

Compte-rendu

Cantwell, Cathy, *Dudjom Rinpoche's Vajrakīlaya Works: A Study in Authoring, Compiling, and Editing in the Tibetan Revelatory Tradition* (with a chapter by Robert Mayer), Sheffield: Equinox, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-78179-762-4 (xii, 396 pp., 6 figures).

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This is a very detailed and thorough study of Dudjom Rinpoche's works on Vajrakīlaya, an important tantric deity of Tibetan Buddhism, by Cathy Cantwell, one of the foremost scholars of Tibetan tantric ritual, whose expertise spans both anthropological and philological approaches to Tibetan religion. The subject of the book, Dudjom Jigdral Yeshe Dorje Rinpoche (1904-1987), was a towering figure in the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. As a highly respected lama and prolific scholar, he was instrumental in preserving and transmitting the Nyingma spiritual and cultural legacy at a time when the latter was in danger of extinction.

By examining Dudjom Rinpoche's contributions to the Vajrakīlaya corpus he inherited as part of his lineage, as well as his own treasure (*gter-ma*) revelations on the subject, this study sheds much light on the dynamics of literary production within the treasure tradition. The author provides a careful and detailed analysis of numerous concrete examples of ritual, iconographic and textual variation amongst a wealth of related sources, and shows how passages from previous tantric revelations are quoted, rearranged and expanded within new configurations that, far from overshadowing the source revelation as might be expected, tend to imbue the latter with renewed vitality by ensuring that it is carried on by new generations of practitioners. This study thus invites us to rethink the categories of 'author', 'editor' and 'compiler' in the light of the rich web of intertextuality that characterizes the Tibetan treasure tradition, and to appreciate the matrix of concerns – ritual requirements, lineage affiliation, social embeddedness, etc. – that shape the production of this kind of literature.

The book, which opens with an introduction, consists of fourteen chapters. The first of these is written by Robert Mayer and highlights the theoretical issues that serve as a backdrop to many of the findings later explored in the book. The succeeding chapters (and the introduction) are all written by Cathy Cantwell. The second chapter deals with

Tibetan Buddhist conceptions of identity, the understanding of which is necessary in order to appreciate the whole ethos of the treasure tradition. Chapters 3 to 13 examine Dudjom Rinpoche's various contributions to the Vajrakīlaya heritage; the chapters are roughly organized chronologically in the order in which Dudjom Rinpoche worked on the different materials in turn, though as Cantwell notes (p. 26), a stylistic evolution is not obvious, something that is not altogether surprising given this codified genre of ritual literature which tends to downplay individual panache. Chapter 14 is the book's conclusion and brings together the various threads taken up and analysed in the previous chapters.

The introduction itself already makes several very important points; one of these concerns the way that tantric rituals are held to function. From an emic perspective, the more inner aspects of the ritual, such as the meditation and visualizations, are deeply intertwined with their performative aspects. It is not just that the performance of the ritual reflects and supports the meditation, but the mere performance of the ritual, especially if carried out with devotion in the context of a group practice accompanied by a master and more accomplished practitioners, is held to have a deeply transformative effect on the minds of the participants, even if they have not trained in meditation. One can therefore speak of a ritual meditation or meditative ritual interchangeably in this context (pp. 8f). A further point concerns the conservative nature of the treasure tradition, which in this respect differs little from other forms of Tibetan literature. Contrary to popular imaginings of the treasure revealer (*gter-ston*) as an inspired genius giving voice to a personal creative vision, it can be stated quite unequivocally that the revelation of tantric practices as treasure is rarely innovative, as it rather seeks to re-present a timeless heritage slightly reworked to fit new circumstances (pp. 12f). A third point emphasized by Cantwell is the social dimension of the redaction of treasure texts. There is often a significant amount of time that elapses between the actual revelatory event and the redaction of the specific texts making up the treasure revelation. It is the requests of the revealer's disciples that provide the impetus and circumstances to write the concrete texts of a particular treasure corpus (pp. 17f).

