools of the AIIRE project.⁷ AIIRE⁸ is a free open-source natural language understanding

¹ This work was supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, Grant No. 19-012-00616, "Semantic Interpreter of Texts in the Tibetan Language."

² "The Basic Corpus of the Tibetan Classical Language." http://corpora.spbu.ru/bonito/index_gram.html. Accessed March 3, 2020.

³ "The Corpus of Indigenous Tibetan Grammar Treatises." <http://corpora.spbu.ru/bonito/index.html>. Accessed March 3, 2020.

⁴ A token is the smallest unit that divides each corpus. Its usual application refers to lexical tokens, words or other atomic parse elements.

⁵ Grokhovskii *et al.* 2015: 182–191.

⁶ A hyper phrase is a segment of text in the form of a sequence of two or more independent sentences, united by a common theme in semantic blocks.

⁷ Dobrov *et al.* 2016: 215–222.

⁸ "AIIRE—Artificial Intelligence Information Retrieval Engine." <http://svn.aiire.org/repos/tproc/trunk/t/>. Accessed March 3, 2020.

system (NLU system).⁹ This system implements a full-scale procedure for natural language understanding—from graphematics¹⁰ to morphological annotation and syntactic parsing—and even includes semantic analysis.

The development of the morphosyntactic analyzer of Tibetan texts and the formal grammar necessary for it has been very complicated due to the ambiguity of both the segmentation of Tibetan texts into morphemes (since there are no word delimiters between word forms in Tibetan writing) and the syntactic parsing. Syntactic parsing without the help of semantic restrictions leads to combinatorial explosions. To resolve the problem of morphosyntactic ambiguity, our team¹¹ decided to use the AIIRE tool for semantic analysis—thus developing a *computer-based linguistic ontology*.

Such linguistic ontologies are designed for automatic processing of unstructured texts. Units of linguistic ontologies are based on meanings of actual natural language phrases. Ontologies of this kind model a linguistic picture of the world represented by language semantics.

The present article describes the process of developing a computer ontology of the Tibetan language, as well as a methodology of its practical application for the current corpus and opportunities for its use in the field of interdisciplinary studies of Tibetan linguistics and wider research on the Tibetan linguistic picture of the world.

⁹ AIIRE is developed and distributed under the terms of the GNU General Public License that is a free, copyleft license for software and other kinds of works. The name of the system, GNU, is a recursive acronym meaning “GNU’s Not Unix.” This acronym is a way of both paying tribute to the technical ideas of Unix and saying that GNU is something different. Technically, GNU is like the operating system Unix. But unlike Unix, GNU gives its users freedom.

¹⁰ The initial stage of text processing usually includes the segmentation of input text into graphemes and further refers to the recognition of words and additional graphemic components (e.g., punctuation marks). For inflectional languages the input units are easy to identify as word forms, separated by space, punctuation marks, etc. However, that is not the case with the Tibetan language, as there are no word delimiters. The AIIRE system performs the segmentation of the input string into elementary units by using a special algorithm (Aho-Corasick) that allows for the detection of all possible substrings of the input string according with a given dictionary. See Dobrov *et al.* 2017 for more details on the implementation of this approach.

¹¹ The linguistic ontology presented in this research is the result of joint efforts of an entire team including Aleksei Dobrov, Anastasia Dobrova, Olga Dzhangolskaya, Yana Khramova, Anna Kramskova, Ksenia Rastorgueva, Nikolay Soms, and Viktor Zakharov. This work would not have been possible without its founding member and team leader of all our projects—Pavel L. Grokhovskiy who passed away on December 17, 2018.

1. Related Work

Computer linguistics generally defines “ontology” as “an explicit specification of a conceptualization.” This definition was popularized by Thomas R. Gruber, where conceptualization is “an abstract, simplified view of the world that we wish to represent for some purpose.”¹²

Without claiming any changes to this *de facto* standard, our team has to clarify that as researchers we do not mean just any “specification of a conceptualization” by this term, but rather a computer ontology, which is defined as a database consisting of concepts and relations between them. Attributes and relations are interconnected: participation of a concept in a relation may be interpreted as its attribute, and vice versa. Relations between concepts are binary (i.e., between two concepts) and directed. Each relation is directed from the subject of the relation to the object. For example, the relation “to have a part of the body” should be directed from its subject (the concept “any creature”) towards its object (a concept, denoting “any part of the body”). In turn, the concept “leg,” for example, is the subject of the reverse relation—“to be a part of somebody’s body.”

Linguistic ontologies are designed for automatic processing of unstructured texts.¹³ Units of linguistic ontologies are based on meanings of real natural language expressions.¹⁴

In the first generations of natural language understanding systems (NLU systems), ontologies were used as semantic dictionaries. In the early 1990s, several scholars already used the term “ontology” in the most general sense, which allowed linguistic thesauri to be considered as types of ontologies. The WordNet computer thesaurus has come to be called an “ontology,” and this trend has only been growing in the majority of modern works.

Thesauri, including the WordNet, reflect more or less specified semantic relations between lexical units (words): synonymy, hyponymy, hypernymy, antonymy, meronymy, holonymy, logical entailment, the relation of an adjective to a noun, etc. These relations can be used to perform lexical disambiguation. Unfortunately, these relations alone are not enough to solve the problem of lexical or morphosyntactic ambiguity, especially in Tibetan, since they do not reflect semantic valencies.

¹² Gruber 1993: 199.

¹³ Unstructured data is the information that either does not have a pre-defined data model or the one which is not organized in a pre-defined manner. A text is considered unstructured data.

¹⁴ Dobrov *et al.* 2018: 340.

In contrast, the *linguistic* ontologies model strictly specified relations between concepts such as the relation between a physical object and its parts (meronymy); the relations between the agent and the actions that the agent can perform; the relations between an action and objects towards which this action can be directed, etc. Some of these concepts represent meanings of different lexical units, others have no representation in vocabulary, but are necessary for its modeling.¹⁵ This difference between thesauri and linguistic ontologies becomes obvious in the attempt to create inference systems: linguistic ontologies are built on the basis of logical formalisms and corresponding inference rules. In contrast, thesauri generally do not provide any native mechanisms for logical inference.¹⁶ A semantic dictionary is a description, whereas an ontology is a model that predicts and explains this description and can be used and developed with much higher efficiency.

Ontologies are used for various tasks in natural language processing systems: from primitive problems of named entity recognition or text classification¹⁷—for which, to a certain extent, thesauri can also be used—to tasks of full-scale semantic analysis of texts, which involves inference of meanings based on individual lexical units. Ontologies can also be used for tasks that require syntactic and lexical disambiguation based on strict semantic relations that thesauri do not provide. Such relations include those between classes of entities and actions that these entities can perform or the states in which they can be; relations between these actions and states, on the one hand, and their objects, on the other; relations between actions or states and their objects; all kinds of relations that can be expressed by the genitive case—the relation between an object and its owner, between a part and the whole, or the most complicated relationships between people, organizations, and societies, expressed by the genitive construction—as well as all kinds of relations expressed by prepositions, etc.¹⁸

Until now, the task of creating a universal linguistic ontology has been set only for European languages, which resulted in the spread of a number of incorrect assumptions concerning ontological semantics in general. It was suggested by some researchers that a universal computer ontology may not depend on a particular language. But, in fact, this universality falters due to the specificity of

¹⁵ Dobrov 2014: 151.

¹⁶ Dobrov *et al.* 2018: 339.

¹⁷ Sánchez-Pi, Martí, and Garcia 2016: 48–58; Zhou and El-Gohary 2015; Sánchez-Cisneros and Aparicio 2013: 622–627; Lytvyn *et al.* 2017: 229–240; Abdollahi *et al.* 2019.

¹⁸ Kang and Lee 2001: 199–220; Jensen and Nilsson 2006: 229–244; Dobrov 2014.

each language. Ontology is universal in the way that it concerns diverse subject matters, but not in regard to many languages. It is obvious that an ontology cannot possibly be fully independent of a specific language because not all linguistic units of those languages have a direct analogy in other languages. Different general concepts in different languages have specific linguistic units that have individual semantic meanings not represented in every language of the world. Furthermore, the structuring of the world itself and thus its concepts and lexical meanings may differ significantly from language to language, which has an effect not only on lexical but also on grammatical semantics.

Even though scholars are working on the tools for processing Tibetan texts in different countries (e.g., Germany, Great Britain, China, USA, Japan, Netherlands), there is still no conventional standard of corpus annotation for Tibetan language material. A number of recent studies were primarily aimed at developing solutions for the initial stages of Tibetan NLP, such as word segmentation and part-of-speech tagging. No attempts have been made to develop the Tibetan thesaurus, let alone ontology for the entire Tibetan language.

2. The Structure of the Computer Ontology

Our Tibetan ontology is developed within the framework of the AIIRE ontology editor software.¹⁹ In the AIIRE project, “ontology” is understood as a consistent classification of concepts that unite the meanings of Tibetan linguistic units, including morphemes and idiomatic morphemic complexes.

Concepts are interconnected with different semantic relations. To create a new concept, it is compulsory to incorporate this concept into the general classification hierarchy according to class-superclass relations (hypo/hyponymy). Therefore, the whole ontology denotes one common superclass.

The ontology models the meanings of atomic linguistic units (morphemes) and of idiomatic combinations of these units, including nominal and verbal compounds, idiomatic nominal groups, as well as adjectival and adverbial groups. In all these cases, in addition to the meanings of each idiomatic expression, meanings of its

¹⁹ The ontology itself is available at the AIIRE website in a snapshot (<http://svn.aiire.org/repos/tibet/trunk/aiire/lang/ontology/concepts.xml>; accessed March 14, 2020) and it is also available for unauthorized view or even editing (please refer to <http://ontotibet.aiire.org>; accessed March 14, 2020). The editing permission can be obtained through an access request.

components are also modeled in the ontology so that they can be interpreted in their literal meanings as well.

To model a new concept, a researcher needs to create an expression entry in the ontology. An expression is analog to a heading word in a dictionary entry (e.g., the expression *sbrang rtsi* in Fig. 1). Then, a researcher gives the meaning of the expression and provides a translation and description (or interpretation) of the expression in Russian.²⁰ These entries are intended to facilitate a common understanding of the decisions made by project participants in the process of editing the ontology (the choice of hypernym, the establishment of certain semantic relations, etc.). The main source for establishing the basic meaning of each expression is a text or texts in the employed corpora where the expression is used.

འབྲུག་རྩི་ལྗང་།
<p>1. honey; a sweet, viscous food substance produced by bees and some related insects: [2032] 1) <i>bung bas bsags pa'i rtsi mngar mo/ ... spu gri'i so la sbrang rtsi byug pa/ ... ming gi rnam grangs la mngar ldan dang/ spra tshil lo/ 2) ro mngar/ zhu rjes drod/ nus pas lus stobs nyams pa gso ba dang/ mig nad bar 'grib/ rtsa dkar gyi nad/ dbang po mi gsal ba/ sha 'phel gyi nad bcas la phan/ bad kan dang/ chu ser la phan pa'i sman gyi nus pa rtsar 'khrid par byed/</i></p> <p>Token type: noun phrase with genitive compound</p> <p>synonyms</p> <p>hypernyms</p> <p>1. ལྗང་ (substance that influences color and taste...) —</p> <p>hyponym: 4</p> <p>hyponyms</p>

Fig. 1 — The expression *sbrang rtsi* in the computer ontology

Each expression, the meaning of which is modeled in the ontology, is also provided with a full-scale interpretation in Tibetan from *The Great Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary* (see Fig. 1).²¹ If according to the dictionary, the expression has several meanings, then the one used in the particular context of the corpus is translated into Russian (except for the case when the expression is defined in the dictionary through synonyms). For each concept, a separate type of token is established.

²⁰ The Russian language is the language of the software interface, including the ontology itself. In the ontology, Russian is also used for technical classes and to describe verbal semantics and relations between concepts.

²¹ Zhang 1985: 2032.

The number of token types in the ontology has been continuously expanded: with the development of the formal grammar, new types of tokens were added into the ontology. For example, new types of nominal and verbal compounds were identified.

The researcher establishes different relations between concepts. The relation of synonymy is always absolute, which suggests complete correspondence of referents with possible differences in significations. In linguistics, synonyms are usually defined as words that are close in meaning. In the computer ontology, synonyms are meanings of different linguistic units that have strictly identical denotations.

Concepts form synonymic sets. Each element of the set has the same attributes, i.e., the same relations and objects of these relations. The variance of significations within a synonymic set is compensated by automated logic rules: if Y is the synonym of X, then X has the same attributes as Y, and Y has the same characteristics as X. For example, if the concept *deb* “book” is the subject of the relation “to have been written by an author,” its synonym *dpe cha* “book,” is also considered to be the subject of the same relation. In other words, anything that could cogently be said about a *deb* should also apply to a *dpe cha*.

Hypo-hypernymy is established between classes and subclasses or between classes and instances when one concept (hyponym) is a token of another (hypernym). For example, the class *pho gsar* “young man,” is a subclass of *pho* “man,” which is a subclass of *mi* “human being.” If there is a lacuna in Tibetan, it is possible to use a Russian hypernym. For example, the hierarchy of hypernyms for the Tibetan concept *lag pa* “hand” is presented in Fig. 2.

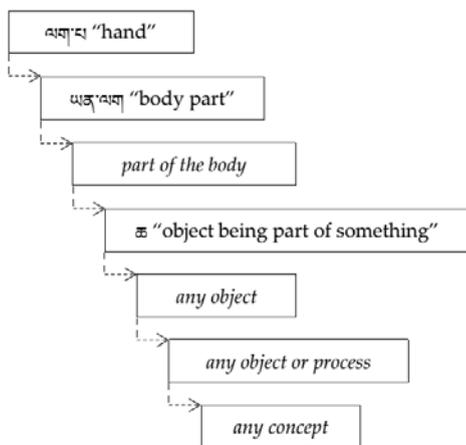


Fig. 2 — Concept hierarchy of the expression *lag pa* in the computer ontology

Here, the conceptual gaps in the hierarchy are rendered in English (originally, they are in Russian, as it is the default language of the ontology interface). If, during the development of the ontology, some gaps remain, it means that the concept hierarchy probably needs additional manual correction.

Each concept must have at least one hypernym, except for the ontology root concept.²² In order to determine semantic valencies, it is necessary to create a concept hierarchy that has basic classes—for example, the class “person.” Basic classes usually have a large number of relations, which appear in genitive constructions, verb valencies (a number of predicate arguments), etc.

Modeling verb meanings in the ontology is made with the use of special tools that allow speeding up and partial automating of verbal concept modeling. The AIIRE *Ontohelper* is used together with the main AIIRE ontology editor web interface to build a complete hierarchy of superclasses for any verb meaning in the ontology.

The logic behind the *Ontohelper* is also based on the division of verbs into dynamic (terminative and non-terminative) and static ones.²³ Dynamic verbs express actions, events, and processes associated with different changes. Static verbs express states, relations, or qualities.²⁴ A terminative verb denotes an action that has a limit in its development. A non-terminative verb denotes an action which does not admit any limit in its development. For example, one can take the verb “to sing.” In the sentence, “she sang,” the verb is non-terminative since the duration of her singing is not defined. However, in the sentence “she sang a song,” the verb is terminative, as it is clear that she was singing for the precise amount of time limited by the duration of that song. The verb can also be defined as terminative just by the meaning of its root.

When using the *Ontohelper* editor, it is necessary to determine whether the verb being modeled denotes an action, activity, or state. Terminative, non-terminative, and static verb meanings correspond in the ontology to subclasses of concepts “to perform an action,” “to perform an activity,” and “to be in a state,” respectively. The editor of the ontology indicates the basic class for subjects of the verb to be modeled, as well as the basic class of direct objects for transitive verbs and the class of indirect dative objects for verbs denoting addressed actions. It is also possible to specify classes of circumstances, i.e., objects with special case government (e.g., for verbs that govern the associative case, marked in Tibetan with

²² “Root concept” is a single concept, the common superclass of the entire ontology. It is named as “any concept” in the ontology.

²³ Maslov 1998.

²⁴ Ibid: 105.

dang).²⁵ As a result, the ontological editor builds a complete class hierarchy for the modeled verb meaning. For example, modeling the verb *sbyin* “to give,” requires the creation of 523 classes of verb concepts, including its direct hypernym “to perform an action by any creature directed to any object addressed to any creature.” If the given hierarchy includes classes that already exist in the ontology, they are not rebuilt.

Within the framework of the present research, 4335 concepts, including 3943 meanings of Tibetan expressions, were modeled in the ontology.

3. Methodology of the Ontology Implication

Basically, we work with four types of errors: unrecognized units, combinatorial explosions, breaks in syntactic trees and overlaps thereof. Unrecognized fragments are the fragments that the ontology cannot parse. Combinatorial explosions are cases of exponential growth in the number of possible parsings. As the length of the parsed text, and, thus, the number of its ambiguous fragments, increase, parsing permutations increase as well. Syntactic trees describe a method of formulating a hierarchy of the syntactical relationship between expressions in a sentence, each belonging to parts of speech, to noun or verbal phrases, up to the level of the sentence itself. Breaks in these trees occur when the ontology fails to fully map these nested relations for an expression up to the level of the sentence. Overlaps occur when fragments of text belong to two syntactic trees, but neither of the trees completely covers the text to which they belong.

We use our ontology for the consistent elimination of these annotation errors, starting with the most important and frequent ones. As said above, the main reason for the use of the ontology was the need to perform morpho-syntactic disambiguation. This includes dealing with a special type of annotation errors—combinatorial explosions. Most combinatorial explosions were caused by the prevalent use of idiomatic morphocomplexes and compounds in the Tibetan language. Thus, in the initial stage, the computer ontology was used to model the meanings of Tibetan nominal and verbal compounds found in the corpus texts. The work was carried out simultaneously with all the texts of the corpus.

The result of this work was the classification of Tibetan compounds. The classification not only covers all types of Tibetan

²⁵ Dobrov *et al.* 2019: 147.

compounds that researchers have introduced before, but also includes models of classes of compounds that have not been previously described. Different types of compounds require the introduction of different semantic relations between its components in the computer ontology.

