

Mchog gyur gling pa's Visionary Journey to the Copper-Colored Mountain

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I. Invitation

In the middle of the nineteenth-century, the treasure-revealer known as Mchog gyur bde chen gling pa spent some time in isolated retreat in a small hermitage above the 'Og min Karma dgon monastery. His biographies relate that one day during this retreat he noticed that the air was filled with a particularly pleasant scent of incense and sounds like trumpeting elephants resounded through the sky. Looking up, he saw five *dākiṅīs* adorned in fine silks and jewels, flying effortlessly toward him. In the words of his most comprehensive biography:¹

They were five in number but they spoke with one voice:
"We have come from the emanated realm of O rgyan.
At the sacred site, the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain,
The wheel of the vast and profound dharma of
The vast ocean of the collected teachings is being turned.
We were sent as messengers to invite you, son,
To come and witness this wondrous spectacle.
Aḥ Haṃ!"

As soon as they said that, an experience of joy blazed forth and without noticing that he had a body, in an instant, he was in the vision.²

¹ For an overview of the hagiographical corpus devoted to Mchog gyur gling pa (consisting of twelve distinct texts), see Doctor 2005: 75–83. The biography referred to here and throughout this article is Dkon mchog 'gyur med's 1921 composition, *Gter chen mchog gyur bde chen gling pa'i rnam thar bkra shis dbyangs kyi yan lag gsal byed*.

² *Yan lag gsal byed*, 102.3–5: *lnga byung nas mgrin gcig tu 'di skad do/ nga o rgyan sprul pa'i zhing nas 'ong/ gnas zangs mdog dpal ri bo na/ bka' 'dus chos kyi rgya mtsho yi/ zab rgya che'i chos 'khor ba bskor bar yod/ bu ngo mtshar ltas mo gzigs pa ched/ spyen 'dren pa'i pho nyar mngags pa yin/ A haṃ/ zhes gsungs pa'i mod la dga' ba de'i nyams 'bar zhing lus yod du mi tshor ba snang ba'i ngang la dal gcig song ngo/.*

The next twenty folios of this biography tell the story of Mchog gyur gling pa's journey from his retreat hut in eastern Tibet to the Copper-Colored Mountain and back again. The richly detailed account of this voyage provides a wealth of information regarding Tibetan views of the imagined land and an opportunity to explore the role of visions within Tibetan Buddhist literature.

Despite the central role that such visionary journeys play in the biographical and hagiographical literature of Tibet, these stories have received little scholarly attention.³ In part, disregard for these narratives may be attributed to the well-documented bias for philosophical writing, meditation manuals, and political history in studies of Tibetan Buddhism. A broader anxiety around the category of "religious experience" has also deterred scholarly attention from this material. The critical backlash against a twentieth-century preoccupation with religious experience (from William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* to the influential writings of Mircea Eliade) has shifted attention away from the personal and toward critical theory focused on the constitutive systems of language, ritual, and institutions.⁴ These shifting trends in the academic study of religion have not changed the fact that a great deal of Tibetan Buddhist writing is concerned with personal visionary experiences such as Mchog gyur gling pa's journey to the Copper-Colored Mountain. By considering the literary structure and style of this story, I hope to demonstrate that closely reading a narrative of personal religious experience need not imply a naïve acceptance of the essentialist model of *sui generis* religious experience. Prominent theorists in religious studies are already proclaiming the need to move beyond the "literary turn" and move toward a more sophisticated recovery of religious experience, most often drawing upon perspectives from psychology and cognitive science. In this study of an early-twentieth century Tibetan text, I hope to demonstrate that we still have much to learn from analyzing the public literary representations of private religious experiences.

In Dkon mchog gyur med's text, when the five *ḍākiṅṅs* introduced themselves and invited Mchog gyur gling pa to join them at the Copper-Colored Mountain, "an experience of joy blazed forth and without noticing that he had a body, in an instant, he was in the vision." Rather than attempting to answer the phenomenological question of what it means to be "in the vision," my reading of the text will argue that the author's twenty-folio narrative is a carefully structured ac-

³ Notable exceptions include Gyatso 1996, Kapstein 1992 & 1997, and Newman 1996. For considerations of the "vision quest" motif in Indian Buddhist literature, see Beyer 1977 and Studholme 2002: 98–104. The same topic is considered in the context of Korean Buddhist Literature in McBride 2003.