Following the introduction, the first chapter, which is written by Robert Mayer and represents an expanded and updated version of an article previously published in the *JIASB*,¹ provides some very useful background to the broader theoretical issues that are tackled in the

¹ Mayer, Robert, 'gTer ston and Tradent: Innovation and Conservation in Tibetan Treasure Literature', in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vols.36-37, 2013-2014, pp. 227-242.

book. Mayer draws attention to the modular nature of Tibetan tantric literature, underlining the fact that when a treasure revealer produces a treasure text he will not be writing out of thin air, but will be drawing on a vast repertoire of codified phrases and passages, many of them committed to memory, that he can rearrange to weave a new text (pp. 39f). Moreover, several of the genres of Tibetan tantric literature, notably the *rNying-ma rgyud-'bum*, the transmitted literature (*bka'-ma*) and the treasure revelations, share the same modules of text (pp. 44), which we see reappearing in slightly new constellations.

The theoretical foundation being thus laid, Cantwell is free to guide her readers through the intricacies of tantric composition in Tibet. She does this skilfully by beginning her study with an exploration of self-identity in the context of Tibetan Buddhism, the subject of the book's second chapter. This is a very important topic in seeking to understand the treasure tradition, since the latter involves the idea that the revealer of a spiritual treasure is the reincarnation of a line of previous masters (typically going back to one of the twenty-five disciples of Padmasambhava, the 8th century adept credited with establishing tantric Buddhism in Tibet) and that the treasures he reveals in this life were bequeathed to him by Padmasambhava in the 8th century. In this chapter, Cantwell contrasts the somewhat fierce and unconventional character of Dudjom Lingpa (1835-1904), a visionary self-made lama who was Dudjom Rinpoche's immediate predecessor, with the mild-mannered Dudjom Jigdral Yeshe Dorje. The latter, as a highly respected incarnation, received an elite religious education and had little need either to establish his authority in the face of opposition or to engage in arduous retreats, as his innate talents and abilities manifested effortlessly. By contrast, Dudjom Lingpa drew his religious authority from visionary encounters he had during meditative retreats, and was not always accepted by the established monastic hierarchies. The contrast between both figures serves to highlight the fact that such differences in style and emphasis between two successive incarnations of the same master are quite acceptable by Tibetan standards. In this case, an important element in Dudjom Lingpa and Dudjom Jigdral Yeshe Dorje's self-understanding concerns their identity as Padmasambhava's disciple Khye'u-chung Lotsawa and their connection to the wrathful form of Padmasambhava called Dorje Drolö, as well as their association with Dudul Dorje (1615-1672), their common predecessor, who is famed for opening the hidden land of Pemako, the birthplace of Dudjom Rinpoche.

With the third chapter we enter in earnest the textual studies that make up the backbone of this book: the chapter considers Dudjom Rinpoche's work on the *Phur-bu bdud-dpung zil-gnon*, a Vajrakīlaya revelation by Drakngak Lingpa alias Dudjom Namkhai Dorje (1871-*ca.*

1929). In his late teens, Dudjom Rinpoche was invited to Drakngak Lingpa's centre in Devikoṭa in Pemako in order to bestow the empowerments of the *Rin-chen gter-mdzod*, a massive collection of treasure texts compiled by Jamgön Kongtrul (1813-1899), which takes several months to grant in full. This marked the first time that Dudjom Rinpoche bestowed this collection of empowerments, a duty which he was to fulfil ten times during his life. On this occasion, Drakngak Lingpa requested Dudjom Rinpoche to write a framework text (*khog-dbub*) for his Vajrakīlaya revelation, which was being put down in writing at that very time, Dudjom Rinpoche occasionally acting as a scribe for Drakngak Lingpa's revelations. As a genre, a framework provides necessary instructions and inserts ritual recitations required in the context of a communal major evocation session (*sgrub-chen*). In writing the framework text for Drakngak Lingpa's revelation, Dudjom Rinpoche follows the template of Terdak Lingpa's (1646-1714) framework for Guru Chöwang's (1212-1270) *Yang-gsang spu-gri*.