For example, Tibetan often combines letters or exponents of arbitrary Tibetan morphemes with a noun root, e.g., *la sgra*, which denotes “grammatical marker *la*.”²⁶ This class was called the “named entity compound” and was introduced into the formal grammar. The *la sgra* class is a subclass of named-entity nomination, where the name of the entity is a letter or an exponent of any Tibetan morpheme, in this case, *la*. To ensure the correct parsing of the compound *la sgra*, it is necessary to connect the expressions “linguistic unit” (that is the basic class of *sgra* “grammatical marker”) and “any exponent” (the basic class for all exponents of any Tibetan morpheme) with the relation “to denote a concept” in the computer ontology.²⁷

The next step in resolving morpho-syntactic ambiguity was the establishment of the following types of restrictions in the computer ontology: the restriction on adjuncts, the restriction on genitive relation, the restriction on classes of direct objects and subjects of verbs.

Restrictions on the general genitive relation “to have any object or process (about any object or process)” are imposed by establishing specific relation subclasses between basic classes in the ontology. For example, to exclude the possibility of the first version of parsing (1.1) in the example (1) below, the concept *lus* “physical body,” was allowed to possess a genitive relation of “to have a body (about human being)” only when connected with the concept *mi* “human being.” This facilitated the exclusion of the version of parsing in which “fame” can have a body.

- (1) བླ་མཁའ་པོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་
grags-pa 'i lus
 be_well-known-NMLZ GEN body
 (1.1) ‘body of fame’

²⁶ *La sgra* and *la don* are paired terms of the Tibetan linguistic tradition. The first denotes the form, the second—the meaning (i.e., “grammatical markers with meaning of *la*”). This is a typical opposition for the Tibetan linguistics (for example, *sgra'i sbyor tshul* denotes “the way of joining [grammatical marker] according to its form” (i.e., the rules for choosing allomorphs) while *don gyi 'jug tshul* is “the way of joining [grammatical marker] according to its meaning.”

²⁷ Dobrov *et al.* 2019: 149.

(1.2.) 'body of a famous [person]'²⁸

At the moment, the concept *mi* "human being," has the following genitive relations in the computer ontology:

- to be a person whose activity is related to a thing;
- to be a person born or living in any place;
- to be a person occupying a certain position;
- to have a text;
- to be a participant of a social process;
- to be a person whose activity is related to animals;
- to have age (i.e., to be of a certain age);
- to have a body.

According to the inheritance of the attribute's rule, all following concepts that are hyponyms of the class *mi* inherit its semantic relations: any person of a certain ethnicity; any person of a certain belief; any person of a certain age; any person of a certain occupation; any person with a certain ability; any person of high social status; any person engaged in a certain activity at a certain level; any person related to some institution; any person with a certain skill; any person who was born or lived in a certain place; any person in a certain relationship with other people; any person characterized by a certain social connection with other people; *khyim bdag* "housekeeper"; *grong pa* "neighbor"; *chos pa* "religious devotee"; *dgra* "enemy"; *dpa' bo* "hero"; *pha rol po* "opponent"; *pho* "male"; *btsun pa* "religious teacher"; *bud med* "woman"; *mkhas mchog* "supreme sage"; *mtha' khob* "barbarian"; *mu to pa* "poor man"; *mo* "female"; etc.

Tibetan adjuncts are placed after the noun they modify. Due to the absence of word delimiters (spaces) in the Tibetan writing system, adjuncts cannot be graphically distinguished from elements of a compound, and in this way may cause incorrect parsing. For example, the compound (2) in the example below may be misinterpreted either as "father-mother" ("a father, who is also a mother")—*ma* "mother," is interpreted as an adjunct—or as "father's mother" (a noun phrase with a genitive compound). However, the only correct interpretation is "father and mother" (a noun root group compound). While the second interpretation (which is, moreover,

²⁸ Hereinafter the interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses are made according to the Leipzig Glossing Rules. <https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>. Accessed May 20, 2020.

logically possible) can be eliminated by just setting the correct token type in the ontology (because both the second and the third interpretations imply that the phrase is a compound), the first interpretation cannot be eliminated in this way.

(2) བཤམ
pha ma
 father_mother
 'father and mother'

Thus, only semantic restrictions can eliminate semantically incorrect adjunct versions of parsings. This is achieved by limiting possible equivalence relations ("to be equivalent to an object or process"). Basic classes were connected with themselves to this relation so that only concepts that inherit these classes could be interpreted as adjuncts for each other. Though, as in the case of *pha ma* this is not necessarily the case.

Restrictions on subjects and direct objects of verbs were necessary for the correct analysis of compounds and idioms, as well as for eliminating unnecessary versions of syntactic parsing. As it was said before, these restrictions are imposed by specifying the correct classes of verb subjects or objects in the *Ontohelper* editor, so that only concepts that inherit these classes can perform or be the object of the action denoted by a certain verb.

At the present stage, we continue developing the ontology and using it to eliminate annotation errors. The ultimate goal of our project is to create a complete semantic annotation of all texts in the corpus.

4. Study of the Lexical Semantics Using the Computer Ontology

The specific nature of the Tibetan linguistic picture of the world is particularly evident in the field of lexical semantics. When we model concepts in the computer ontology, we need to classify them. Since our corpus mainly includes Tibetan grammar texts and texts on the theory of writing, these classifications are specific. We model all necessary semantic relations in order to perform correct semantic parsing of a given text. This helps reveal the most frequent terms, lingua-specific concepts, typical semantic relations, etc. Thus, the creation of the computer ontology discovers features of the Tibetan picture of the world (notably, the scientific picture of the world described in section 5 of the present article) and itself becomes a formal model of the Tibetan linguistic picture of the world.

Buddhism, to a great extent, determines the characteristics of the Tibetan linguistic picture of the world. Terms in the Buddhist doctrine are basic lingua-specific concepts and are key to Tibetan culture. When modeling such concepts in the computer ontology, a Tibetologist usually encounters a number of difficulties. In order to create interpretations or identify hypernyms for some specific concepts, one could rely on the context in which a term is used, as well as on the definition of this term in a Tibetan definition dictionary. In cases when the term is a Buddhist compound, formulating its interpretation and identifying its hypernym can be facilitated by the term's internal structure. In particular, the analysis of Tibetan nominal and verbal compounds utilizing the computer ontology made it possible to identify typical syntactic and semantic structures.²⁹ For example, according to the syntactic structure, the compound *sbrang rtsi* in Fig. 1 is a noun phrase that is a genitive compound. According to the semantic structure, it refers to subordinate compounds in which the second element (*rtsi* "substance") is a hypernym of the whole compound.

For the Tibetan picture of the world, the difference between animals and humans, and the difference between living beings with a dualistic mind trapped in cyclic existence and the Buddha is relevant. These features require a construction of several complex hierarchies of concepts in the computer ontology. Thus, in the Tibetan linguistic picture of the world, the most frequently used class of subjects of verbs is the basic class "any creature" (while for the Russian language it is the class "any person"). At the moment, this basic class includes several hyponyms in the ontology, some of which include only humans (e.g., *mi* "human") and others that unite people and animals (e.g., *sems can* "sentient being who has a dualistic mind"; *'gro ba* "migrator"; and *skyes ldan* "having a birth"), or others that even unite people, gods and Buddhas (e.g., "any creature that is not an animal").

The relation between Buddhism and the linguistic picture of the world also appears in fundamental categories. Thus, Buddhist discourse is highly parameterized by descriptions of space—one of the basic categories—and distinguishes between proximity and distality. In other linguistic pictures of the world, opposition-primitives such as "top/down," "forward/reverse," etc., are used to describe proximal space that directly "adjoins" a person. The basic meaning of these oppositions is relative to the human body. Distal space parameters, on the other hand, are associated with

²⁹ For more details on the semantic types of Tibetan compounds, see Grokhovskii and Smirnova 2017. For different types of their syntactic structure, see Dobrov 2018.

“hostility/friendliness” of corresponding objects. Therefore, the most significant opposition for the distal space is “friend/foe.” Thus, the distal space is defined via the person *cum* “social organism.”³⁰

But in the Tibetan linguistic picture of the world, distal space becomes metaphoric for the object’s relationship with Buddhist religious doctrine. Rather than placing objects on a continuum from social inclusion to exclusion, Tibetan distal words describe another continuum with the Buddha and his teaching as the starting point.

For example, the Tibetan compound *mtha’ khob* can denote any “borderland” or “suburb,” as well as “barbarian lands, unfamiliar with the higher culture of Buddha’s teaching,” or even a “person who does not practice Buddhism, or who does not belong to the Buddhist spiritual community.” The connection of spatial metaphors with Buddhism is also demonstrated by the opposition between the Tibetan terms *nang pa* “Buddhist,” and *phyi rol pa* “non-Buddhist,” literally meaning “insider” and “outsider.”

Thus, the computer ontology, which includes different classification hierarchies of concepts in the Tibetan language, can be used as a model and tool for studying the Tibetan linguistic picture of the world as it is given in Tibetan texts.

5. Modeling Tibetan Concepts Related to Subject Areas of Knowledge

Since the Tibetan-Russian corpus includes texts on the traditional Tibetan sciences, linguistic works (*sgra’i rig pa*) constitute one of its major genres. Thus, a large number of modeled concepts refer to grammatical terms³¹ and special lexis of the theory of writing. Therefore, they reflect the Tibetan scientific picture of the world. Tibetan linguistics is mainly based on grammars created by Buddhist scholars and is strongly connected with the Indian tradition. Moreover, Buddhist lingua-specific concepts and ideas were widely used in texts on other sciences. It is also typical for different traditional Tibetan disciplines to use the same terms with different meanings.

³⁰ Kasevich 1996: 133–134.

³¹ It should be noted that the word “term” in its strict modern definition does not fully apply to the special lexis of the Tibetan fields of medieval knowledge, including the Tibetan grammatical tradition. Tibetan grammar terms do not meet all the criteria of a scientific term (such as, for example, monosemy or motivation, that is the term itself having such sufficient semantic transparency that an approximate understanding of the concept denoted by a term can be formed). In this situation, it is more appropriate to talk about pre-terms—lexical units used as terms in subject areas for naming newly formed concepts, but not meeting the basic requirements of a scientific term (Grinev-Grinevich 2008: 44).

In the Tibetan grammar texts created within the framework of the Buddhist religious tradition, the morpheme *dbyangs* “voice/sound” was used to mean “vowel phoneme.” In contrast, in the treatises on music, the same term denotes “melody,” or even functions as an element in the compound name of the bodhisattva Mañjuḥśa (‘Jam dbyangs; literally “tender melody”).

Apart from indigenous linguistic terms, religious and philosophical terms were also widely used in Tibetan grammar treatises. When using the computer ontology, the researcher can indicate a subject area for concepts of the Tibetan traditional sciences, be it linguistics, Buddhist religious doctrine, etc. This helps the study of Tibetan terminological fields, their structure, the interconnection of terms, terminological polysemy, homonymy, etc.

For example, in the texts of our corpus, in addition to grammatical terms, general scientific terms are also common. Most of them denote various text parts or sections. Thus, at the moment, the expression “text structural unit” in the ontology already has 14 hyponyms: *nang gses* “text sub-division”; *mtha’ dpyod* “thorough study”; *re’u mig* “table”; *sa bcaḍ* “text section”; *skabs don* “text section that reveals the main theme”; *sdom tshig* “concise conclusion”; *bam po* “section or chapter of the text”; *skabs* “chapter”; *sdom* “conclusion, summary”; *mchod brjod* “expression of worship for the Buddha and the gods”; *nang tshan* “text section”; *mjug bsdu* “summary of a message”; *mdor bstan* “synopsis”; and *’gyur phyag* “homage to the translator.”

A number of concepts denote various types of scientific, literary, or religious texts. In particular, the Tibetan scientific tradition identifies basic texts as *gzhung* and their numerous commentaries—*rgyas bshad* “detailed commentary”; *rnam bshad* “thorough commentary”; etc.

A large number of concepts represent the class *don* “meaning [of the text],” common to all Indo-Tibetan traditional sciences, which includes concept-hyponyms important to Tibetan scientific literature, such as *gnad don* “key meaning”; *gzhung don* “the main meaning of the text”; *dgongs don* “implied meaning”; *brjod don* “topic”; *go don* “core meaning”; etc.

There were common ways of term formation in the Tibetan scientific tradition such as terminologization of common words, compounding, and borrowing. In some cases, nominalized verb forms acquired narrow terminological meanings. These forms include nominals produced by the syllabic formative, nominalizer *-pa*, as well as the forms formed by adding nominalizing suffixes with the meanings “method,” “place,” “path,” etc. to the verb. The unfinished state of the terminologization process, the closeness of the Tibetan special lexis to common language, the presence of a large number of

consubstantial terms—found both in everyday speech and professional terminology³²—often lead to hypo-hyperonymy relations between concepts of a single expression. For example, in the grammatical terminological field, the Tibetan *rtags* is “a grammatical sign which marks various grammatical meanings.” At the same time, as a common word, it means “sign, tool for transmitting and receiving information, localized in any space.” Thus, its common meaning is a hypernym of its meaning as a grammar term.

In those cases when certain disciplines employ idiosyncratic hypo-hypernym relationships, or when the semantic valences of these terms differ from normal usage, the ontology used the relation “to have a typical representative (about the class of objects)” and the inverse relation, that is “to be a typical representative of the class.” Since, in the case of *rtags*, the class and the typical representative are expressed by one word in Tibetan, the expression denoting a typical representative was indicated in the ontology in Russian. In this way, we create a separate expression “a grammatical sign” and connect it with the relation “to be a typical representative of” with the expression *rtags*.

A number of Tibetan terms are formed by adding a numeral to a noun, thus denoting a collection of objects (for example, *dus gsum* “three verb tenses”; *dus bzhi* “four seasons”; *byung ba lnga* “five elements”; etc.). To connect collections and their elements in the computer ontology, the relation “to include objects of a class” (and the inverse, “to be an object of a class”) were used. For example, the term *dus bzhi* is connected through this relation with the concepts *dgun kha* “winter”; *dpyid ka* “spring”; *dbyar kha* “summer”; and *ston kha* “autumn.”

Polysemy and the absence of unique meanings of morphemes are typical features of Tibetan terminology in general and grammatical terms in particular. Not all contexts can reveal the particular meaning of a polysemic term. For example, one basic term of the Tibetan grammatical tradition, *yi ge*, corresponds to the concept of a “phoneme, which can be expressed graphically,” and sometimes as a “syllable” or even “syllabographeme.” Thus, the concepts of phoneme, grapheme, syllable, and its components in the Tibetan tradition are not separated. A single concept denoted by the Tibetan term *yi ge* unites minimal units of linguistic sound (phonemes) with minimal units of the language graphic system (grapheme). In this and similar cases, the relation “to denote a concept” (and the inverse relation “to be denoted by a sign”) was used in the ontology. The

³² Grinev-Grinevich 2008: 25.

Tibetan term *yi ge* was modeled as a basic concept³³ and connected via this relation with the expression in Russian. Thus, we describe the meaning of the term *yi ge* as “a grapheme (syllabographeme); a linguistic sign denoting the phoneme.” Then, we connect this concept via the relation “to denote a concept” to the concept in Russian “any phoneme.” Parallel hierarchies are built for all types of Tibetan graphemes/phonemes. This allows us simultaneously reflect the dual meaning of the term and preserve the opportunity to participate in various semantic relations (for example, phonemes can be pronounced, graphemes can be written; graphemes can have graphic elements, but phonemes cannot; etc.).

6. Concluding Observations

Even in the initial stages of work, the development of the ontology for the Tibetan language demonstrated that ontologies are not language-independent, but should be individually developed for each particular language. The ontology of the Tibetan language reflects special features of Tibetan lexical, grammatical, and syntactic semantics, as well as the specifics of ordinary and special lexis functioning. Thus, the ontology is a formalized representation of the real-world knowledge expressed in the Tibetan lexicon and grammar.

Building an ontology of Tibetan allows the investigation of the structure of lexico-semantic fields and the meaning of Tibetan language elements, taking into account language facts from such areas as the structure of lexical systems, including polysemy and connotations, metaphorical compatibility, etc. This research will allow us not only to reveal features of the above-mentioned areas and to solve certain issues of system lexicography but also to understand the scope of differences that exists in this respect between classical and modern Tibetan.

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³³ Basic concepts are those with a large amount of semantic relations.

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Curating a Treasure: The *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* in the Development of Rnying ma Tradition

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he *Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings (Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa)* has been a deeply consequential revelation cycle (*gter ma*) for Tibet's eldest Buddhist denomination, the Rnying ma.¹ As one of the main revelations produced by Tibet's "First Tertön King," Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192), it contributed much to Nyang ral's seminal curation of the tantric tradition: an effort which would effectively define Rnying ma identity and, in some regards, the contours of Tibetan Buddhism altogether.² Over eight centuries in Tibet, the *Bka' brgyad* has consistently served as a resource for adepts and institutional figures in undertaking self-cultivational ritual practice, in the historiography of Tibetan Buddhism's origins, and in the organization of tantric knowledge. As a definitive cycle bringing together several of the main "wrathful" (*khro bo*) deity systems of classical Mahāyoga tantras, the *Bka' brgyad* supplied an imaginal world and set of ritual idioms which would be central to the Rnying ma pa approach to tantric practice. It also contributed much to the assimilation of Buddhism in Tibet, as it enfolded the ritual culture and lore of Tibet's autochthonous gods into its distinctive tantric program. Additionally, its formats were employed as a framework for organizing tantric knowledge in the anthologization efforts of the Rnying ma between the 15th and 19th centuries. Thus, the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*

¹ English translation of the title *Bka' brgyad* has not yet reached standardization. Frequent translations include "Eight Instructions," "Eight Precepts," "Eight Proclamations," "Eight Commands," "Eight Logos," "Eight Practice Instructions," etc. This inconsistency owes to the multivalence of *bka'*, which can be used as an honorific for "speech" (*gsung ste skad cha'i zhe sa*; e.g., *rgyal po'i bka'*), or to mean the discourse of the Buddha (Skt. *buddhavacana*). See *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, s.v. "Bka'." For the sake of simplicity, I have settled on "Eight Teachings," although Chögyam Trungpa's argument for "Eight Logos" is also compelling, see Trungpa 2013: 645–665.

² See Hirshberg 2016; Doney 2013; Gyatso 1986 & 1993; and Germano 2005 for more on Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer's influence on Tibetan religious literature and historiography.

supplied many enduring features of the Rnying ma pa's distinctive identity, while consistently serving as a resource for lineage masters in their efforts to articulate, reform, and bolster their "Early Translation Ancient School" (Snga 'gyur Rnying ma).