⁴ For a concise summary of this turn in the study of religion, see Taves 2009: 3–12.

count that unpacks this moment, gradually leading the reader from the substantial mundane world into the ethereal visionary world of the pure land. In this reading, the shift from ordinary perception to the "pure perception" of the vision is the actual topic at hand and the story of Mchog gyur gling pa's journey is interpreted as an allegory of sorts, one that serves to gradually map the transformation that is here described as instantaneous. Accepting that we do not have access to whatever subjective experience Mchog gyur gling pa had that day in the retreat hut above 'Og min Karma dgon, we must pay attention to the forms and structures of the literary representation of that experience and attempt to discern the implicit logic of the text and its relationship to the network of texts, practices, and histories in which it was created and understood.

Two place names appear in the first lines of the *dākiṅīs'* invitation: O rgyan and the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain. In the detailed itinerary that follows, it becomes clear that these are neighboring and closely associated regions. For Tibetan Buddhists, the two locations mark the beginning and end points in the hagiography of Padmasambhava, the eighth-century tantric master credited with establishing Buddhism in Tibet and renowned as "the Second Buddha." Padmasambhava is said to have been born in O rgyan and most accounts describe this birth as a miraculous one—spontaneously appearing as a boy seated in a lotus flower in the middle of a lake. The stories of his life describe his adoption by a Buddhist king, his exile from the palace, his training in Buddhism both within and beyond the monastic system, his eventual travel to Tibet where he tamed the indigenous spirits, assisted in establishing the first monastery, and guided numerous disciples to complete awakening (entrusting many of them with the task of revealing in the future 'treasures' that he concealed at that time). At the conclusion of his long sojourn in Tibet, Padmasambhava is said to have departed for the southwest, where he "liberated" the demon king who ruled an island populated by vicious demons from the top of the Copper-Colored Mountain⁵ and established a "pure land" where he resides to this day. Thus, the first two lines of the verse invitation may be read as a very condensed parallel to the life story of Padmasambhava, coming from O rgyan and leading to the Copper-Colored Mountain. When the *dākiṅīs* mention that the "wheel of the dharma is being turned" and that they were "sent as messengers," it goes without saying that Padmasam-

⁵ This article is part of a larger research project devoted to the Copper-Colored Mountain. I hope to address the broader history of the island and its relationship to demon-inhabited islands found in Indian Buddhist literature in a separate article.

bhava is the teacher who is turning the wheel and the authority who dispatched them with the invitation.

The recipient of this extraordinary invitation, Mchog gyur gling pa, was one of the most prolific and influential *gter ston* of his day. His close collaboration with 'Jam mgon kong sprul (1813-1899) and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820-1892), the two luminaries responsible for the monumental institutional, editorial, artistic, and publishing projects known as the "nonsectarian" (*ris med*) movement, ensured his revelations a prominent place in the lineages that took their inspiration from this nineteenth-century renaissance.⁶ The thirty-nine volumes of Mchog gyur gling pa's *New Treasures* remain widely practiced in Nyingma and Kagyu circles today. As with any *gter ston*, Mchog gyur gling pa's life story is marked with attempts to clarify doubts regarding the authenticity of the treasures that he revealed. He was born into the Skya su clan in the Nang chen region and reported that his first encounter with Padmasambhava as well as his first treasure-revelation took place before he had reached the age of thirteen. His autobiography describes skepticism in Nang chen regarding his treasures and relates that early in life he was called Skya su *gter ston*, a slightly dismissive moniker in which the authority of the *gter ston* title is mockingly undermined by being paired with the worldly name of a minor local clan. At the age of twenty-five, Mchog gyur gling pa left Nang chen for Sde dge and the vibrant monastic communities of Dpal spungs and Rdzong gсар where Kong sprul and Mkhyen brtse were teaching and working on their monumental collections of Tibetan Buddhist literature. The recognition by these two figures unquestionably secured Mchog gyur gling pa's place in the pantheon of great *gter ston* and his presence provided their scholastic endeavors with the authority of Padmasambhava's power. In this sense, the special invitation received in the beginning of this account also granted Mchog gyur gling pa entry into the most important religious and secular communities of Tibet.