Next, the fourth chapter turns towards Dudjom Rinpoche's contributions to the *Yang-gsang spu-gri* of Guru Chöwang, highlighting his involvement, beyond the treasure lineages with which he was immediately associated, with the foundational traditions of tantric praxis in the Nyingma school. In this regard, Dudjom Rinpoche's dedication to preserving the wider textual heritage of the Nyingma treasures and transmitted literature owes much to the exemplars of Terdak Lingpa and of his scholarly younger brother Lochen Dharmasrī (1654-1717). The Mindroling monastery which they established was to have a lasting impact on the Nyingma tradition as a whole, not the least through the convening of ritual gatherings which attracted the major Nyingma masters of the day and thus contributed to the ritual integration of an otherwise rather decentralized tradition.² Cantwell makes the important point (p. 97) that a key factor in this ritual integration is played by the sacred pledges (Skt. *samaya*) that bind the participants in such gatherings among each other and that are physically embodied in the sacramental substances consumed during the rituals. In the case of the *Yang-gsang spu-gri*, Dudjom Rinpoche's (and indeed our) knowledge thereof was mediated by the works of Terdak Lingpa and Lochen Dharmasrī – it seems that in the 19th century, when Jamgön Kongtrul compiled the *Rin-chen gter-mdzod* collection, the *Yang-gsang spu-gri* was only known through the contributions of the Mindroling brothers, and it is even conceivable that its texts had already been lost by the 17th century, so that Terdak Lingpa himself may have had to rely on earlier compilations that were already removed from the original revelation

² Cf. Dalton, Jacob, *The Gathering of Intentions: A History of a Tibetan Tantra*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, pp. 115-119.

(p. 101). Dudjom Rinpoche's contributions to this cycle consist of three sets of notes (*zin-bris*), mainly written in 1926 when he was a young man. The notes were originally taken while observing a major evocation session (*sgrub-chen*) held at Mindroling monastery, and were later edited and elaborated on with the aim of ensuring the continuity of the Mindroling conventions of ritual performance and of introducing them to the communities under Dudjom Rinpoche's spiritual direction. Such notes are intended as a navigation tool to aid practitioners find their bearings among the various practice texts that are recited during extensive sessions of communal ritual.

The fifth chapter is about Dudjom Rinpoche's work on Dudul Dorje's Vajrakīlaya revelation, popularly known as the *gNam-lcags spu-gri*. Apart from his work on this cycle, Dudjom Rinpoche also composed texts for Dudul Dorje's Avalokiteśvara cycle, the *Nam-mkha'i rgyal-po*, and for his cycle devoted to Padmasambhava (*bla-sgrub*), the *dGongs-pa yongs-'dus*. It is interesting to observe (p. 126) that Dudjom Rinpoche's inserts for Dudul Dorje's Vajrakīlaya are drawn from his own *gNam-lcags spu-gri* (on this title, see below), whereas earlier he had relied on Dudul Dorje's Vajrakīlaya revelations when compiling his *gNam-lcags spu-gri* cycle.

The sixth chapter looks at Dudjom Rinpoche's important contributions to Dudjom Lingpa's Vajrakīlaya cycles. Dudjom Lingpa revealed three cycles regarding the deity Vajrakīlaya: (1) the *Thugs-sgrub gsang-ba'i rgya-can*; (2) the *bDe-gshegs snying-po*; and (3) the *Dag-srang ye-sheś drwa-ba*. Dudjom Rinpoche's magnum opus on Vajrakīlaya, his *gNam-lcags spu-gri* (a title derived from the popular name of Dudul Dorje's cycle, p. 121), is devoted to Dudjom Lingpa's *Thugs-sgrub gsang-ba'i rgya-can*. In discussing the production of these textual cycles, Cantwell makes some very interesting observations regarding the religious context of treasure revelation. She notes in particular that Tibetan masters are steeped from their youngest age in a process of internalizing vast quantities of liturgies, often written in versified form, which are regularly chanted and in many cases memorized deliberately. These verses are recited audibly during meditative rituals, so that they are internally associated with the visualizations performed as part of the evocations (Skt. *sādhana*). In such an environment, it is quite possible for a revelation to at once genuinely flow forth from the inner experience of the individual visionary and incorporate parts of the textual heritage in which s/he is steeped (p. 144, p. 353). In the case of the *Thugs-sgrub gsang-ba'i rgya-can*, it was put down in writing several years after the initial revelation, so Dudjom Lingpa's continued immersion in the rituals and visions of Dudul Dorje's tradition would have naturally shaped the revelatory output.