While tradition regularizes the story of such a scripture to yield the impression that this cycle functioned consistently over time, a literary-historical perspective suggests something different. A history of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa's* treatment in Tibet reveals how this particular cycle was actively curated, reimagined, and positioned within shifting institutional contexts, often in response to extrinsic pressures facing its custodians. We may trace the development of the *Bka' brgyad* over several centuries, and through several critical historical junctures, to see how this cycle and its accompanying myth and ritual complexes were engineered to provide resources for communities in search of responsive shifts in identity. In this, we can see the degree to which the use and received meaning of a scriptural cycle is contextually determined and its significance continually reimagined to supply resources for practitioners and institutional figures in their attempts to articulate denominational identities.

In the case of the *Bka' brgyad*, we will see how this process unfolded in three specific contexts: (1) in its initial development in the post-fragmentation period of the 9th through 12th centuries, (2) in the tumult of 16th- and 17th-century Central Tibet on the eve of Dga' ldan supremacy and the rise of Smin grol gling, and (3) in 18th- and 19th-century Sde dge during politically contentious decades that saw the further institutionalization of the Rnying ma pa. In each of these contexts, the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* met with ecclesiastical treatments that leveraged its basic mythologies, ritual programs, and doctrinal formats to yield scriptures and ritual texts which could be utilized in the myriad attempts of Rnying ma pas to respond to various extrinsic pressures. While a comprehensive survey of these developments is beyond the scope of this article, a cursory history of the *Bka' brgyad's* treatment in Central and Eastern Tibet will hopefully demonstrate some of the ways that a major cycle is reworked under the custody of institutional figures. While it is my thesis that such reworkings were often in response to shifting extrinsic pressures, proof for causation over correlation will require further research. My initial interpretation of the *Bka' brgyad's* treatment within the context of the history of the Rnying ma is therefore meant to provide some preliminary directions for interrogating the connection between social-historical contexts and the treatment of scriptural corpora in Tibet.

1. What Is the Bka' brgyad?

The Bka' brgyad consortium of revelation cycles refers to scriptural corpora centering on eight principal (although there are actually nine) wrathful tutelary deities. The *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* seems to be the first comprehensive cycle devoted to this particular complex of deities, although at least five of the Bka' brgyad's icons were present in tantric cycles of Indian origin. In Tibet, Nyang ral's *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* was followed by major Bka' brgyad revelation cycles produced by Gu ru Chos kyi dbang phyug (1212–1270) in the 13th century and Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (1337–1408) in the 14th, plus several smaller cycles revealed by Rnying ma and Bka' brgyud masters over the centuries.³ But Nyang ral's *Bde gshegs 'dus pa* remains the preeminent of these, initially supplying the important mythologies and ritual formats which would undergird future Bka' brgyad revelations.⁴

The Bka' brgyad brings together five important icons from Indian tantric tradition, plus four others of less certain provenance. The Bka' brgyad deity mandalas of certain Indian origin are those of: Che mchog (Skt. Mahottara Heruka), Yang dak, or Sri khrag thung (Skt. Vishuddha Heruka), Gshin rje (Skt. Yamāntaka), Rta mgrin (Skt. Hayagrīva), and Rdo rje phur ba (Skt. Vajrakīlaya).⁵ The remaining four mandalas—those of Bla ma rig 'dzin (Skt. *Guru Vidyādhara), Ma mo rbod gtong (Skt. *Matārah), 'Jig rten mchod btsod (Skt. *Lokastotrapūjā), and Dmod pa drag sngags (Skt. *Vajramāntrabhiru)—may have their origins within the Bka' brgyad cycle itself, although the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* putatively categorizes

³ According to Kaḥ thog rig 'dzin tse dbang nor bu's Bka' brgyad history, Nyang ral's *Bde gshegs 'dus pa* was the "enlightened action" (*phrin las*) treasure; Chos dbang's *Gsang ba yongs rdzogs* was the "enlightened qualities" (*yon tan*) treasure; Rgod ldem's *Drag po rang shar* was the "enlightened speech" (*gsung*) cycle; Padma gling pa's *Bka' brgyad me long* was the "enlightened mind" (*thugs*) treasure; and Bsam gtan gling pa's *Bka' brgyad yang gsang dregs 'dul* cycle was the "enlightened body" (*sku*) revelation. O rgyan gling pa's *Bka' 'dus chos kyi rgya mtsho* was especially comprehensive, embodying all enlightened qualities. Thus, the five-fold concept of enlightened body, speech, mind, quality, and action is said to be encapsulated in the complete set of Bka' brgyad revelations. Kaḥ thog rig 'dzin Tsho dbang nor bu 2006: 400.

⁴ An exception to the prominence of Nyang ral's *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* is the preference of Byang gter institutions for Rgod ldem's *Drag po rang shar*. Chos dbang's *Gsang ba yongs rdzogs* was also an influential cycle for figures such as Klong chen rab 'byams (1308–1364), and 'Gyur med rdo rje (1646–1714), both of whom purportedly received the *Gsang ba yongs rdzogs* empowerments at a young age, see Klong chen rab 'byams 2009: 184 and Dudjom 1991: 825–827.

⁵ See Boord 1993:1–8, 39–70 for his argument for the Indian origins of Vajrakīlaya. Also see Cantwell and Mayer 2008: esp. 1–40 for their discussion of the search for the origins of the tantric tradition of Vajrakīlaya.

some Indian tantric materials under the template of these Bka' brgyad sub-cycles.⁶ The *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* also contains elements drawn from the Net of Magical Emanation (Sgyu 'phrul drwa ba, Skt. Māyājāla) genre of Mahāyoga tantra, specifically the Five Sugata Family (Bde gshegs rigs Inga) mandala, the Peaceful-Wrathful (Zhi khro) deity complex, and the wrathful mandalas of taming (*'dul ba*) and liberation (*sgrol ba*). But whereas Magical Emanation tantras such as the Secret Nucleus (Gsang ba'i snying po, Skt. Guhyagarbha) mostly focus on the peaceful deity mandalas to communicate important tantric doctrines, the Bka' brgyad cycles favor the wrathful mandala as the foundation for a distinctive approach to self-cultivation and harm-averting ritual practice.

The *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* also includes many rites for the aversion of obstructive forces. In the Bka' brgyad corpus, these hindering entities are identified as the autochthonous gods and spirits of Tibet, generally known as the "Eight Classes of Gods and Demons" (*lha srin sde brgyad*). In the edition widely regarded by Rnying ma pa ecclesiasts in Eastern Tibet as the definitive corpus of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*—a 13-volume edition published at Kaḥ thog Monastery, probably sometime in the early 20th or late 19th century—violent exorcistic *bzlog pa* rites are by far the most prevalent type of ritual activity, and, by some measures, the most prevalent topic in the entire corpus.⁷ These apotropaic, or harm-averting, rituals enfold uniquely Tibetan characters and ritual protocols into classical Mahāyoga tantric formats. In fact, many of the *sgrub thabs* (Skt. *sādhana*), *bzlog pa*, and mytho-historical narratives included in the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* tantras incorporate the autochthonous gods and spirits of Tibet in their tantric mythologies, self-cultivational practices, and harm-averting ritual programs. The Bka' brgyad was thus a hybrid tradition, and it played an important role in the assimilation of Buddhism in Tibet as it worked to render tantric ritual traditions resonant for new Tibetan audiences.⁸

⁶ The Sde dge edition of the *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* organizes the Accomplishment Class of Mahāyoga in two subcategories: the Two Revealed Treasures (Gter byon gnyis) and the Eight Transmitted Cycles (Bka' ma brgyad). The Two Revealed Treasures include the general and individuated tantras of Nyang ral's *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*, as well as Sangs rgyas gling pa's *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* revelation. The Eight Transmitted Cycles contain transmitted (i.e., not *gter ma*) texts organized under headings of the eight Bka' brgyad Herukas. However, some of these texts are extracted from the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* and other Bka' brgyad revelation cycles, while some of them do seem to be first-dispensation texts cross-listed in the *Bka' 'gyur* and *Bstan 'gyur*. For more on the Bka' brgyad's inclusion in the *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* and other Rnying ma anthologies, see Trautz 2019: 147–165.

⁷ Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978: passim.

⁸ See Samphel 2008.

Bka' brgyad lore holds that the cycle was initially dispensed by *dākinīs* to eight tantric masters, the Rig 'dzin brgyad, in India at the Bsil ba'i tshal (Skt. Śītavana) charnel ground near Rājagṛha.⁹ From there, it was brought by Pad ma 'byung nas (Skt. Padmasambhava), to Tibet, where it was bestowed to the Emperor Khri srong lde btsan (r. 755–794) and a retinue of eight close disciples at Bsam yas chims phu.¹⁰ According to tradition, it was then concealed for future discovery by Khri srong lde btsan's incarnation, Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer himself. Thus, the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* was an early example of physical *gter ma*, recording a scriptural tradition thought to be of decidedly Indian origin.

As Daniel Hirshberg points out, the procedures for early *gter ma* revelation had yet to be standardized in Nyang ral's time. Prior to the distinction between *sa gter* and *dgongs gter*, revelation involved a suite of techniques, including visionary encounter, archeology, and textual tradency.¹¹ As Robert Mayer suggests, the retrieval of *Bde gshegs 'dus pa* materials from Mkho mthing may have indeed involved the physical extraction of imperial-period texts from within the temple's walls.¹² However, despite the tradition's claim of Indian origins, the literary evidence available to us suggests that the *Bde gshegs 'dus pa* was incubated in Tibet, perhaps a bit before the time of Nyang ral. Evidence for this view, which will be reviewed below, includes the absence of this particular arrangement of Bka' brgyad deities and their ritual protocols from any documentably Indian tantric sources, and also the inclusion of specifically Tibetan gods and spirits in the mythology and ritualism of the Bka' brgyad.¹³

As for its revelation by Nyang ral in the mid-12th century, while

⁹ This story is recorded in the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa bka' byung tshul*, an auto-historical revelation text that seems to have been part of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* cycle from an early point, see Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978 vol. 1: 243–284. Also see Dudjom 1991: 481–483.

¹⁰ The recipients of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* at Bsam yas are said to have been: Khri srong lde btsan, Nam mkha'i snying po, Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, Rgyal ba mchog dbyangs, Ye shes mtsho rgyal, Dpal gyi ye shes, Rlangs chen Dpal gyi seng ge, and Bai ro tsa na. Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978 vol. 1: 257–259. Also see Dudjom 1991: 482–483.

¹¹ Hirshberg 2016: 139.

¹² See Hirshberg 2016: 135 and Mayer 2015: 228–229.

¹³ The inclusion of specifically Tibetan gods in a cycle of purportedly Indian origin did not go unnoticed by Tibetans. 'Gos lo tsa ba Gzhon nu dpal (1392–1481) reports on criticisms directed to the Bka' brgyad in this regard and seems to agree with those who asserted the Tibetan provenance of the *Ma mo rbod gtong*, *'Jig rten mchod bstod*, and *Dmod pa drag sngags* sub-cycles. However, 'Gos adjudicates the matter by suggesting that these cycles' origins with Padmasambhava still qualifies them as valid tantric scriptures, see Go Lotsawa 1949: 107.

the normative account gives us the story of Nyang ral clandestinely retrieving the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* in 130 texts from "behind" (*rgyab nas*) the main Vairocana (Tib. Rnam par snang mdzad) statue at Mkho mthing Temple in Lho brag, there are actually several divergent accounts found within Bka' brgyad-associated literature. The account of the Mkho mthing revelation is told in Nyang ral's most widely circulated biography, the *Gsal ba'i me long*. But a different, and perhaps older, account is provided by the less-well-known *Dri ma med pa'i bka' rgya can* hagiography.¹⁴ According to the *Dri ma med pa*, Nyang ral received some version of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* from his own lamas, Bla ma ra shag (a.k.a Bsod nams rdo rje, c. 12th century) and Gter ston Grub thob dngos grup (12th century).¹⁵ This suggests that the *Bka' brgyad* was already in circulation, and, as Hirshberg suggests, its "revelation" by Nyang ral may have simply involved the texts returning to their rightful owner in the person of Khri srong lde btsan's reincarnation (i.e., Nyang ral).¹⁶ Even where the *Gsal ba'i me long's* narrative of the Mkho mthing revelation prevailed, as it has across most Rnying ma oral and literary traditions, there has long been ambiguity around the degree to which the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* represents the revealed (*gter ma*) or transmitted (*bka' ma*) type of textual dissemination. Historical introductions to Tibetan editions of Bka' brgyad materials often refer to Nyang ral's "mixing the rivers of *bka' ma* and *gter ma*" (*bka' gter chu 'dres*) in his treatment of the Bka' brgyad cycle. This turn of phrase may be traceable to Mnga' ris Pañ chen Pad ma dbang rgyal's (1487–1542) historical commentary on the Bka' brgyad, wherein he outlines both transmitted and revealed lineages of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*.¹⁷ Mnga' ris concludes that the lineage of a transmitted *Bde gshegs 'dus pa*, sometimes called the "Bka' ma bka' brgyad," or "Bka' ma brgyad," which was passed down in an unbroken line from the imperial period, and which Nyang ral received from Ra shag and Dngos sgrub, effectively ended

¹⁴ "Sprul sku mnga' bdag dag chen po'i skyes rabs mams thar dri ma med pa'i bka' rgya can," in Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978 vol. 1: 1–176. "Gsal ba'i me long in Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor," in Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1980 vol. 2: 199–381. Also see Hirshberg 2016 for his thorough analysis of the history and relationship between Nyang ral's biographical texts.

¹⁵ Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978 vol. 1: 92. This passage reports that Nyang ral received the 20 *Bde gshegs 'dus pa* tantras and teachings, along with the practice methods (*rgyud lung nyi shu sgrub thabs phro mo dang bcas pa*) from Bla ma Ra shag, and the Bka' brgyad empowerments and instructions (*gsang sngags sgrub pa bka' brgyad kyi dbang bka' gdams ngag dang bcas pa*) from Gter ston Dngos grup.

¹⁶ Hirshberg 2016: 102, 104.

¹⁷ Mnga' ris Pañ chen, "'Chad thabs mun sel nyi zla'i khor lo," in Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978 vol. 1: 177–242, specifically, see: 218–219.

with Nyang ral's revelation at Mkho mthing, whereafter all *Bde gshegs 'dus pa* materials were subsumed under Nyang ral's treatment of the corpus.¹⁸

Interestingly, there may be evidence for a pre-Nyang ral iteration of the *Bka' brgyad* in an obscure tantra with various titles found nestled in several editions of the *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* and also included in some of the major *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* editions. This text is variously known as the *Bde gshegs 'dus pa'i rgyud*, the *Zhi khro 'dus pa*, or the *'Byed pa lde mig gi rgyud*, among other aliases.¹⁹ This tantra includes the same basic iconographical elements as the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa's* root tantra, the *Rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po*, but more closely resembles Indian Māyājāla doctrinal templates and narrative style. Such isomorphisms with Māyājāla tantras include the centrality of the Five Sugata Family (Bde gshegs rigs Inga) mandala, the elevation of the Peaceful-Wrathful (Zhi khro) deity complex, as well as a doctrinal orientation strongly evident in Māyājāla scriptures, but replaced with a strong ritual orientation in Nyang ral's *Bka' brgyad* revelation. This *Bde gshegs 'dus pa'i rgyud* also includes a hybrid cast of characters of both Indian and Tibetan provenance, ranging from rival Hindu gods (as in the Guhyagarbha's wrathful mandala), to the Tibetan imperial god, Yar lha sham po, along with various *btsan* spirits. This iconographical hybridity suggests that this text developed in Tibet, and, given the presence of characters such as Yar lha sham po and other *btsan* spirits associated with imperial lore, may have been incubated in the imperial period or shortly thereafter. This tantra was perhaps an initial iteration of the *Bka' brgyad* system transmitted to Nyang ral by Ra shag and Dngos sgrub, just as the *Dri ma med pa* biography asserts, and likely provided the iconographical template for Nyang ral's revelation.

Also worth mentioning is a Sems sde cycle called the "Bka' brgyad rdzongs 'phrang." Mnga' ris Paṅ chen reports that completion stage (*rdzogs rim*) and Sems sde contemplation was an important feature of *Bka' brgyad* training,²⁰ and Ngag dbang dpal bzang likewise tells of his reception of the *Rdzong 'phrang* cycle at Kaḥ thog four centuries later.²¹ As exemplars of Sems sde literature, the *Rdzongs 'phrang* texts are understood to participate in the "transmitted" (*bka' ma*) family of

¹⁸ Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978 vol. 1: 200.

¹⁹ This text may be found in the following *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* editions: Mtshams brag vol. 23 text 449; Sde dge vol. 15 text 250; Dpal brtsegs vol. 18 text 240. See *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum*. Tibetan & Himalayan Library: The Catalogue of the Master Edition of the Collected Tantras of the Ancients. <http://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/canons/ngb/catalog.php#cat=ng>. Accessed May 19, 2020.

²⁰ Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978 vol. 1: 199–200.

²¹ Palzang 2013: 145.

tantric scriptures, and Mnga' ris Paṅ chen provides a transmission history that stretches back to Gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes and other first-dispensation masters.²² Thus, we have further evidence for a pre-Nyang ral iteration of Bka' brgyad materials. However, as this lineage's first historical figure is Gnubs chen, we cannot conclude that it had truly Indian origins.

In sum, there appears to be evidence for Bka' brgyad traditions that pre-date Nyang ral's revelation. These early Bka' brgyad traditions may have included a Mahāyoga tantra centering on the eight Bka' brgyad Herukas, as well as a Sems sde tradition which was evidently maintained from the 9th century onward. So, while the Bka' brgyad is widely known as an early example of revelation literature, elements of it may have indeed circulated in Tibet before the time of its revealer, Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer.

2. *The Bka' brgyad's Development and Impact in the 12th–15th Centuries*

As Ronald Davidson, David Germano, Jacob Dalton, and Matthew Kapstein (among others) have shown, the period immediately following the "age of fragmentation" (*sil bu'i dus*, 842–early 12th century) was a time of intense competition and creativity across the Tibetan Plateau. During this time, Snga 'gyur communities faced pressure from several fronts: from emergent neoconservative rulers in Gu ge, from new monastic institutions under the support of ascendant aristocratic houses in Central Tibet, and from the importation of exciting new tantric traditions from India, proffered by charismatic translator-adepts.²³ In this environment of competition and innovation, Tibetan religious institutions took on never-before-seen formats, most notably introducing the involvement of powerful clans with the leadership of emerging monastic strongholds such as Sa skya and Gsang phu. Additionally, as the Eastern Vinaya-based monasteries of Central Tibet gained wealth and influence, rivalries erupted around sacred sites, resulting, for example, in the razing of Lhasa's two most important shrines: the Ra mo che and Jo khang temples, as well as the destruction of several temples at Bsam yas in 1106.²⁴

All told, the general instability surrounding the rivalries of powerful new institutions, and the celebrity of Gsar ma translator-adepts, would have certainly detracted from the stability and

²² Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978 vol. 1: 218.

²³ Davidson 2004: 117–160. Also see Germano 2005, Kapstein 2000, and Dalton 2011 & 2016.

²⁴ Yamamoto 2009: 35.

influence of the Early Translation chieftain-priests, leaving the loosely-associated Snga 'gyur communities in need of competitive resources for bolstering their nascent identity. The *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*, for a number of reasons, would have been just such a resource. Its ultra-fierce iconography and mythological narratives would have been emboldening to the Snga 'gyur practitioners, whose embrace of such idioms had been directly challenged by the Gu ge kings.²⁵

This is not to suggest that it was only within Snga 'gyur communities that the wrathful idiom flourished; it is absolutely the case that Heruka iconography and wrathful soteriology were present in the traditions that emerged from the Second Spread (*phyi dar*) of tantra in Tibet. However, the Rnying ma, who were in no small degree under the influence of Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer's tremendous literary vision, would come to incorporate the wrathful and ritualistic tantrism of the *Bka' brgyad* into a complex of idioms distinctive of Snga 'gyur Rnying ma pa religiosity. The resulting matrix of doctrines and idioms yielded an elevation of harm-averting ritual as soteriological practice, a commitment to wrathful iconography as expressive of the Buddhology of pristine cognition, and a subordination of all forms of Buddhist doctrine and practice to Mahā Ati under the rubric of the Nine Vehicles (*Thegs pa dgu*). While some of these formats are discernable in Indian Mahāyoga scriptures, they gain a distinctive character and emphasis in Snga 'gyur tantric literature. Indeed, each of these features is strongly present in the *Bka' brgyad* cycle's ritual programs and mythological narratives. For example, the self-cultivational rituals of the so-called worldly (*'jig rten pa'i*) mandalas of 'Jig rten mchod bstod and Dmod pa drag sngags revolve around geomantic and thaumaturgical themes resonant with Tibet's indigenous ritual culture. At the same time, the framing narratives of the *Bka' brgyad* root tantras center on the cosmogenesis of wrathful mandalas out of the naturally expressive character of a pristine cognition, a Buddhology most fully articulated in the mystical rhetoric of the ultimate vehicle of Ati. Taken together, these features define the *Bka' brgyad* cycle in terms of its elevation of the wrathful idiom and the advancement of a distinctive vision for the soteriological value of harm-averting ritualism.²⁶ Moreover, this approach to tantric practice was coordinated with an emergent conception of the harm-averting ritual adept as the paradigmatic Buddhist master: an image strongly advanced by Nyang ral nyi ma

²⁵ Karmay 1998: 3–15.

²⁶ See Trautz 2019: 204–232 for a detailed analysis of these features in the context of the *Bka' brgyad rtsa ba rgyud kyi rgyal po*.

'od zer himself in his curation of Padmasambhava lore.²⁷

The incorporation of characters and ritual idioms derived from indigenous ritual culture would have been specifically bolstering to the Snga 'gyur adepts, many of whom, like Nyang ral, were professional ritualists known for performing harm-averting rites for livelihood. Such ritualism has ancient origins on the Tibetan Plateau and across the Himalaya, where propitiation of natural forces embodied as environmental gods and demons was (and continues to be) an essential element of daily life. Entities such as the fearsome *btsan po*, the cannibalistic *srin po*, the tempestuous *ma mo* goddesses, the aquatic *klu*, and the powerful white *lha*, are all thought to be active participants in the fortunes of humans. With the introduction of Buddhism, these entities were hybridized with characters from Indian pantheons, resulting in a complicated milieu of divine, semi-divine, and demonic entities with which ritual adepts were supposed to interact. By the 9th century, we see attempts to standardize these entities in a rubric known as the Eight Classes (the *Sde brgyad*), which Nyang ral placed at the center of the *Bka' brgyad's* tantric mythology and ritualism.²⁸ The *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* thus constellates the soteriological and apotropaic dimensions of tantric practice around uniquely Tibetan (or hybridic Indo-Tibetan) ritual idioms, a development which would play a strong role in the institutional profile and emergent denominational identity of the Rnying ma pa. We can thus imagine how the *Bka' brgyad* became a resource for a community whose leaders were already valued for their harm-averting ritual prowess.

Finally, in collating the non-Māyājāla deity systems which had been circulating in Snga 'gyur communities—systems such as

²⁷ See Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1989.

²⁸ The codification of the Eight Classes of Gods and Demons (*dregs pa sde brgyad*, *lha ma srin sde brgyad*, or sometimes *sprul pa'i sde brgyad*) is first evidenced in Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes's 9th-century liturgy, the *Sde brgyad gser skyems*. In the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*, the *Sde brgyad* include the *klu*, *gza'*, *bdud*, *lha*, *dmu*, *gnod spyin*, *srin po*, and *bgegs* demons. *Ma mo* are also sometimes included in the *Sde brgyad* lists. Subcategories of the Eight Classes include the *srid pa'i lha*, *pho lha* and *mo lha*, *gsang sku'i lha*, *srid pa'i ma mo*, *btsan*, and other specifically-named entities. Lists of the *Sde brgyad* gods and spirits are notoriously idiosyncratic, even within a single corpus such as the *Bde gshegs 'dus pa*. Thus, it seems that the very idea of "Eight Classes" was an important signifier for Tibet's autochthonous gods and demons, which were ordered by the *Sde brgyad* rubric for the purpose of clerical ritual interventions. In the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*, we see these entities involved in the preparation and concealment of *gter ma*, incorporated into the mythic narratives and deity mandalas of the root tantras and also targeted in the copious harm-averting ritual practices that fill out the *Bka' brgyad* ritual cycles. See Samphel 2008; Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes 1997; and Dudjom 1991: 254–266.

Hayagrīva, Yamāntaka, and Vajrakīlaya—the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* provided a new canon with its own idioms, ritual programs, and mythology. Though some attempts had already been made to anthologize the Snga 'gyur inheritance of tantras transmitted from India, the tremendous scale and comprehensive scope of Nyang ral's *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* may be interpreted as a further attempt to collate materials into a consolidated doctrinal and practical identity.²⁹ By bringing together tantric traditions which had long sustained the Snga 'gyur into one corpus, Nyang ral was able to communicate a coherent identity for what had been a diverse and localized collection of tantric Buddhist communities. This collation had doctrinal, historiographic, and vocational implications, and was an important part of Nyang ral's overarching project of shifting authority towards the Snga 'gyur and its imagined history in the Tibetan imperium.

In this, we should remain cognizant of Nyang ral's overarching authorial identity. Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer's incredible body of work was essentially a historiographic one, bolstered by doctrinal and ritual works with their own distinctive myth and ritual formats. As curated by Nyang ral, the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* participated in an emergent vision of Rnying ma—and of Tibetan Buddhist—religiosity, one that included a re-imagining of the legacy of the Tibetan imperium, a recourse to both the transcendental mysticism and the wrathful ritualism that ran through Snga 'gyur practice, and the elevation of the harm-averting ritual adept as the paradigmatic Buddhist master.³⁰ By incorporating these elements, the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* would have resonated for the Early Translation practitioners, and we see it rapidly come to stand at the center of Rnying ma orthodoxy. Mnga' ris Pañ chen tells us, for example, that, by the 16th century, 151 exegetical commentaries on the *Bka' brgyad* were in circulation, dozens of practice lineages persisted across central and southern Tibet, and that “in Dbus, Gtsang, Mdo, and Khams, the *Bka' brgyad* had especially spread.”³¹

While the influence of the *Bka' brgyad* in an emergent religious identity for the Snga 'gyur seems clear, what is less directly provable is the connection between the developments in the treatment of this

²⁹ Dalton interprets the emergence of the *Zur bka' sde* corpus as an early anthologization effort, reflecting the Snga 'gyur's inheritance of Indian tantric materials (2016: 49).

³⁰ See Germano 2005 for his description of Nyang ral's attempts to incorporate both “pristine” and “horrific” idioms of tantric contemplation in his overarching oeuvre. Also see Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1988 & 1989 for his prominent historical literature.

³¹ *deng sang dbus gtsang dang/ mdo khams kong po sogs na dar ba'i bka' brgyad pal cher rnams ni/* (Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978 vol. 1: 205–206).

scriptural literature and the socio-political context surrounding the emergence of Snga 'gyur institutions and communities. Few sources from the post-fragmentation period speak directly to the impact of contestations that gripped Central Tibet, and there are essentially no sources from this period that theorize ritual practice in terms of its use as a response to extrinsic social pressures. Thus, the theory that the Bka' brgyad emerged and was curated in response to extrinsic pressures facing the Snga' gyur is a preliminary hypothesis deserving further research. However, my interpretation will proceed in this vein, as I believe it provides a compelling model for understanding the development of a scriptural tradition within specific historical contexts, and it is clear that new treatments of the Bka' brgyad and other tantric cycles so often accompanied accelerated institutional transformations. At stake is a methodological question about the use of religious literature as historical evidence: an obviously important issue for historians of religions, but beyond the scope of the present article to fully address.

3. *Bka' brgyad Ritual and Rnying ma Institutions in the 16th–17th Centuries*

Political dominance over Central Tibet alternated between Mongol-backed Sa skya and the Bka' brgyud-affiliated Phag mo gru clan from the 13th until the 17th century. By 1613, the Phag mo gru pa had been eclipsed by the Gtsang pa aristocracy, while Dga' ldan would align with Gushri Khan's Mongols to achieve a long-lasting dominance over Central Tibet beginning in 1642. As James Gentry observes, it was during this period of instability, and in the 16th and 17th centuries in particular, that ritual mastery became a valuable commodity in rival factions' attempts to exert control over political events.³² Indicative of this trend was the prominence of Blo gros rgyal mtshan, also known as Sog bzlog pa, the "Mongol Repeller," (1552–1624). Sog bzlog pa was a student of Zhig po gling pa Gar gyi dbang phyug rtsal (1524–1583), whose revealed ritual text, *The 25 Ways of Averting Armies* (*Dmag bzlog nyer lnga*), was deployed by Sog bzlog pa under the patronage of Gtsang as they fended off the initial incursions of Dga' ldan's Mongol mercenaries.³³ Sog bzlog pa also inherited the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* from a 'Bri gung Bka' brgyud lineage. We should not be surprised to find the Bka' brgyad in the resume of this ritual master, as harm-averting ritualism with a violent (and, as James Gentry observes, "object-based") orientation was a definitive

³² Gentry 2013: 52.

³³ Gentry 2013: 47–56.

feature of the highly-valued ritual program proffered by figures like Sog bzlog pa.

One of Sog bzlog pa's main disciples was Gong ra lo chen Gzhan phan rdo rje (1594–1654), a polymathic lama who would be a critical figure for the Rnying ma lineage in general, and for the Bka' brgyad tradition in particular. Gong ra was the principal lama to Phrin las lhun grub (1611–1662), the father and root lama to Gter bdag gling pa, 'Gyur med rdo rje (1646–1714), the founder of Smin grol gling. According to 'Gyur med rdo rje's short biography of Gong ra, and from information gleaned from references in other biographical sources, Gong ra supposedly edited an early *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, an edition of the *Man ngag sde'i rgyud bcu bdun*, and a comprehensive edition of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*, all from his scriptorium at Nges gsang rdo rje gling in Gtsang.³⁴ Unfortunately, it seems that none of these editions survives, having been destroyed when the 5th Dalai Lama banned the works of “the trio of Snang, Sog, and Gong” (i.e., Zhig po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa, and Gong ra).³⁵ Of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* editions in circulation today, the two most widely-circulated editions—one from Kaḥ thog and the other from Mtshams brag in Bhutan—claim to be descended from Gong ra's redaction.³⁶ While these two editions are quite different in some regards, they do share a basic structure, and entail a similar density of apotropaic ritual texts. The Kaḥ thog edition, for example, boasts at least 55 major exorcism (*bzlog pa*) texts, making it the most prevalent topic in the corpus. Other prominent elements include rites of exorcism (*bzlog pa*), effigy sacrifice (*gtor bzlog*, *gtor zor*) and impalement (*gzer kha*), invoking and dispatching unseen forces (*rbod gtong*), and mantric cursing (*dmod pa* and *drag sngags*). It may be the case that this iteration of the Bka' brgyad as a repository for harm-

³⁴ 'Gyur med rdo rje's biography of Gong ra tells us that he assembled the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* three times, see 'Gyur med rdo rje 1998 vol. 3: 90. Gong ra's *Curation of the Seventeen Esoteric Tantras of the Great Perfection* is registered by Gentry 2013: 467n961. And the English-language introduction to the Mtshams brag edition of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor* suggests that Gong ra was the initial editor of the parent edition to the 13-volume *Bka' brgyad chos skor* editions, see Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1980: 5.

³⁵ Gentry 2013: 480. Also see Gu ru bkra shis 1990: 448 and Smith 2004.

³⁶ This claim regarding the provenance of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* with Gong ra is weakly substantiated. Beyond the claim as it is made in the Mtshams brag's preface, there are but a few colophonic references to Gong ra's editorial role, including the colophon of the *Zhi khro rtsa ba'i rgyud* which specifies Gong ra's role in curating (*bzhengs pa*) this version of the text. It is not clear why the Mtshams brag editors took these colophonic references to suggest that Gong ra had edited the entire corpus, and perhaps they were drawing on received information regarding the provenance of the major *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* editions as they were transmitted in Bhutan and Khams.

averting and thaumaturgical ritual practice had its origins in Gong ra's edition, which was curated within his context of the commodification of intercessory ritual magic in a particularly contentious context. Whether Gong ra's curation of the corpus was a matter of simply publishing materials that he had received in a coherent package, or whether he scoured Central Tibet to bring together Bka' brgyad-associated materials, we do not yet know. But we do see the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* increasingly become a repository for apotropaic ritual knowledge between the 17th and 20th centuries. It is worth noting that this association of the Bka' brgyad with harm-averting ritualism contrasts with Mnga' ris Paṅ chen's description of Bka' brgyad tradition, which emphasizes the self-cultivational practice of *bskyed rim* and *rdzogs rim* under the close tutelage of Snga 'gyur masters.

At Smin grol gling, 'Gyur med rdo rje and his brother, Lo chen Dharma śrī (a.k.a Ngag dbang chos dpal rgya mtsho, 1654–1717), made an effort to streamline Bka' brgyad rituals into a single ritual cycle, the "Smin gling system" (*bka' brgyad smin gling lugs*), which could be practiced as part of liturgical life at the monastery.³⁷ As Jacob Dalton and Kurtis Schaeffer have observed, the curation of ritual cycles at Smin grol gling replicated the institutionalization of ritual at Dga' ldan and was related to efforts to consolidate authority and articulate institutional identity.³⁸ These revisions of institutional ritual practice at Smin grol gling resulted in a ritualism that involved a cast of professional officiants, in formats that could be carried out in communal settings over a few days, and were suited to public audiences. This kind of approach to ritual practice was a revolution for the Rnying ma pa, establishing a newly institutionalized identity for the Ancient School moving forward; the large "Mother Temples" of Eastern Tibet would each adopt the Smin gling system for their regular Bka' brgyad ritual intensives (*sgrub chen*), which are still performed either in commemoration of Padmasambhava's life, or to dispel obstacles at the end of the lunar calendar.³⁹ There was no analogous curation of Bka' brgyad tantras or doctrinal commentaries at Smin grol gling, evidencing the development of a ritual-centric attitude towards the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* which would reverberate in Smin grol gling's affiliated insitutions for the following centuries.

³⁷ 'Gyur med rdo rje 1977.

³⁸ Dalton 2016: 97–114. Also see Dalton 2006 and Schaeffer 2006.

³⁹ This is not to suggest that it was at Smin grol gling that the Bka' brgyad *sgrub chen* was initially conceived. As Cantwell (2019: 156) suggests, there is evidence that Nyang ral's lineal descendants had organized textual materials for the performance of regular ritual intensives at Smra bo lcog.

4. *The Bka' brgyad in 18th- and 19th-century Khams:
Revelation, Ritual, and Anthologization*

From Central Tibet, the Bka' brgyad cycle spread east, with Bka' brgyad study and practice becoming an important feature of temple life at the major Rnying ma monasteries in Khams. As the autobiographical accounts of people like Ngag dbang dpal bzang (1879–1941) and 'Jam mgon kong sprul (1813–1899) attest, the Bka' brgyad was an important source of liturgical and contemplative knowledge at the great Rnying ma institutions around Sde dge in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁴⁰ It was also a source for ritual mastery that secured the fortunes of lamas in the service of the Sde dge king (and sometimes his enemies). The Bka' brgyad Great Accomplishment Rites (Bka' brgyad sgrub chen) would be instituted across Rnying ma temples, while Khams pa *gter ston* would prolifically reveal their own Bka' brgyad materials. The Bka' brgyad was also implicated in the anthologization efforts of Rnying ma ecclesiasts in the 18th and 19th centuries as new canons of scriptural and ritual texts were developed alongside the growth of Rnying ma temples. In these new canons, the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* was either included outright, or deployed as a template for the organization of Mahāyoga knowledge altogether.⁴¹ All told, it is clear that the Bka' brgyad was a central feature of an increasingly institutionalized identity for the Rnying ma denomination between the 18th and 20th centuries.

The development of a highly institutionalized iteration of Rnying ma religion in the 18th and 19th centuries may be understood in the broader context of political contestations that embroiled Sde dge.⁴² While it is not universally accepted amongst historians of Eastern Tibet that the rise of major institutions in the 18th through 20th centuries was exclusively in response to inter-institutional competitive pressures (specifically, the rising influence of Dga' ldan in Eastern Tibet), I suggest that the kinds of contestations surrounding Sde dge must have inflected the development of ecclesiastical institutions in this period.⁴³ The 18th century saw

⁴⁰ See Kongtrul 2003 and Palzang 2013.

⁴¹ See Trautz 2019: 147–165 for an overview of the Bka' brgyad's inclusion in Rnying ma anthologies.

⁴² See Hartley 1997.