In the textual study that constitutes the core of the chapter, Cantwell points out that there is little text shared in common between Dudjom Lingpa's two major Vajrakīlaya cycles, the *Thugs-sgrub gsang-ba'i rgya-can* and the *bDe-gshegs snying-po*; the latter mainly consists of short texts focusing on the ultimate level of meaning (pp. 151f). Dudjom Rinpoche's work on the *bDe-gshegs snying-po*, which was done when he was twenty-two years old, extracts and combines several of the short texts in order to create a ritual manual (*las-byang*), a daily practice (*rgyun-khyer*) – which is particularly internalized in character – and a secondary ritual (*smad-las*) (p. 154). Regarding the *Dag-snaang ye-shes drwa-ba*, Cantwell provides a thorough discussion of the cycle's distinctive origin myth for the barberry sticks that are placed around the oblation (*gtor-ma*) to make a fence (pp. 157-160).

The seventh chapter concentrates on Dudjom Rinpoche's *gNam-lcags spu-gri*, the name of his work on Dudjom Lingpa's *Thugs-sgrub gsang-ba'i rgya-can*. The chapter's narrower focus is on the ritual manual (*las-byang*), which makes good sense, since this manual is used as a central feature of communal practices within the Dudjom tradition. It is interesting to note that whereas Dudjom Lingpa's ritual manual is lacking even in crucial components of the visualizations for the generation phase and for the *mantra* repetition, these elements are supplied by Dudjom Rinpoche, mainly by relying on and reworking other parts of Dudjom Lingpa's revelation (pp. 166f), as well as by drawing on Dudul Dorje's revelations. Dudjom Rinpoche's contributions include extensive elucidatory comments, which are drawn from the wider heritage of the transmitted literature; these are typically not marked by the orthographic device of the *gter-tsheg*.

The eighth chapter pursues this focus on the *gNam-lcags spu-gri* by examining the medicinal accomplishment (*smān-sgrub*) manual which Dudjom Rinpoche wrote for this cycle in 1937. The text gives detailed instructions for the preparation and consecration of sacred pills during a major evocation session (*sgrub-chen*). It is based on a similar, though more general, manual by Terdak Lingpa, and differs in its length and complexity from the manuals of Dudjom Lingpa and Dudul Dorje; the latter are unsuited for elaborate monastic settings, but are intended to be performed by a single practitioner, or else by a master and a few attendants. The case in point is particularly interesting, for we witness a kind of 'mixing and matching' from a number of revelations to which Dudjom Rinpoche was closely connected. Of course, as the author is careful to underline, this is quite different from the practice of 'mixing and matching' usually discussed in the sociology of religion, where it

designates a syncretic mixing from very disparate contexts made possible by the globalized nature of the modern religious marketplace.³ In the case of Dudjom Rinpoche, on the contrary, the textual material that is 'mixed and matched' is drawn from closely related revelations of conducive family (*gter-kha rigs-mthun*) (p. 210).

The book's ninth chapter presents an overview of Dudjom Rinpoche's other texts comprising the *gNam-lcags spu-gri*. This includes ritual texts as well as commentaries and instructions. Among the ritual texts can be counted a longevity practice (*tshe-sgrub*), texts for the guardian deities, a daily practice (*rgyun-khyer*), an evocation framework (*sgrub-khog*), a secondary ritual (*smad-las*), etc. Some of these ritual texts, such as the evocation framework and the secondary ritual, share a similar structure with parallel texts from other cycles (p. 217, p. 225). The commentarial texts include a propitiation handbook (*bsnyen-yig*) for the primary ritual (*stod-las*), pith instructions for the secondary ritual and a commentary on the yogic practices of the channels and winds (*rtsa-rlung*).