⁴³ Paradigmatic of this debate is Alexander Gardner's suggestion that the so-called non-sectarian (*ris med*) movement of 19th-century Khams was actually a pan-sectarian (but decidedly non-Dge lugs pa) response to the growing dominance of Lhasa's Dge lugs institutions, see Gardner 2006: 145. Thubten Phuntshok, on the other hand, dismisses the idea that the development of major religious institutions around Sde dge had anything to do with the growing influence of Dga' ldan in Eastern Tibet (personal communication, October 2017).

periodic power shifts in Eastern Tibet between Lhasa, the Qing, and other regional polities. The Sde dge kingdom maintained autonomy through much of this tumult, but was subject to a momentary conquest by the warlord Dgon po nam rgyal (1799–1865) in the 1860s and *de facto* colonization by Lhasa, followed by a period of Qing rule.⁴⁴ As Alexander Gardner observes, between the late 1860s and 1918, Sde dge was essentially at the forefront of a centuries-long struggle between Lhasa and China to define their mutual borders: something of growing importance to the Qing as it began to transform its self-concept from an older model of concentric spheres of imperial influence towards a defined nation-state with definite borders.⁴⁵

In the midst of this, Sde dge and its ecclesiastical leaders strove to maintain autonomy not just for the kingdom, but for the region of Khams altogether. They would do this in part through new religious formats and identities. Such ecclesiastical developments included the growth and reformation of major monastic institutions, the formation of new scriptural canons, the development of ecumenical approaches to exegesis and practice, an efflorescence of *gter ma* revelation, the development of public tantric ritual programs (*sgrub chen*), the inception of comprehensive curricula for exegetical study of exoteric and esoteric traditions (*bshad grwa*), and the close involvement of luminary masters with the Sde dge court. Many of these developments mirrored the highly institutionalized and politicized practice of Buddhism as it had been deployed by the Dge lugs reform tradition and the Dalai Lama's Dga' ldan pho brang. Just as at Smin grol gling, the Rnying ma temples replicated these modes of institutionalized Buddhism, while incorporating their own distinctive traditions by including the study and practice of transmitted and revealed tantric corpora. The *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* was an essential element of this mix, as it was understood to represent the Rnying ma's unique tantric inheritance and was regarded as paradigmatic of the origins and structure of tantric knowledge.

The *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* became important in liturgical life at Kaḥ thog, Zhe chen, Dpal yul, and Rdzogs chen monasteries. Ngag dbang dpal bzang tells of receiving extensive training in the *Bka' brgyad* under the 3rd Kaḥ thog si tu, Chos kyi rgya mtsho (1880–1923), and we also learn of Dge rtse Paṅ chen 'Gyur med mchog grub's (1761–1829) encounter with the *Bde gshegs 'dus pa* when he first arrived at Kaḥ thog in the late 18th century.⁴⁶ The 13-volume Kaḥ thog edition of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* was published at the

⁴⁴ See Tsomu 2014.

⁴⁵ Gardner 2006: 152.

⁴⁶ Palzang 2013: 149.

printing house there, perhaps in the early 20th century under the supervision of an elderly Chos kyi rgya mtsho, or immediately thereafter. Prior to that, there seems to have been a nine-volume edition, which Kong sprul claims was published at Sde dge Par khang, and which circulated at places like Zhe chen and Kaḥ thog.⁴⁷ Perhaps this nine-volume edition more closely reflected Gong ra's parent collection, although we cannot know for sure. Why it was expanded to 13 volumes, we also do not know, although it is worth noting that the 3rd Kaḥ thog si tu, Chos kyi rgya mtsho, seems to have been particularly fond of the *Bde gshegs 'dus pa* and its rituals, using it as a sourcebook for liturgical life at Kaḥ thog.⁴⁸ Indeed, volumes 10 through 13 of Kaḥ thog's edition of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* exclusively feature supplementary rites, mostly for the violent aversion of obstructive forces. Many of these rituals have been incorporated into the Great Accomplishment ritual manuals (*sgrub skor*) for the Rnying ma Mother Temples.

As for Kong sprul, he received the *Bka' brgyad* at numerous temples, including at Zhe chen, where the First Zhe chen dbon sprul Mthu stobs rnam rgyal (1787–1854) had curated an extensive *Bka' brgyad* ritual manual based on the Smin gling tradition, and also through the Zur mang *Bka' brgyud* lineage.⁴⁹ Indeed, from the 18th century onward, the monasteries of Dpal yul, Kaḥ thog, and Rdzogs chen all harbored *Bka' brgyad* ritual traditions allegedly derived from Smin grol gling. Supplementing the Smin gling lugs with rites distinctive to each institution, these monasteries produced unique ritual manuals to be followed in the context of annual *sgrub chen* ceremonies, or to be drawn on as a sourcebook for *ad hoc* rites. Kong sprul reports on the prominence of such *Bka' brgyad* rituals in his own resume of professional ritual activities: a professional function

⁴⁷ Kongtrul 2003: 217, 283. A nine-volume manuscript edition of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* from Eastern Tibet has recently been digitized by the Buddhist Digital Resource Center in Chengdu with no identifying information (TBRC: W2PD20239). It is quite possible that this edition is the very nine-volume one mentioned by numerous 18th-century sources. Interestingly, a ten-volume *Bka' brgyad*, digitized under the supervision of Karma Phuntso for the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme, has been found at Phur sgrub dgon, near Thimpu. Phuntso speculates that these manuscripts date from between the 17th and 19th centuries. A cursory analysis shows significant similarities to the nine-volume edition from Khams, and a picture thus emerges of the ongoing transmission of *Bka' brgyad* corpora—first in the nine-volume, and, later, the 13-volume format—from Kaḥ thog to Bhutan between the 18th and 20th centuries. British Library Endangered Archives Programme, EAP 310/1. <https://eabl.uk/collection/EAP310-3-1>. Accessed May 19, 2020.

⁴⁸ Palzang 2013: 129.

⁴⁹ Kongtrul 2003: 63.

he would use to his advantage in navigating the hazards of Sde dge's shifting political fortunes.⁵⁰

'Jam mgon kong sprul was not the only Sde dge "non-sectarian" (*ris med pa*) to work with Bka' brgyad materials. 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse' dbang po (1820–1892) received the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* from 'Jam mgon kong sprul, and was said to have attained mastery of the Bka' brgyad in dream-visions, while his *gter ston* associate, Mchog gyur gling pa (1829–1870) himself revealed a Bka' brgyad cycle which was deemed especially comprehensive. Other treasure revealers also specialized in Bka' brgyad revelations, especially in the wilds of Nyag rong, where Rang rig rdo rje (a.k.a. Sku gsum gling pa, 1847–1903) was said to have revealed over 100 Bka' brgyad *gter ma* texts in the remote Upper A bse Valley alone.⁵¹

Beyond ritual practice and treasure revelation, the *Bka' brgyad* became a subject of exegetical treatment, and 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho's (1846–1912) commentary, the *Bka' brgyad rnam bshad*, would become a central element of the *bshad grwa* curricula at Dpal yul and at Rdzogs chen's monastic colleges. Kaḥ thog also incorporated the Bka' brgyad into the curriculum there, using an analysis of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa's Phyi ma'i rgyud* as a main source for unpacking Mahāyoga practice.⁵²

Perhaps most enduringly, the Bka' brgyad was deeply implicated in Rnying ma canon-formation in this period. As early as the 15th century, we see the 15 tantras of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* included in early iterations of the *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, as evidenced in the Bhutanese Sgang steng edition.⁵³ Stag sham nus ldan rdo rje's (a.k.a. Bsam gtan gling pa, 1655–1708) 17th-century edition, for which we only have the *dkar chag*, also contains the 15 Bka' brgyad root tantras in the same order as they appear in later *Rgyud 'bum* editions.⁵⁴ The Sde dge *Rgyud 'bum*, edited by Dge rtse Ma ha paṇḍita and based on a previous edition of 'Jigs med gling pa (1729–1798) includes the same selection of Bka' brgyad materials, but expands things by utilizing a Bka' brgyad rubric to organize all sorts of Mahāyoga materials to fill out the Accomplishment Class (Sgrub sde) of Mahāyoga scriptures. In this, the 15 foundational tantras of Nyang ral's Bka' brgyad revelation are categorized as the *Bka' brgyad*

⁵⁰ Kong sprul's autobiography recounts many occasions on which he was asked to complete Bka' brgyad *sman sgrub* and *sgrub chen* rituals for the aversion of obstacles on behalf of temples, masters, and aristocrats. For example, see Kongtrul 2003: 141, 147, 170, 174, 180, 186, 225.

⁵¹ Nyag bla rang rig rdo rje 2005 vol. 19.

⁵² Field interviews with *bshad grwa* students and instructors at Kaḥ thog Rdo rje ldan, Sichuan, the People's Republic of China, August, 2015.

⁵³ See Cantwell and Mayer 2006.

⁵⁴ Stag sham nus ldan rdo rje n.d. vol. 4: 43–70.

bde gshegs 'dus pa, one of two cycles comprising the Two Treasures (Gter gnyis) sub-category (the other being Sangs rgyas gling pa's *Bla ma dgongs 'dus*). However, all sorts of other non-Māyājāla Mahāyoga tantras, mostly verifiable to be of First Dispensation provenance (and therefore of the "transmitted" rather than "revealed" variety) are also included in the category of the Eight Transmitted Teachings (Bka' ma brgyad). Some of these texts have nothing to do with Nyang ral's *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* revelation cycle, but they are here arranged under the sub-headings of the eight Bka' brgyad deities, as if this eightfold format represented an inherent taxonomy of non-Māyājāla materials from India. We also see this use of the Bka' brgyad rubric in other anthologies, such as in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* and in the *Rnying ma bka' ma*, which echo this predilection for organizing materials under the headings of the eight Bka' brgyad deity systems. In these cases, a Bka' brgyad rubric was utilized to organize otherwise free-floating texts as if they were part of a single dispensation of related materials.

The origins of this idea are explicitly articulated in the Bka' brgyad's auto-history, a *gter ma* text called the *Bka' brgyad bka' byung tshul*. This fascinating text, which inspired Mnga' ris Paṅ chen's 16th-century research and was closely linked to material at the heart of O rgyan gling pa's (1323–1360) 14th-century *Bka' thang sde lnga* revelation, gives a comprehensive account of the dispensation of some 240 non-Māyājāla Mahāyoga tantras in the context of the Bka' brgyad's initial revelation to the Eight Vidyādhara at the Śitavana charnel ground. According to this account, each of the Eight Vidyādhara was bestowed dozens of tantras having to do with the deities featured in the Bka' brgyad revelation.⁵⁵ This narrative undergirds the status of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* as a canon for such materials, linking the Bka' brgyad to a broader scriptural taxonomy. Literary-historical evidence available to us, however, suggests no evidence outside of Bka' brgyad lore for a specifically collative relationship between these materials in India.

At any rate, the sensibility that these tantras—all sorts of scriptures featuring deities such as Hayagrīva, Yamāntaka, Vajrakīlaya, and so forth—participated in a single dispensation in mytho-historical India undergirded the development of the term *sgrub sde* to refer to non-Māyājāla tantric scriptures. The term *sgrub sde* also suggests a praxical orientation to these materials, and it is certainly the case that the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* does not

⁵⁵ "Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa bka' byung tshul," in Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978 vol. 1: 231–272 and "Dkar chag gsal ba'i sgron me," in Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978 vol. 1: 615–660.

demonstrate the doctrinal or philosophical complexity of Māyājāla tantras such as the Guhyagarbha.

It is as of yet unclear where the term *sgrub sde* is first used. Mnga' ris Paṅ chen uses the term in the plural—*sgrub sde rnams*—to refer to each of the eight sub-cycles of the Bka' brgyad (e.g., the Accomplishment Class of Hayagrīva, the Accomplishment Class of Vajrakīlaya, etc.).⁵⁶ But it seems that the use of the term to refer to a broad category of materials with both revealed and transmitted elements is a later formulation and probably related to the efforts of early *Rgyud 'bum* editors to organize Mahāyoga materials not otherwise included in the great *Bka' ma* cycles.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the Bka' brgyad was clearly an essential element of Rnying ma tradition in the 18th through 20th centuries in Eastern Tibet. Between its curation as a regular liturgical cycle at the Rnying ma pa's most important temples, its ongoing appearance in the resumes of treasure revealers, its use as a source for professional ritualism, its utilization as an exegetical template in an increasingly formalized sense of religious education, and as a rubric for the organization of tantric scriptures, the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* played a central role in how the Rnying ma denomination worked to define its institutional identity. In its participation in these diverse modes of religious practice, exegesis, and canon formation, the Bka' brgyad's function had expanded to participate in nearly every dimension of Rnying ma pa religious life. Of course, the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* was not necessarily the most important cycle in the Rnying ma literary inheritance: transmitted scriptural traditions such as the *Guhyagarbha* and the *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, and the transcendental mysticism of the Snying thig corpus, were continually maintained as staples of the Rnying ma's distinctive approach. But, as Jacob Dalton observes in regards to the *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, the treatment of a scriptural tradition—especially in its ritualization in institutional settings—addresses perceived gaps between the offerings of canonized materials and the needs of its custodians.⁵⁷ We can thus interpret the changes endured by the Bka' brgyad as evidence for the continual leveraging of its myth and ritual templates to supply resources for the articulation of identity for the Rnying ma pa. As I aver, we especially see the active curation of the Bka' brgyad

⁵⁶ Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer 1978 vol. 1: 201.

⁵⁷ Dalton 2016: xv.

cycle in historical contexts which found Rnying ma communities facing extrinsic pressures: in the competition and contestation of the post-fragmentation period, during the tumult preceding Dga' Idan's rise and the subsequent reinvention of the Rnying ma as a fully institutional denomination at Smin grol gling, and in the response of religious institutions to the various pressures surrounding Sde dge in the early modern period. In each of these settings, the Rnying ma was called to define itself in relation to extrinsic political and ecclesiastical pressures. The Bka' brgyad was one critical resource for this effort. Admittedly, a direct correlation between the curation of scriptures such as the Bka' brgyad and developments in the social and political history of Tibet is not self-evident. Tibet's history is arguably defined by inter-institutional and regional contestations that left every kind of institution—political and religious—in a perpetual position of competition and response. Given a constant state of contestation, developments in religious tradition do not necessarily reflect concerted efforts to re-author institutional identities. However, the historical contexts addressed above were associated with sudden changes in the profile of the Rnying ma, culminating in the eruption of new scriptures, the inception of new institutions, and the rapid transformation of Rnying ma religiosity. The *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* was implicated in each of these major shifts in how the Rnying ma imagined and articulated itself. It is thus tempting to correlate transformations in the reception of the Bka' brgyad with the social and political contexts that stimulated the transformation of the Rnying ma. From this perspective, the development, curation, and transformation of scriptural corpora may serve as evidence for gauging the impact of contextual social, political, and cultural changes.

From the beginning, the *Bde gshegs 'dus pa* was positioned within Nyang ral's seminal constellation of religious literatures to remain firmly at the heart of Rnying ma efforts to exert a distinctive religious identity, yet it also had to endure changes to meet the shifting needs of its custodians. Thus, this proto-canon of ritual materials and obscure mythologies that, somehow, came to Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer in a remote valley in southern Tibet came to be so much more: it supplied a vast trove of ritual knowledge for averting harms of all kinds, it was a template for communal ritualism, and it provided a taxonomy reflecting the very structure of esoteric knowledge. In this, the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* achieved a foundational stature, supplying a distinctive idiom of wrathful soteriology, a protectively violent ritualism, and a vision of ritual mastery with resonance for a community of practitioners striving to imagine themselves at the center of the history of sacred Dharma in the Land of Snow.

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Teaching the Living through the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*: Exploration into the Context and Content of an 18th-century Mongolian Block Print

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 In the final year of my MA studies at Leipzig University, I came across a small collection of manuscripts that my Mongolian language teacher Klaus Koppe acquired during the 1980s in Mongolia. Among them was a translation of the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead* or “The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State” (Tib. *Bar do thos grol chen mo*). After only reading a few sentences, it became apparent that it was written in an artificial style with cryptic formulations, which were only possible to understand by comparing it against a Tibetan version of the text.

Intrigued, I traced the history of the Mongolian translation of the *Bar do thos grol chen mo* and found its earliest edition among the Beijing block prints sponsored by the emperors of the “Great Qing” (Da Qing 大清, 1636–1912) dynasty with the title “The Sutra of Liberation Through Hearing” (Mong. *Sonusuyad tonilyayči-yin sudur ene bui*; hereafter BTG). This article seeks to construct the history of this particular block print¹ and offers a few observations for understanding the peculiarities of its translation process. This means

bringing to light the complex network of cultural exchanges between people, cultures and civilizations through the ages. [...] It means finding out why their sponsors (kings, aristocrats, patrons, high-ranking clergy, etc.) asked them to translate a given work.²

In this way, political, historical, and religious circumstances all weigh into the history of the BTG’s translation. Shedding light on these various aspects will enable us to do three things. Firstly, it will allow us to see “the larger picture stereoscopically with the smaller.”³ Secondly, it will also help us to untangle the complex web of alliances,

¹ The block print is preserved as BM-MON49 in the British Library.

² Delisle *et al.* 2012: XXI.

³ Breckenridge *et al.* 2002: 11.

animosities, and political struggles that shaped Mongol-Chinese-Tibetan relations that defined Qing policies up until the beginning of the 20th century. And thirdly, it gives us a glimpse into the mindset and decisions that have gone into the translation of this particular ritual text.

This article discusses the following three motives, which were outlined in Natalia Yampolskaya's seminal study, and were involved in the translation of the BTG into Mongolian. From a political view, texts (and rituals) can become symbols of power. Further, translations have devotional aspects, that is to say, they were done for the sake of merit production. Finally, a scholarly interest was taken in these texts, primarily due to the absence of a previous translation.⁴

Moreover, I argue that a fourth reason, *viz.* didactic purposes, was a fundamental motivation as well. Based on a textual analysis of the Mongolian BTG block print, the second part of this article aims to explore the translation techniques employed by the Mongolian translators for making this ritual text accessible to Mongolian readers, students and Buddhist adherents alike. Although previous scholarship has either stressed the political ramifications of Tibetan Buddhist patronage of the Mongolian groups⁵ or concluded that the Mongolian translations were not intended to be read, but rather served as vehicles of merit production and monuments of state power,⁶ the discussion below will highlight further levels of meaning involved in the production of this particular translation of the BTG.

1. Historical Background

To fully appreciate the political dimension of the Mongolian translation of the BTG, we need to revisit some of the historical developments starting with the 1577 conference in today's capital of Inner Mongolia, Hohhot (Mong. Kökeqota; Chin. Huhehaote 呼和浩特). The meeting of Altan Khan (1507–1582) of the Mongolian Tümed and the 3rd Dalai Lama Bsod nams rgya mtsho (1543–1588) of the Tibetan Dge lugs school inaugurated a renaissance in the history of Mongolian Buddhism when the two leaders formed a so-called patron-priest relationship (*yon mchod*).⁷ On the occasion of the Hohhot

⁴ Yampolskaya 2015: 754. See also footnote 66 below.

⁵ See, e.g., Farquhar 1978, Hevia 1993, and Rawski 1998.

⁶ See, e.g., Elverskog 2016: 31 and Sobkovyak 2018: 215.

⁷ Its antecedent can be found in the first official *yon [bdag] mchod [gnas]* relationship between the Mongolian emperor of the Yuan dynasty Khubilai Khan (1260–1294) and his Tibetan counterpart 'Gro mgon chos rgyal 'phags pa (1235–1280) marking

meeting Altan Khan made a speech which is recorded in the 18th-century *Religious History of Mongolia* (Tib. *Hor chos 'byung*). He proclaimed that after the fall of the Yuan dynasty, Buddhism ceased to exist. Only through the blessing of this “new” *yon mchod tie*,

the path of the holy religion opened up; the sea of blood was transformed into milk: this was a great blessing. Therefore, all who dwell in this land, Chinese, Tibetans, Hor, and Sog, they shall all abide by the Law of the Ten Virtues. [Therefore, from now on, every] action in this country [i.e., Mongolia] should be like in the Tibetan areas of Dbus and Gtsang.⁸

The ties were further strengthened when the reincarnation of the 3rd Dalai Lama was found in the great-grandson of Altan Khan, who became known as the 4th Dalai Lama Yon tan rgya mtsho (1589–1617). He also received part of his religious education in Hohhot, which was thereby established as an important hub of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia at the beginning of the 17th century. Thus, the Mongols were finally integrated into a “multi-ethnic and multi-centered Buddhist network,”⁹ that soon stretched all the way from the Himalayas to Tibet and the Mongol regions. The installment of a Dalai Lama of Mongolian descent was a strategic act of proselytization that helped in the orientation of Mongolian Buddhists toward Tibet and, in the process, reiterated the Mongolian self-understanding that state and religion must form a joint-venture.

After the Manchus successfully conquered the Chinese throne in 1644, it became paramount to form a political Qing identity through geo-cultural affiliations. According to Sabine Dabringhaus, the Manchu governmental structure was based on the traditional Chinese precept “to control the peoples of the empire by utilizing their own cultural characteristics” (Chin. *yin su er zhi* 因俗而治). Cooperation and collaboration with local elites were essential for the unification of their new empire.¹⁰

the first wave of conversion of the Mongols to Tibetan-style Buddhism. The duality of religious and secular rule, “the two rules,” is expressed in Mongolian as *qoyar yosun* and in Tibetan as *lugs gnyis*. The specifics have been described, for example, in the 16th century work *The White History of the Dharma with Ten Virtues* (Mong. *Arban buyantu nom-un çayan teiike*). See, e.g., Sagaster 1976.

⁸ *slar tho gan the mur rgyal po* [r.1333–1368] *nas chos chad/ [...]* *mchod yon nyi zla zung gcig gi bka' drin las/ dam pa'i chos kyi lam btod/ khrag mtsho 'o mar bsgyur ba 'di bka' drin che bas/ phyogs 'di na yod pa'i rgya bod hor sog kun gyis kyang dge ba bcu'i khrims la gnas pa dgos/ [...]* *mdor na bod yul dbus gtsang ji ltar bya ba ltar/ yul phyogs 'dir yang bya dgos zhes [...]* (*Hor chos 'byung* in 'Jigs med rig pa'i rdo rje 1892: 137.19–139.3).

⁹ Kollmar-Paulenz 2011: 83.

¹⁰ Dabringhaus 1997: 130–131.

However, the initial integration of the various independent Mongolian groups¹¹ into a unified Qing domain was complicated largely by the Dga' ldan pho brang government's policies under the leadership of the 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1683) who—with the help of the Western Mongolian leader Gushri Khan (1582–1655) of the Khoshut—established Lhasa as the capital of Central Tibet in 1642. The Dga' ldan pho brang officials pursued the creation of a theocratic empire which would incorporate all peoples of the Tibetan Buddhist faith. The greatest threat to their plans came from the newly emerging Qing Empire, which tried to seize the eastern, northern, and western Mongolian territories. Such an expansion would not only have made the formation of a theocratic domain impossible, but could even have endangered the independence of Tibet itself.¹²

With the support of the 5th Dalai Lama and his regent Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705), the attacks of another faction of the Western Mongolians or Oirats under the leadership of Galdan Boshugtu Khan (1644–1697) against the northern Mongolian Khalkha territories were seen as an act of resistance against the Qing rule. However, for Galdan Khan it was more of a personal matter since he intended to take revenge for the killing of his younger brother, in which the Khalkha Mongol lama Zanabazar¹³ was implicated.

But Zanabazar sought the support and protection of the Qing Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1662–1722) instead. In 1689, the Kangxi Emperor tried to stop further bloodshed and wrote a series of letters to various dignitaries. He appealed to the Tibetan government to intervene and further explained his support of Zanabazar and the Khalkha as follows:

We are the lord of the Empire (*tianxia zhu* 天下主). If We do not grant asylum to, and nourish, those who come to Us, then who will give asylum to them and nourish them? If the Khalkhas had sought refuge with you, O Lama, certainly you could not have tolerated their death and destruction. [...] Our wish is that the O-lu-t'e [i.e., the Oirat] and the Khalkhas completely get rid of their previous hatred, and live in

¹¹ James Hevia concluded that we cannot simply speak of unified national entities during the Qing rulership, but need to “reconceptualize sovereignty in terms other than those which map ethnicity and culture over territory” (Hevia 1993: 268). Therefore, I refer to the various factions that trace their lineage to one of the eight Mongolian clans and speak a variant of the Mongolian language as “Mongolian groups.”

¹² Ngag dbang chos ldan & Sagaster 1967: 84–85.

¹³ Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1635–1723) who was the first in the reincarnation lineage of the Khal kha Rje btsun dam pa Hu thog thu-s.

peace, as formerly. Let each keep his own territory, and stop the war, and cease hostilities.¹⁴

Only two years later, in 1691, a total of 550 Khalkha princes led by Zanabazar officially submitted to the Qing Emperor in the so-called Dolonnur convention in southern Mongolia. On this occasion, the Emperor welcomed them with many gifts and bestowed upon them various titles and established the Blue Temple (Mong. *Köke Süme*; Chin. *Huizong Si* 彙宗寺) in the Dolonnur area. Subsequently, this became a center of refuge for many Tibetan Buddhists living in Beijing, and a central hub¹⁵ for over 3,000 Mongolian monks in the 18th and 19th centuries which provided an alternative to Lhasa as an important center of Tibetan Buddhism, this time within Mongolia.¹⁶

After the successful expulsion of the last remnant troops of Galdan Khan in 1696 from the northern Qing borders, future danger from the northeast of the empire was contained so far. The emperor planned to maintain control over the administrative and social structures without committing large numbers of troops or spending large sums of money.¹⁷ After he secured the loyalty of Zanabazar as the highest Buddhist authority of the Khalkha, the emperor was thus faced with the difficult task of creating a religious institution for the Inner Mongolian groups, and even more importantly, it was necessary to establish it in the imperial capital.¹⁸ Accordingly, he summoned Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan (1642–1714), who became the first representative of the reincarnation line of the Lcang skya Ho thog thu (Mong. *Janggiy-a qutuy-tu*) to Beijing.¹⁹ The emperor saw the possibility of a more direct political influence upon the Mongolian groups and thus averting their gaze away from Tibet and towards a Mongolian clerical elite within the expanding Qing Empire, or as the Kangxi Emperor put it: “Building one monastery equals to keeping a hundred thousand soldiers.”²⁰

¹⁴ Ahmad 1970: 276. It should be noted here that the 5th Dalai Lama already died in 1683 but his death was kept secret by Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho.

¹⁵ It was extended by the Shanyin Temple (Mong. *Shira Süme*; Chin. *Shanyin Si* 善因寺) in 1731.

¹⁶ Wu 2015: 113.

¹⁷ Di Cosmo 1998: 291–292.

¹⁸ Ngag dbang chos ldan & Sagaster 1967: 85.

¹⁹ From Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan's *rnam thar* Brenton Sullivan translates an edict that an imperial envoy delivered him in 1693, “At this time there has arisen the need for a great lama of superior virtue. Since the Lama Rinpoché [i.e. the Dalai Lama] and Pañchen Rinpoché are both advanced in age, they are not being invited. You are a good lama who has great virtue [...]. You must by all means come” (Sullivan 2013: 140).

²⁰ Ujeed 2009: 54.

[But behind] the policies for the restabilization of Buddhist Inner Asian society established by the Pax Manjurica lay a fundamental conception of Buddhist monarchy, one of the constitutional features of which was close cooperation of crown and clergy. Its interpreters exhorted the emperor to promote publication and study of the sutras, and encouraged his devotion and that of his family and officials to the Dharma as the basis for preserving the state against natural calamities, public disorders and foreign invasions.²¹

This not only followed the precedents set in the past—that is to say, the various *yon mchod* relationships starting with Khubilai Khan and 'Phags pa bla ma during the Yuan dynasty which established a familiar cultural vocabulary—but also helped to stylize the Chinese emperor as the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, establishing both religious and secular rule. According to Dorothea Heuschert-Laage, the role of an emperor granting protection and support also included the sponsorship of Buddhist translations and printings and qualified the Manchu ruler as “protecting, beneficent, kind and forgiving” in order to provide “an interpretative framework for future representations of the position of the emperor vis-à-vis his Mongol subjects.”²² This can best be illustrated by an imperial edict on the occasion of Kangxi's 70th birthday, which summarizes the rise to power of the Manchus, pointing out the pacification of Mongolia by him and calling the Mongols the first of all his subjects.²³

Following Johan Elverskog's argumentation for a Qing cosmopolitanism, the projection of the Qing emperors as both Buddhists and the righteous rulers of the region became a fundamental element of Qing imperial discourse. To achieve this project, the Qing court produced and reconfirmed the new reality “in a torrent of textual, visual, and various performative media” in order “to establish a shared reality with those incorporated into the empire.”²⁴ Elverskog further argues that the Manchus were creating communities by using language and rituals to “engender an interrelated process of becoming both Buddhist and an imperial subject.”²⁵

This enterprise further extended the support for the various members of the Buddhist clergy, and more than 100 monasteries were founded of in the southern Mongolian corridor and the printing of religious texts was advanced. In particular, the Qing court patronage

²¹ Grupper 1984: 49.

²² Heuschert-Laage 2014: 651.

²³ *Mongγol-un γajar-i ariγudqan toytayγasan anu [...]* wang : sayid : tūsimed : čirig irgen *mongγol ud-ača ekilen* (Heissig & Bawden 1971: 115).

²⁴ Elverskog 2006: 8.

²⁵ Elverskog 2006: 8.

for Buddhist translations played a direct and leading role in the development of non-Han book culture, which was integral to the multicultural policies promoted by the emperors.²⁶ It triggered a renaissance of print culture and generated large-scale translation activities, as one can see in the vast outcome of a total of 554²⁷ works which were translated into Mongolian and printed in Beijing alone.

2. Beijing as a Printing Hub

From 1650, in addition to the 108 volumes of the Bka' 'gyur and the 226 volumes of the Bstan 'gyur in the Mongolian language, another 220 religious works in Mongolian were printed in Beijing until the fall of the dynasty in 1912.

The printing workshops (Chin. *jing chang* 經廠) for Mongolian and Tibetan texts were located next to various temples built by the Qing administration, all situated around the Western Gate or Andingmen 安定門 of the Imperial City. In 1652, the construction of the Lha khang ser po or Yellow Temple (Chin. Xihuang Si 西黃寺) was finished. Initially, it was intended as the residency of the 5th Dalai Lama in Beijing, but it later served as the residence of high Tibetan and Mongolian lamas such as Zanabazar when they visited the emperor.²⁸ Then, in 1706, the Mahākāla Temple (Chin. Pudu Si 普渡寺) was built, which was also the seat of the Lcang skya Ho thog thu-s, the Tibetan Buddhist reincarnation lineage established in Inner Mongolia and Beijing.

Walther Heissig identified seven individual woodblock carvers that were active in the Imperial City.²⁹ The carver Fu Dalai (Chin. Fu hai 傅海) "who dwells outside the Anding Gate,"³⁰ cut the blocks for the print of the Mongolian BTG and was active from 1707 to 1721. His workshop was presumably succeeded by a printing house opened in the Mahākāla Temple since the monasteries were not only the recipients of books but also served as centers for the production and sale of religious texts in Mongolian and Tibetan.³¹

²⁶ Rawski 2005: 305.

²⁷ For a detailed list, see Heissig 1954: 3–4.

²⁸ Charleux 2010: 110.

²⁹ Heissig 1954: 4.

³⁰ *an ding men qayalyan-u yadan-a sayuysan : fu dalai seyilgejü yarayabai* (BTG: 64a25–26).

³¹ Naquin 2000: 587.

Since the *Pax Manjurica*,³² regular tribute missions (Chin. *chao gong* 朝貢) to Beijing were expected from the Mongolian nobility and reincarnated lamas. The Mongolian princes often traveled together with local traders who took the opportunity to spend two to three months in Beijing during the winter months to sell their livestock. For example, according to the Lifanyuan 理藩院 records of 1694, more than 10,000 tribute-bearing Mongolians had to be provided with lodging in Beijing. When they usually started their return journey the following spring, in addition to silk and tea, they brought back new books. Many of them had summer residences set up, and a Mongolian community of up to 150,000 residents was formed in Beijing. They visited the temples and bookstores in the Qing capital, and their demand for religious texts encouraged the commercial printing business.³³

So far, the article has shed light on the historical context that facilitated the creation process of the BTG translation. In the following sections, the content of the BTG will be examined in more detail.

3. *The Ritual Manual*

The earliest publications sponsored by the Qing were reprints of previous Mongolian translations or redactions of the Tibetan *Bka' gyur* under the patronage of the Chakhar Mongol leader Ligdan Khan (1592–1634).³⁴ It was only at the beginning of the 18th century that new translations were commissioned and printed. The Mongolian BTG translation was part of this new development. It bears the title “The Sutra of Liberation through Hearing” (Mong. *Sonusuyad tonilyayči-yin sudur ene bui*), and “was completed on an auspicious day of the last month of autumn in the 54th year [of the reign of Emperor Kangxi, i.e., 1715] of the Qing dynasty.”³⁵

The Tibetan source text is a *gter ma* or “treasure text” believed to have been retrieved by the Gter ston Karma gling pa (1326–1386), and thus most likely dates from the 14th century. It belongs to a bigger cycle of teachings, *The Profound Teachings of Self-Liberation through the Intention of the Peaceful and Wrathful Ones* (Tib. *Zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol*) and provides information about a millennia-old riddle: what happens to us in the course of dying?

³² The *Pax Manjurica* refers to a period of peace from the early 1680s to the 1830s in China under the rulers who were ethnic Manchus (Newby 2011: 557).

³³ Charleux 2014: 10 and Rawski 2007: 201–202.

³⁴ Alekseev & Turanskaya 2013: 755–757.

³⁵ *daičing ulus-un engke amuyulang-un tabin dörbedüger on-u namur-un segiül sar-a-yin sayin ediür tegiiskebei* (BTG: 64a27–28).

On a ritual and ideological as well as social and economic level, death plays a central role in Buddhist culture and contributed to the development and spread of Buddhist teachings. If a religion wanted to establish itself in other countries, as was the case with Buddhism, it had to be able to provide answers to essential human concerns such as illness and death. The Buddhist teachings not only were able to inform practitioners what exactly happens at the time of death and how it relates to each and everyone's way of life but also laid out the processes needed to ensure a successful rebirth.³⁶

The BTG is such a manual which explains *en détail* the different intermediate states that the deceased will experience over the course of 49 days until the next rebirth. The text is structured around four invocation prayers, which are embedded in prose that forms a commentary on these prayers. When a person dies, the lama reads aloud these explanations to the deceased, thus guiding him or her through a total of six stages or intermediate states. The format of the text is a step-by-step approach to liberation from *saṃsāra*. Each state offers the opportunity for liberation of the deceased—or rather his or her consciousness—through various prayers or practices.

In the ground-breaking study by Bryan Cuevas on *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, he pointed out that the standardization of the *Bar do thos grol* in Tibet in terms of structure and content was only completed in the 18th century.³⁷ The individual prayers were probably already in circulation in Central Tibet from the late 11th century onwards.

A similar trend can also be observed in Mongolia, where a set of the four core invocation prayers from the *Bar do thos grol* in Mongolian was found in Xarbusyn Balgas written on birchbark dating from the early 17th century. Similar fragments were also excavated at the southern Mongolian monastery of Olon Süme.³⁸

Around the same time, a reference to Buddhist funeral practices in Mongolia is found in the biography of Altan Khan which records his hour of death:

³⁶ Ladwig & Williams 2012: 1.

³⁷ Cuevas 2003: 24, 39.

³⁸ Chiodo 2000: 244–260 and Chiodo 2009: 127–129. Xarbusyn Balgas is located 240km west of Ulaanbaatar to the south of Bulgan Aimag. Olon Süme is an archaeological site in Inner Mongolia, Baotou (Mong. Buyutu qota, Chin. 包头市) prefecture.

At that time, Mañjuśri Qutuγtu was [responsible] for the remains [of Altan Khan] and to help his radiant, pure soul gain the best rebirth or [at best] guide and lead him to liberation.³⁹

But until 1715, which marks the publication date of the BTG block print, there is no evidence of an actual ritual manual based on the BTG teachings.

The BTG's immediate popularity among Mongolian Buddhists can be fathomed by the many Beijing block prints and manuscripts that are preserved in libraries all around the world.⁴⁰ Moreover, a few lines have even been reprinted as a sample of a xylograph of the 17th century in N. Poppe's *Grammar of Written Mongolian*.⁴¹

Furthermore, the BTG was still in use when the Hungarian linguist Bálint Gábor at the end of the 19th century and the Russian explorer Aleksei Pozdnev at the beginning of the 20th century traveled around Mongolia.⁴²

4. Symbols of Power

The translation of the first Tibetan texts into Mongolian in the mid-13th century was followed by a period of stagnation at the end of Yuan rule in China. It was not until 200 years later that the translation activity was revived, many old translations were revised, and other texts newly translated into Mongolian.