The tenth chapter turns to Dudjom Rinpoche's own Vajrakīlaya revelations, the *sPu-gri reg-phung*. Given Dudjom Rinpoche's deliberate decision to focus his energies on consolidating previous treasures and the heritage of the transmitted literature rather than on the production of new revelations, the treasures which he did reveal are revered for being particularly pithy and well-structured. The accounts of the *sPu-gri reg-phung* make it clear that it is a very profound instruction bequeathed to Dudjom Rinpoche through the direct mind transmission of Yeshe Tsogyal, Padmasambhava's mystical consort, but also (as is typical for tantric teachings) that it is part of a much larger cycle. This implies that Dudjom Rinpoche exercised a degree of choice in deciding which portions of the revelation to commit to writing. The corollary of this is that while the *sPu-gri reg-phung* has the main practice texts, its auxiliary rituals share text with other cycles, being particularly dependent on the *gNam-lcags spu-gri* (pp. 262f). Unlike with Dudjom Lingpa's Vajrakīlaya revelations, however, the root text (*rtsa-gzhung*) of the *sPu-gri reg-phung* itself follows a well-structured order. It is noteworthy that when the initial pithy verses of the root revelation are expanded by the revealer himself to make a practice manual, the entire resultant text comes to be regarded *as though* it were revealed text. In this particular case (though this is no universally applicable rule!), this

³ Cf. Altglas, Véronique, *From Yoga to Kabbalah: Religious Exoticism and the Logics of Bricolage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014; Altglas, Véronique, 'Exotisme religieux et bricolage', in *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, vol.167, July-September 2014, pp. 315-332; and Sinha, Vineeta, "'Mixing and Matching": The Shape of Everyday Hindu Religiosity in Singapore', in *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol.37:1, 2009, pp. 83-106.

is reflected by the fact that the expanded text too is marked by the *gter-tshag* (p. 253, p. 265). It is also of interest that if the verses of a closely connected lineage revelation are deemed to be especially beautiful, they can be incorporated into the text of a ritual even if their content doesn't exactly fit the new context. An example is provided by Pema Lingpa's fulfilment ritual (*bskang-ba*), which is used in both the *gNam-lcags spu-gri* and the *sPu-gri reg-phung* (p. 263).

The eleventh chapter is about Dudjom Rinpoche's work on Pema Lingpa's (1450-1521) Vajrakīlaya revelations. These contributions were written when Dudjom Rinpoche was in his late forties to mid-fifties, at a time when he was a mature scholar and master widely versed in a number Vajrakīlaya lineages. Cantwell's discussion of the reasons behind Dudjom Rinpoche's writing of Vajrakīlaya texts for the Pema Lingpa tradition is especially interesting, for it illustrates the dynamics of literary production in the context of the treasure tradition as a whole. The reasons in this case can be summarized as follows: (1) involving a high-status lama such as Dudjom Rinpoche is held to infuse the lineage with fresh blessings; (2) asking him to compose metrical texts has practical advantages, in that it makes the recitation of the texts easier; and (3) aligning the texts with the widely spread Mindrolling ritual procedures means that they can be easily slotted in during communal practice sessions (pp. 273-276). Taking as an example the evocation framework (*sgrub-khog*) which Dudjom Rinpoche composed for Pema Lingpa's *Yang-gsang srog-gi spu-gri*, it can be said that while there is a degree of standardization involved in such a procedure, this does not exclude the preservation of distinctive parts of Pema Lingpa's own more idiosyncratic formulations, though they are integrated within a more familiar overall pattern. What is witnessed in the examples analysed by Cantwell is that over the course of generations, the presentation of a revelation may change quite significantly, and such subsequent representations of a prior revelation may owe much to cycles other than the one being represented (p. 291). This repackaging of tantric cycles helps to ensure their continued vitality over time and can best be seen as a response to the needs of the wider religious community (p. 292, p. 294).