This can also be interpreted as a sign of the populist nature of the second wave of Mongolian Buddhist conversion under the newly

³⁹ *tere cay-tur manjusiri qutuγtu über-ün bey-e-ber gegen sünesiin-i inu : degedü törül-ün tonilqui töb-tür udurid-un jalaju* (Kollmar-Paulenz 2001: 196. 37a20–23; translation is mine).

⁴⁰ *Cod. mongol. 23* and *Cod. mongol. 124* (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek); *M.8* (University Library of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium); *BM-MON49*, *BM-66a* (British Museum London, Mongolici); *Libr. Mong 55* (Westdeutsche Bibliothek Marburg, Libri Mongolici), *SCH 3593* (Institut de France, Paris, Schilling von Canstadt Collection), *L 298* and *L 528* (Far Eastern Library, University of Chicago, Laufer Collection), *Div. O. M227* (Division of Orientalia of the Library of Congress), *TB 28* (Manchu-Mongol section of the Tōyō Bunko), *Mong. 466* (Det Kongelige Bibliotek København, Denmark), *M II.321* (IMBTS SB RAS, Ulaan-Ude), *Mong. B4* and *Mong. D28* (St. Petersburg State University Library) as well as a block print from Dr. Lokesh Chandra held by the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC) *W2EE6*. Handwritten copies are also preserved under *j-314/91* (Far East Department of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague), *Mong. 72* (The Mongolian Collection in Berkeley, California), *Cod. mongol. 27* (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek), *Mong. E37* (St. Petersburg State University Library), and the Leipzig manuscript (no shelf-mark).

⁴¹ Poppe 1964: 37.

⁴² See Majer 2019 for a detailed study.

established Qing rule. The Manchu rulers sought to strengthen the ties between Mongolian monasteries and Beijing and considered the various Mongolian Buddhist dignitaries as a tool for the expansion of their authority. On the other hand, "the emperor had to rely on those outside the official system to spread the idea among the Mongols, and this meant the lamas and the lay nobles, the chief beneficiaries of the *Pax Manjurica*."⁴³

In 1705, the construction of the monastery in Dolonnur was completed under the supervision of the Lcang skya Ho thog thu and was not only intended as a mere memorial. Kangxi had realized that the Buddhist institutions in Beijing could not exert the same influence on the Mongols as a religious center located in Mongolia itself. According to the will of the emperor, the monastery "was built for the benefit of the eight Tsakhar banners [a Chinese administrative system; *baqi* 八旗], the forty-nine southern and fifty-seven northern banners, and the Oirat."⁴⁴

For now, the emperor had achieved his goal. He bestowed the Lcang skya Ho thog thu with various honorary titles and a seal, and soon enough, the emerging influence of the new monastery attracted the southern and eastern Mongols who came to Dolonnur in great numbers. The reputation of the Lcang skya Ho thog thu quickly became so wide-spread that even pilgrims from Amdo and scholars from India, as well as the Chinese monks who worked as constructors, came to pay their respects.⁴⁵ The Lcang skya Ho thog thu made extensive use of his new privileges and promoted the spread of Tibetan Buddhism among the Mongols in Beijing and the Qing border regions. For instance, in 1709, a Mongolian delegation was sent to Tibet to copy all the publications held in the Potala and 'Bras spungs Monastery. The Lcang skya Ho thog thu wanted to provide the rich treasures of these monasteries to the local Mongolian monasteries and, thereby, created the Inner Mongolian sphere of the Buddhist faith.⁴⁶

Another key element in the consolidation of their Mongolian subjects was to deal with shamanistic remnants. Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz observed a multi-level process, "whereby the Mongolian indigenous religious specialists were described as possessing a 'wrong view,' compared to the 'true' Buddhist teaching."⁴⁷ Only in the 19th century, through the reification and "invention of shamanism," would

⁴³ Farquhar 1978: 28.

⁴⁴ *Čaqar-un naiman qošiγun ba : öber döc'in yisiin qošiγu : aru tabin doluyan qošiγu kiged : ögeled neyite büikiin-ü tusa-dur [...]* (Ngag dbang chos ldan & Sagaster 1967: 124).

⁴⁵ Ngag dbang chos ldan & Sagaster 1967: 127.

⁴⁶ Ngag dbang chos ldan & Sagaster 1967: 133, 170.

⁴⁷ Kollmar-Paulenz 2012: 103.

it finally be integrated into a Mongolian holistic world-view without any pejorative judgment.

In the 17th century, the ban of all shamanistic beliefs was radically pursued and is most evident in the instructions of Zanabazar, who became an ardent opponent of shamanism. He instructed his lay followers and disciples that whoever observed someone making offerings to *ongγod* (i.e., felt dolls inhabited by spirits; plural form of *ongγon*) should burn them.⁴⁸

Since shamanism is intrinsically tied to healing and funerary rites, the religious specialist was either in charge of capturing the soul (*sünesiin*) of a sick person and reintegrating it into the body or leading it into an *ongγon* in the case of death. The structure of the BTG employs similar features and will be demonstrated by a comparison between the Mongolian and Tibetan versions:

⁴⁸ *Boγda zaya bandida : basa busu gelung : gečül : bandi : ubasi : ubasangja-du nige edür-ün bačay abisig uduriyulsun nuγud-i ögbei : ken ujeγsen kümiin : onγod takiγsan-i anu onγod-i tülin* (Transliteration follows Bawden 1962: 82; translation is mine). Johan Elverskog demonstrates that Mongolian culture needed to be “fully reengineered within the Buddhist structure” for the Qing to employ their Buddhist rhetoric. He gives a graphic example of Norbusangbu of the Khorchin, “who rounded up all the shamans in the ten banners of the Jirim League [Inner Mongolia] and burned them alive on a wooden pyre,” and rather than being punished for it, he was lauded by the Qing authorities. (Elverskog 2006: 118–119).

BTG: 2a6–24

The Great Liberation through Hearing [consists of] these three parts: the preceding [practices], one's own clear belief, and the exertion.

First, through the preceding [practices], virtuous beings are liberated by this. Those with the highest intellect will certainly be freed by following these instructions. If someone has not been liberated [yet], they [should practice] the *Self-Liberation by Remembering the Soul* in the intermediate state at the time of death. Through this, the yogin of middle intellect will certainly be liberated.⁴⁹

KGP: 2a1–2b2⁵⁰

This Great Liberation by Hearing has three parts, namely: the preliminary [practices], the main subject matter [of the text] and the conclusion.

Regarding liberation, at the beginning, [all aspirants] should practice the steps of the instruction. Those of highest acumen will definitely be liberated through [the application of these] instructions. Those who are not liberated by these [instructions] should recall [the practice of] *Self-Liberation through Transference of Consciousness* during the intermediate state at the time of death. Yogins of average intellect should certainly be liberated by that.⁵¹

The Mongolian phrase *sünesiün-i sedkin*, “to remember the soul,” which renders the Tibetan *'pho ba dran ba* “remember [the practice] of the transference [of consciousness],” translates the well-known Buddhist meditation practice of transmigrating the consciousness from the physical body in order to escape the intermediate state and enter nirvana. In the ritual practice, one often sees that the corpse is covered with a white cloth and must not be touched under any circumstances until the lama arrives. This is done for the *'pho ba* practice, as the consciousness tries to come out at the place where you first touch the person after his or her death.⁵²

⁴⁹ *yekede somusuyad tonilyayçi : egiün-dür yurban jüil udq-a bui : urida yabuyulaqui ile sittiigen degen orulduqui luy-a yutayar boluyu : neng terigiün urida yabuyulaqui-bar : sayin jayay-a-tan toniluyçid-bar : neng terigiün uduriyulsun⁴⁹-i jerge-ber tegsi abuysan qurça oyutan uduriyulsun-iyar mayad tonilumu : tegiün düir ese tonilbasu ükiil-iin jayur-a-du-dür : sünesiün-i sedkin öbesiiben tonilqu-yi tegsi abuysan tegiün-iyer büged dumdadu yögaçaris mayad-iyar tonilumu* (BTG: 2a6–24).

⁵⁰ Karma gling pa (1326–1386). n.d. *Zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol las: Chos nyid bar do'i gsal 'debs thos grol chen mo* [From the Profound Dharma of Self-Liberation through the Intention of the Peaceful and Wrathful Ones: The Elucidation of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State of the Quintessential Reality].

⁵¹ *thos grol chen mo 'di la don gsum stel sngon 'gro dngos gzhi rjes dang gsum yin no/ dang po sngon 'gro'i dus [sic] can grol ba ni/ khrid kyi rim pa thog mar nyams su blangs/ dbang po rab rnam khrid kyis nges par grol/ des ma grol na 'chi kha'i bar do la/ 'pho ba dran pa rang grol nyams su blangs/ des ni rnal 'byor 'bring rnam nges par grol* (KGP: 2a1–2b2).

⁵² Gouin 2012: 17.

The Mongolian translators chose the term *siinesiin* to describe this practice, which is of particular interest. In the Mongolian folk belief, a person has three souls, an idea that has shamanistic roots and predates Buddhism. The first soul, *amin*, resides in the bones and leaves the body after death. It can be summoned by a shaman and revered as an *ongyon*. The second soul, *siilde* or “protecting genius,” is a spirit that guarantees life. And the third soul, *siinesiin*, resides in the blood and is thought of as immortal and independent of the material body. It has become a frequent motif in Mongolian folk tales known as “The Wandering Soul” since it can leave the body in the form of a wasp or bee through the nose or mouth. Usually, this *siinesiin* can cause great trouble and needs to be pacified by the shaman.⁵³

Furthermore, the above-mentioned excerpt indicates a change in agency. In shamanism, the ritual specialist was the main actor responsible for the soul, whereas the deceased was only of secondary importance. In the BTG, the deceased is the most important person for the success of the *'pho ba* practice to find a good area for rebirth or even leave the cycle of *samsāra*.

Only later, from the mid-18th century onwards, we find a more refined definition of *siinesiin*. In the *Collected Works* of the Lcang skya Ho thog thu a small text is preserved—*The Manual of Instructions to Transmigrating the Consciousness Swiftly into Celestial Realms* (Tib. *Rnam shes gong du 'pho ba'i khrid yig mkha' spyod myur lam*; Mong. *Siinesiin-i degegsi yegüdkegdekii-yin kötelbüri bičig udiyan-a-yin türgen mör*). The text was written originally in Tibetan and later translated into Mongolian. Here, *siinesiin* is paired with *rnam shes*, “consciousness,” which is its prevalent use nowadays, and *'pho ba* with *yegüdkegdekii*, “to transmigrate.”

Another example is *yadayadu amin* translating the Tibetan *phyi dbugs* or “outer breathing.” In the process of dying, the person goes through several stages, including a cessation of vital functions of the body.⁵⁴ Gyurme Dorje describes this process as:

The period following the cessation of the coarse outer breath (*phyi dbugs*) and before the cessation of the subtle inner breath (*nang dbugs*) [...] is that during which the vital energy and mind are drawn together into the central channel, causing ordinary beings to lapse into unconsciousness.⁵⁵

⁵³ Sárközi 2008: 468 and Bawden 1962: 82.

⁵⁴ *yasun bui bügesii yadayadu amin tasuraqu-yin jabsar-du* [...] (BTG: 2b20–21) and the corresponding Tibetan: *ro yod na phyi dbugs chad pa'i tshams su* [...] (KGP: 3a4–3b1).

⁵⁵ Gyurme Dorje 2006: 418n44.

In their choice of words, the Mongolian translators again linked it to a familiar (shamanistic) concept of the life-giving "soul," *amin*, whereas (*γadayadu*) *amisqal/amisqul*, "breath" or "respiration," is well attested as an equivalent for Tibetan (*phyi*) *dbug*.⁵⁶

In the translation of the Mongolian BTG block print, the translators appeal to the shamanistic idea of a soul, which was familiar to most Mongols. In the wake of the new translations of ritual texts, the cultural vocabulary became then linked to Tibetan Buddhist death-rite literature.⁵⁷ This can also be observed from the Mongolian ritual text for *Summoning a Person's Soul* (Mong. *Kümiin-ü siinesü-yi dalalaqui sudur*).⁵⁸ According to Charles Bawden, death in the Mongolian folk religion was attributed to the removal of life or the soul (*amin* and *siinesüin*) by demons. These rituals

form an interesting illustration of the process of adaptation of shamanism to lamaism resulting from lamaist missionary activities studied already by Walther Heissig [who] show[ed] how contemporary lamaism set up a system of satisfying the desires of the Mongol nobility to promote prayers emanating from an early animistic form of religion.⁵⁹

Although this is not necessarily a unique feature of the Mongolian translation alone, but can be observed in translation processes all over the world, I argue that the translators' choice in their wording used the ambiguity to highlight familiarity with the *new* Buddhism and *old* shamanistic practices and reoccupied contested concepts and terminology. Therefore, the Mongolian BTG may have served as an important tool for the Buddhist missionary work among the Mongols, partly due to its resemblance to the shamanistic vocabulary they were already familiar with.

5. Language Matters

At the beginning of the re-ignited interest in Buddhism, the Mongols used Tibetan as their liturgical or sacred language. But the Qing dynasty's first ruler Huang Taiji 皇太極 (r. 1636–1643) was critical to this development. In his view, it meant that the Mongolian princes

⁵⁶ Nomtoev & Sárközi 2018: 957 and Terbish 2018: 1143.

⁵⁷ Tomka 1965: 161–162. This practice became also known as *siimsü zal*, "to deliver the soul [to the realm of the dead]" in the Kalmyk language, as *p'uwa dat'a*, "pulling the spirit," or *siines dat'a*, "pulling the soul," in the Ordos dialect.

⁵⁸ I am indebted to Olaf Czaja who first made me aware of these ritual texts.

⁵⁹ Bawden 1962: 84. See also Bawden 1970 for another manuscript on the *Kümiin-ü siinesü-yi dalalaqui sudur*.

would eventually abandon their Mongolian language; their names became imitations of Tibetan titles and, ultimately, this would entail a decline in the prosperity of the state. Therefore, from the middle of the 17th century onwards, a predominantly Buddhist literature production in Mongolian was encouraged and labeled as “original Mongolian language” (*uur mongyol kele*) and “ear jewelry” (*čikin-ü čimeg*).⁶⁰

This led to an increased translation activity from Tibetan into Mongolian. But how was this large-scale translation project achieved? And what techniques were employed by the translators? Not only did they need to reproduce the embedded ideas from a foreign language and cultural context but also render them *relevant* to their own culture to be fully understood.⁶¹

As early as the 14th century, Mongolian translators tried to come to terms with this task which has been outlined in an early 14th grammatical textbook, the *Artery*⁶² of the Heart (Mong. *žiriiken-ü tolta*) ascribed to Choiji Odser:

As writing is the support of Buddha’s word, the scribes should imagine themselves being the Buddha Amitābha. They should write thinking the brush is a jar of ambrosia. The patrons, too, should think that the scribes are the Buddha Amitābha, and there are many ways to make them objects of honor and respect. Both of them should strive with pure thought.⁶³

In the development of Mongolian Buddhist translations, an increasingly high degree of *translationese*, or artificial language, can be observed that would be mostly incomprehensible for the uninitiated reader. This has a variety of reasons. Translation studies have drawn the distinction between foreignization and domestication of a given text and describe the degree to which the translators make a text conform to the target culture.⁶⁴

An example would be the German sentence “Der Zug ist abgefahren.” When translated into English, there are two ways of translating: as “The train has departed,” which preserves the literal

⁶⁰ Faquhar 1978: 21 and Kara 2005: 180.

⁶¹ The Tibetan translators of the 8th and 9th were faced with similar problems which is reflected in the introduction of the *Two-Volume Lexicon* (Tib. *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*) and discussed in brief below.

⁶² The translation of *tolta* as artery or aorta has become the standard although not entirely clear. Klaus Sagaster provides “Hülle des Herzens” as an alternative translation (Sagaster 2007a: 1253).

⁶³ *burqan-u jarliy-un sitügen üsüig бүкii-yin tula : bičigeči-ner beye-ben Abida burqan kemen bisily-a : bigiri rasiyan-u qumuq-a kemen sedkijü bičikü : öglige-yin ežen-ber bičigeči-ner-i Abida burqan kemen sedkijü : ergün kündülekü-yin oron bolyaqui yosun : olan bui : üy-e qoyar biiri ariyun sedkil-i egusken žoriydaqui* (Kara 2011: 50).

⁶⁴ See Venuti 2008.

meaning (foreignization) of the source language or with an idiomatic phrase available in the target language as “The ship has already sailed.” In the latter, the idiomatic meaning—an opportunity has passed—is preserved, but the wording is altered (domestication). The challenge here is the requirement of *a priori* knowledge of German idioms.

Mongolians chose to translate Buddhist texts from Tibetan and applied a mix of foreignization and domestication, yet they were facing numerous problems during this process. First, they had to find a way to translate the religious and philosophical terminology and the peculiarities of literary Tibetan into their own language, without distorting the meaning or intentions of the text.

Second, they were faced with the problem that meaning does not have a fixed and unchanging inherent essence but rather represented a multi-layered and mutually influencing relationship. Therefore, despite their best efforts, it proved impossible to translate exclusively through a semantic and syntactic one-to-one correspondence.

An example would be the Mongolian translation of Tibetan *sprul sku* (“emanation body”), which is represented as *burqan qubilyan bey-e* (“Buddha transformation body”). Here, we can see that the syntactic function is not translated 1:1, in the sense of *qubilyan* = *sprul* and *bey-e* = *sku*, but rather the concept behind it—the Buddha (*burqan*) transforming (*qubilyan*) into the body (*bey-e*) of a human being.

In terms of sentence structure, the Mongolian BTG would, according to Natalia Yampolskaya’s classification, be a so-called restructured verbatim translation, which is “characterized by a high level of fidelity to the original, allowing minor changes in the structure of the sentence.”⁶⁵ However, even a *foreignizing translation*—staying as close as possible to the source text—cannot give a transparent and essential representation of the foreign text but is a strategic construct whose value depends on the respective recipient.⁶⁶ Therefore, Yampolskaya demonstrates that during the translation of Buddhist texts from Tibetan, a highly specialized Mongolian terminology was developed:

All translation techniques, including verbatim translation, involve a high degree of interpretation. Differences in the grammar of the Tibetan and Mongolian languages are significant, and the target

⁶⁵ Yampolskaya 2015: 761. In her comparative study, she analyzed eight translations of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* [The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines] and established a system classifying Mongolian Buddhist texts in relation to their closeness towards the Tibetan source texts.

⁶⁶ Venuti 2008: 15.

language cannot provide vocabulary and grammatical structures fully equivalent to the original.⁶⁷

This is a phenomenon that is not limited to the Mongolian-speaking world, but is also found in, for instance, Turkish Buddhist literature. The Turkologist and Tibetologist Wolfgang Scharlipp noted that, especially in the death-rite literature, no one could even read and understand a sentence if he or she was not familiar with the philosophical-religious background since almost every word has a specific meaning within a fixed philosophical construct.⁶⁸

The problem with the translation of texts from a language that is both complex in content and terminologically defined was further complicated by the fact that the source and target languages belonged to different language families: Mongolian to the Altaic, Tibetan to the Sino-Tibetan language family.

However, these challenges were not limited to the Mongolian speaking world. Already in the 8th century, the Tibetan translators had to grapple with similar issues when they started their translation project from Sanskrit into Tibetan. In the process, various works were compiled to help to translate in a standardized fashion, such as the *Two-Volume Lexicon* (Tib. *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*), which can be dated to the very end of Khri lde srong btsan Sad na legs' (r. 799–815) reign. It contains, among other things, an edict ascribed to him outlining translation rules and other practical advice.⁶⁹ Eventually, with the compilation of the Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicon *Mahāvvyutpatti*, the translators were equipped with the necessary tools for the large-scale translation project that rendered the Indian sutras into Tibetan.

While the bilingual dictionary itself contains a fair amount of foreign and technical terminology that would not have been immediately accessible to an untrained readership, it should be noted that the authors of the *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa* opted for a more nuanced and assimilating approach. They not only recommended being as close to the original as possible but also emphasized that a translator should produce “good Tibetan,” which might require some linguistic and terminological adaptations.

Prior to the creation of a standardized Mongolian translation terminology, the translators had no point of reference, which led to inconsistent results:

⁶⁷ Yampolskaya 2015: 765. See also Sobkovyak (2018: 214) who argues for the term “grammatical interpretation” and not for “translation into Mongolian,” since the employed language is not “Mongolian proper.”

⁶⁸ Scharlipp 1996: 259–260.

⁶⁹ Scherrer-Schaub 1999: 68.

Since the languages of the various parts of Greater Mongolia are basically the same but show many differences in some details, and since there was no established uniformity of expression, especially concerning the names and words to be used for the translation of religious texts, many translators had created many different expressions at their own discretion.⁷⁰

Only from the mid-18th century, with the creation of various Tibetan-Mongolian terminological dictionaries such as *The Tibetan Word-Book, Easy to Understand* (Mong. *Töbed üge kilbar surqu bičig*; Tib. *Bod kyi brda yig rtogs par sla ba*) compiled in 1737 and *The Established Orthography Called: The Source of Wisdom* (Mong. *Merged yarqu-yin oron neretüi toytayaysan dagyig*; Tib. *Dag yig mkhas pa'i byung gnas*) compiled in 1741–1742, the codification efforts of the Mongols were well attested.⁷¹

In the case of ritual texts, however, another aspect comes into play: the effectiveness of the ritual. “Church” or liturgical language, which is used in rituals and ceremonies, is hardly ever employed elsewhere in daily life. The scholar of Buddhism Jan Nattier, for instance, argues that “church language” is intentionally separated from the vernacular and reserved only for ritual specialists who, through appropriate initiations and special training, can understand the content and interpret it for the majority of followers. She mentions the linguistic boundaries that face the translators with a dilemma:

[W]hat is the relative importance of form, on the one hand, and of content on the other? [I]f the message is taken out of the form in which a divine power originally revealed it and cast in another language (with all the attendant possibilities of misinterpretation), who is to say that human error has not crept in to alter the message?⁷²

The following chapter is trying to find further possible answers to these questions.

6. Educational Resource

Even though several monasteries in the south of Mongolia and the Mahākāla Monastery of Beijing introduced the custom of reading prayers in the Mongolian language on all occasions from the late 17th

⁷⁰ *chen po hor gyi yul gru so so'i skad kyi byings 'dra yang/ zur cung zad re mi 'dra ba mang zhing/ khyad par du chos bsgyur ba'i ming brda' 'dogs tshul bkas bcad 'dra ba zhig mi 'dug pas/ lo tsā ba du mas so sor rang rang gi 'dod pas tha snyad mi mthun pa sna tshogs sbyar tse thos bsam byed pa rnam kyis rtogs dka' ba sogs nyes pa du ma'i gzhir 'gyur bas/* (‘Jigs med rig pa'i rdo rje 1892: 184.11–15). See also Ruegg 1974: 250–253.

⁷¹ Sárközi 2010: 101–104.

⁷² Nattier 1990: 198–199.

century onwards, the Tibetan influence became authoritative. Many Mongolian monks were sent to Tibetan monasteries for their education, in particular, the Bkra shis sgo mang grwa tshang of 'Bras spungs Monastery.

Higher dignitaries such as the aforementioned Lcang skya Ho thog thu Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan and Zanabazar were educated in Tibetan monasteries and composed works in Tibetan, but most monks in Mongolia began their education by merely memorizing the pronunciation of Tibetan prayers without actually learning the language, and often left the monastery after a few years without receiving training in either the Tibetan or the Mongolian script.⁷³ The implementation of monastic didactics found fertile ground in Mongolia and was facilitated by already existing concepts. Rote learning long predated the Buddhist era as all the classic genres of literature were transmitted orally from generation to generation over many centuries.⁷⁴ Ujeed remarks that nevertheless

most Mongols did not become so proficient in Tibetan that they were able to fully understand the Buddhist teachings nor in Tibetan, nor were they so superstitious that nearly one-third of the male population became monks without understanding the essential meaning of the teachings. Why have Mongols been so keen on translating the Buddhist texts into Mongolian if Tibetan was officially and popularly accepted as the predominant religious language all over Mongolia?⁷⁵

According to Aleksei Pozdneev's ethnographical research, a teacher would start to practice the translations of what had to be read and learned with a young disciple only after he had memorized the entire cycle of requisite prayers. Here, the word "translation" should be understood in a loose sense, as paraphrasing and explaining the meaning of the Tibetan prayer texts in Mongolian, which means Mongolian was being used in teaching and learning in Mongolian monasteries. For doing so, we can assume, the monks who were qualified to teach a disciple not only had to grasp a basic reading and writing knowledge of Mongolian but also to accumulate sufficiently profound terminology for an explanation in Mongolian.⁷⁶

Cha har Dge bshes Blo bzang tshul khriims (1740–1810), for instance, went to Dolonnur Monastery at the age of 16 to study the Mongolian and Tibetan languages as well as translation. In his late forties, he translated a massive corpus of Tibetan works into Mongolian, such as *Instruction of the Two Forms of Ruling: The Pearl Garland* (Tib. *Lugs zung*

⁷³ Atwood 2004: 538.

⁷⁴ Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006: 29.

⁷⁵ Ujeed 2009: 49.

⁷⁶ Ujeed 2009: 50.

gi bslab bya mu thi la'i phreng ba) by the 5th Dalai Lama or *The Secret Biography [and] The Secret Prophecies of the Panchen [Lama]* (Tib. *Paṅ chen gyi gsang rnam gsang ba'i lung*) which were printed at Dolonnur and Beijing and “provided a space for Buddhist knowledge to be created and circulated, and thus extended into other areas on the Mongol Steppe.”⁷⁷

The biography of the 5th Kanjurwa Khutugtu (1914–1978) also explains that it was their custom to debate in the Mongolian language but also to use many technical Sanskrit or Tibetan terms.⁷⁸ But how were these specialized language skills acquired?

For our study of scripture and texts, and for various rituals and ceremonies, we depend mainly on the Kanjur, the Tibetan collection of sacred texts. The Kanjur itself has been translated into Mongolian, but many other texts have not yet been translated and thus we must depend considerably on the original Tibetan texts.⁷⁹

Uranchimeg Ujeed elaborates further that this would imply that the monks tended to use Mongolian texts as far as they were available.⁸⁰ As the previous examples tried to show, the proximity to the Tibetan and the resulting artificial language of the Mongolian BTG block print can be an indication for such a bilingual teaching approach but also for picking up specialized Mongolian terminology from Sanskrit.

In the title of the Mongolian BTG, the block print is classified as a sutra (*sudur*), and it closed in the colophon with the formula *maṅgalaṃ*, “may it be auspicious!” Further, the Mongolian term *dumdadu yōgačāris* (“yogin of middle intellect”) is a combination of the Tibetan *rnal 'byor* ‘bring *rnams* and the Sanskrit *yogācārin* or, as a final example, *ubadis* (“religious instruction”), stems from the Sanskrit *upadeśa*. The inclusion of many Sanskrit terms in the Mongolian translations was also facilitated by the availability of Sanskrit word lists of the Uyghur Buddhist tradition.⁸¹

The following example from the Mongolian BTG block print shows that the Mongolian translation follows the Tibetan equivalent very closely in content. While the titles of the prayers themselves remain very close to the Tibetan syntax and terminology, the instructions intended for the ritual specialist follow a fairly natural Mongolian grammar since no exact pretense of authenticity had to be maintained.

⁷⁷ Mi nyag mgon po *et al.* 1996: 556, 559 and Wu 2015: 120.

⁷⁸ Hyer & Jagchid 1983: 73.

⁷⁹ Hyer & Jagchid 1983: 88.

⁸⁰ Ujeed 2009: 50.

⁸¹ Raghu Vira 1959: 11–14.

BTG: 2b26–3a12

Now, as for the main explanation of Liberation through Hearing: [if available], make abundant and varied offerings to the Three Jewels. If nothing is available, make an offering to them by multiplying the gifts in the mind infinitely.

Then recite three or seven times *The Aspiration Prayer Calling on the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Help*. From the Great Liberation by Hearing, depending on the circumstances seven or three times, this should be recited: *The Aspiration Prayer [Called] The Protector from the Horrors of the Intermediate State in the Moment of Dying*, *The Aspiration Prayer [Called] The Protector from the Dangerous Pathways of the Intermediate State*,⁸² and *The Root Verses* with a firm voice.⁸³

KGP: 3b2–5

Now for the actual explanation of the Liberation [through] Hearing: make extensive offerings to the Three Jewels. If [those offerings] cannot be obtained, make offerings with innumerable emanations of whatever [offerings] you have created and arranged mentally.

Then, *The Aspiration Prayer of Calling to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Assistance* should be recited three or seven times. Further, *The Aspiration Prayer Which Protects from the Dangers of the Intermediate State*, *The Aspiration Prayer for Escaping the Dangerous Pathways of the Intermediate State* and the *Root Verses* should be directed into the ears [of the deceased] in a melodious tone.⁸⁴

⁸² The title of second aspiration prayer also permits further speculation when the edition of BTG started since it is most likely the translation of a text composed by the 1st Panchen Lama Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1570–1662), viz. *Bar do 'phrang sgröl gyi gsol 'debs 'jigs sgröl gyi dpa' bo zhes bya ba* [The Aspiration Prayer which Protects from the Dangerous Pathways of the Intermediate State]. See also Chiodo 2009: 127n5. She provides the Mongolian title *ᠵᠠᠵᠤᠷᠠᠳᠤ-ᠶᠢᠨ ᠠᠭᠠᠳᠤ-ᠠᠴᠠ ᠭᠡᠲᠢᠯᠭᠡᠭᠦᠴᠢ ᠵᠠᠪᠠᠷᠢᠯ ᠠᠶᠤᠯ-ᠢ ᠠᠪᠤᠷᠠᠭᠴᠢ ᠪᠠᠶᠠᠲᠤᠷ ᠬᠡᠮᠡᠬᠡᠭᠡ*. Pavel Poucha published a Tibetan-Mongolian edition of the text (Poucha 1974: 99–106).

⁸³ *tegiin-diir sonusuyad tonilyaychi-yi ilede nomlaqui inu : yurban erdeni-diir ayuu yeke nayirayuluysan takil ergügdeküü : ese beledügsen bügesü alimad joriysan takil-ün ed-i ilede beledüged : sedkil-iyer çaylasi ügei takil-i qubilyaçu dakiyad : tendeçe burqan kiged bodisung nar-un nekegül boluysan iinen irüger doluyan-ta ba yurban-ta ungsiju buyu : tendeçe yekede sonusuyad tonilyaychi egüini doluyan-ta ba : yutayar jabsar luy-a barilduyul-un ungsiqui inu : iikül-ün ᠵᠠᠵᠤᠷ-ᠠ-ᠳᠤ-ᠳᠦᠷ ᠭᠡᠭᠡᠭᠡᠨ ᠭᠡᠷᠡᠯ-ᠶᠢᠨ ᠵᠠᠵᠤᠷ-ᠠ-ᠳᠤ-ᠶᠢᠨ ᠠᠶᠤᠯ-ᠠᠴᠠ ᠢᠷᠢᠭᠡᠷ ᠬᠡᠭᠡᠳ : ᠵᠠᠵᠤᠷ-ᠠ-ᠳᠤ-ᠶᠢᠨ ᠠᠭᠠᠳᠤ-ᠠᠴᠠ ᠭᠡᠲᠢᠯᠭᠡᠭᠦᠴᠢ ᠢᠷᠢᠭᠡᠷ ᠪᠠ : ᠵᠠᠵᠤᠷ-ᠠ-ᠳᠤ ᠢᠨᠳᠢᠰᠢᠨ ᠢᠭᠡᠳᠬᠡᠳ-ᠢ ᠡᠭᠡᠰᠢᠭ ᠰᠡᠯᠲᠡ ᠤᠷᠢᠬᠢ-ᠳᠦᠷ [...]* (BTG: 2b26–3a12).

⁸⁴ *de la thos grol dngos bshad pa ni/ dkon mchog gsum la mchod pa rgya chen po 'bul/ ma 'byor na dmigs pa'i rten gang 'byor bshams la/ yid kyis dpag tu med pa sprul la mchod/ de nas sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnam's la ra mda' sbran pa'i smon lam 'di lan gsum mam bdun du 'don / de nas bar do 'jigs skyob ma'i smon lan dang/ bar do 'phrang sgröl gyi smon lan dang/ bar do'i rtsa tshig rnam's dbyangs dang bcas te rna bar btob* (KGP: 3b2–5).

Although the various Tibetan editions of the text include these prayers in an appendix, none of the prayers mentioned are included in the Mongolian block print of the BTG used for this study. They must either have been contained in a separate work or recited from memory by the ritual specialists.

Moreover, a new vocabulary was created by adding suffixes to existing Mongolian words and assembling them to represent technical terms and mimicked in a *calque* translation. This is illustrated by the example of *sayin jayay-a-tan*—literally “with good fortune”—which translates the Tibetan term *las can*. Here *las* means “karma” or “fortune” and *can* indicates that someone or something has or is endowed with the preceding verb or noun. Again, there is a more natural Mongolian phrase, *jayayaysan barilduly-a*,⁸⁵ “concatenation of circumstances conditioned by karma,” which is used in other Buddhist texts, but the translators chose to paraphrase the Tibetan instead. The result of the technique used here is ultimately a language that could not be understood by an untrained Mongolian reader, insofar as he would not have been familiar with the vocabulary of this specialized language. A text like this enabled the teacher to explain distinct Tibetan grammatical features and the Tibetan concepts of the BTG in Mongolian.⁸⁶

From Pozdneev’s observations, we can conclude that the text and its application in the ritual itself would have served as an *aide-mémoire* written for a ritual specialist who knew the processes of the ritual. He explains that the BTG ritual is so popular in Mongolia [that] “no one dies without a lama being present [and] most lamas know this work by heart, and read it to the dying person in Mongolian.”⁸⁷

7. Conclusion

With the second spread of Buddhism among the Mongolian groups since the beginning of the 17th century, the *Bar do thos grol chen mo* ritual text was made available to the Mongols in the advent of the translation and printing activities around the beginning of the 18th century.

The Mongols were encouraged by the Qing rulers to spread the Buddhist teachings, with the imperial court supporting the Buddhist

⁸⁵ Terbish 2018: 1791.

⁸⁶ The manuscript from the private collection of Klaus Koppe mentioned at the beginning of the article which can be dated to the end of the 19th century seems to confirm this. Many folios are provided with notes and addenda which indicate the practical and regular use of the text.

⁸⁷ Pozdneev 1978: 594.

monasteries and the clergy through funding and bestowing authority on their leaders. Buddhism was seen as a unifying force within the ethnically diverse Qing Empire. By establishing the Lcang skya Ho thog thu lineage, a powerful representative of Tibetan Buddhism was invited to Beijing, who was instrumental in the establishment of the Qing imperial capital as a religious center, which served as an instrument for influencing the entire Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist world.

Therefore, the aim of the Qing policy was that by the end of the 18th century, the Mongols were able to express and develop themselves in Mongolian. The same applied to the Manchus and the Chinese.⁸⁸

One of the results was the printing of numerous religious writings, which were mainly produced in Beijing. On the one hand, the Qing rulers' patronage provided a basis for their empire to become a spiritual and political center within Asia. On the other hand, it is important to point out that, in addition to gaining religious merit, the translation activities were also inspired by the lay Buddhist Mongolian's wish to learn and understand Buddhism in their mother tongue.⁸⁹ The translation of religious scriptures provided further means for converting the Mongolian groups and helped advance Tibetan Buddhism to the position of a state religion in the Mongolian territories.

Even though the Mongolian BTG text is not representative of the entirety of the extensive translation activities, it demonstrates the state of mind of the translators at the beginning of the 18th century. While some elements of the translation show signs of the developing standardization process, the terminology remains mainly idiosyncratic.

The intended ritual use of the Mongolian BTG might have affected the way of translating too, which mirrors the translation approaches of that period. The process itself was not merely mechanical, but instead, the Mongolian scholars created their own translation language, which encouraged the creation of new Mongolian linguistic features and cultural vocabulary.

Although the translation can take on a somewhat esoteric quality because of its incomprehensibility to the majority of lay practitioners, a growing number of expert interpreters were trained in the newly established monasteries in Inner Mongolia and Beijing to perform the last rites for the deceased. This probably helped to adapt and promote Buddhist teachings within the previously shamanistic communities.

⁸⁸ Jagou 2013: 42.

⁸⁹ Bareja-Starzyńska 2015: 7.

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