The twelfth chapter represents an initial foray into contextualizing Dudjom Rinpoche's and his team's editorial work on Pema Lingpa's *Collected Works*, a project sponsored by the Bhutanese royal family at a time when the Tibetan literary and religious heritage was greatly endangered by the Chinese Communist invasion of Tibet and the devastation caused in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. Though a team effort, the end product is attributed to the master as chief editor (p. 325). While the latter may not have much of a role in the day-to-day

business of collating and editing the various texts, he will be responsible for blessing the project as a whole and for helping to gather various manuscript sources through his widespread connections (p. 363). A further consideration is that ordinary scholars may not have the authority to emend the revealed text, whereas the masters in charge of a treasure lineage, particularly its doctrinal custodians (*chos-bdag*), are not at risk of corrupting the original revelation, since it is believed that their wisdom enables them to discern what in the text is genuine and what is not. It is therefore even considered to be their duty to clean up unconventional spellings, etc., if these obscure the meaning of the revealed text (pp. 305f).

The thirteenth and penultimate chapter discusses Dudjom Rinpoche's contributions to Zilnön Namkhai Dorje's (b. ca. 1873/4) *Yang-gsang phrin-las bcud-dril*. Zilnön Namkhai Dorje, whom Dudjom Rinpoche met when he was twenty-one, was particularly important in the latter's spiritual development, both in granting him the Dzogchen mind transmission during the empowerment of Jamgön Kongtrül's secret practice of Dorje Drolö, and in giving him prophecies that confirmed his status as a revealer and unlocked his innate abilities. Dudjom Rinpoche's contributions to Zilnön Namkhai Dorje's revelations concern the *Yang-gsang phrin-las bcud-dril* and the '*Chi-med srog-thig*'. Regarding the former in particular (the focus of the chapter), it is apparent that Dudjom Rinpoche felt a personal sense of responsibility for this revelation, for he wrote contributions for this cycle in Nepal during the late 1970s, long after his encounters with the master and without being prompted to do so by his students.

The fourteenth chapter represents the conclusion to the study. This is followed by an exhaustive bibliography and an index.

The book is of such high academic quality that one would be hard-pressed to find any faults with it. Typographical errors and other inadvertencies are few and far between: 'Pemoko' (p. 94) for Pemako; 'female yogi' (p. 234) would be better rendered as yoginī; the very literal translation 'Innate Wheel Vows' (p. 329) for Cakrasaṃvara (Tib. lHan-skyes 'Khor-lo sdom-pa) is a bit opaque – 'Innate Restraining through the Wheel', or perhaps 'Innate Restraining Wheel' would be closer to the sense;⁴ 'experiential experience' (p. 356) seems somewhat inelegant. Furthermore, some readers might take issue with the policy of giving website references within the main text rather than in a footnote (e.g. p. 59, p. 70, p. 73).

⁴ Cf. Sanderson, Alexis, 'The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism During the Early Medieval Period', in Einoo, Shingo (ed.), *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Culture, 2009, pp. 41-349, esp. p. 166.

Yet such minor quibbles should not distract from the immense value of this study, which is a model of thoroughness and of clarity of presentation. For although this is a very erudite book, the logical organization of the material and the use of phonetic renderings of Tibetan names, along with the English translations of the titles of the Tibetan works being discussed, makes this invaluable study accessible to a non-specialist readership as well. Furthermore, the author has taken pains to give the Tibetan passages under discussion in Tibetan script (rather than transliteration) in the footnotes, which means that the younger generation of English-speaking Tibetans may also benefit from this work of modern Tibetology. What is more, the author's extensive familiarity with the different genres of Tibetan tantric ritual, both in their textual and performative dimensions, has enabled her to render the technical ritual terms with great precision, a precision that will assist future scholars and translators dealing with this highly specialized type of literature. In sum, the detailed case studies presented in this book provide a wealth of material for a more nuanced understanding of the processes of authorship and revelation within the Tibetan tantric tradition. There is much to be learnt from and to ponder in this book, both for academic scholars of Buddhism, of Tibetology and of Religious Studies, and for those with a more general interest in Buddhism and Tibet.