After Mchog gyur gling pa's death in 1870, a search for his reincarnation led to the recognition and enthronement of a young boy from Sde sge.⁷ This boy, Dkon mchog 'gyur med bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, was trained by both 'Jam dgon kong sprul and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po and dedicated most of his religious career to

⁶ On Mchog gyur gling pa's role in redefining the religious geography of Khams in the context of the nonsectarian movement, see Gardner 2006.

⁷ Another boy was recognized as a simultaneous rebirth of Mchog gyur gling pa shortly thereafter and through association with Gnas brtan Monastery, this lineage of rebirths has come to be known as the Gnas brtan mchog gling incarnation line. On the two Mchog gling incarnation lineages, see Orgyen Tobgyal 1982: 47-60.

codifying and publishing the revelations of his previous incarnation. As part of this project, Dkon mchog 'gyur med btsan pa'i rgyal mtshan also composed a six-hundred folio biography of his predecessor that drew upon earlier biographies and combined these with oral traditions and other documents. The massive biography is organized according to the ten headings that 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po had introduced as the outline (*sa bcad*) for his commentary on 'Jam mgon kong sprul's biographical supplication prayer to Mchog gyur gling pa. From among these ten headings,⁸ the section that I will be discussing in this article is found under the sixth one, devoted to "visions" (*dag snang*). Dkon mchog 'gyur med's description of Mchog gyur gling pa's journey to the faraway world of the Copper-Colored Mountain has many parallels from various cultures and times. One thinks immediately of Dante's *Inferno* and *Paradiso* and the pilgrimage of Sudhana in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. The most famous English work in this genre is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, first published in 1678. As famous as this work is, we forget that the full title is *The Pilgrim's Progress from this world to that which is to come; delivered under the similitude of a dream wherein is discovered the manner of his setting out, his dangerous journey, and safe arrival at the desired cuntry*. That last phrase, "delivered under the similitude of a dream wherein is discovered the manner of his setting out, his dangerous journey, and safe arrival at the desired cuntry" could easily be the ornamental title of Dkon mchog 'gyur med's description of his previous incarnation's magical journey from Eastern Tibet to the Copper-Colored Mountain, the potent abode of Padmasambhava himself.

Such a text might be described as "visionary." Yet the English term "vision" implies a dichotomy between reality and imagination, a dichotomy that has often been challenged by Buddhist philosophy, practice, and in this case, literature. The text is a masterful demonstration of the ways in which reality and imagination are interwoven, describing an incremental movement from the substantial mundane world to the ethereal pure land through a variety of modes, including pilgrimage, sacred history, myth, and ritual. The text serves a host of purposes, both spiritual and mundane, purposes that I will address in a longer study. The present paper is devoted to a close reading of several of the most fascinating portions of the text in order to provide something of a commentary on what can sometimes seem a strange and bewildering narrative.

⁸ The ten are: 1. youth, 2. awakening karmic potential, 3. teachers, 4. spiritual development, 5. meditative realization, 6. visions, 7. treasure revelation, 8. students, 9. establishing sacred sites, 10. passing into nirvāṇa.

II. A Pilgrim in Tibet

The story of the actual journey follows this invitation and introduction. The five *dākiṅīs* place a golden crossed-vajra with twelve spokes before Mchog gyur gling pa and explain that the twelve spokes are a symbol of the classic Buddhist doctrine of the twelve links of dependent origination. Eschewing the traditional elaborations of the causal relationships between these various links, sometimes counted across a single lifetime and other times as spanning three lifetimes, the *dākiṅīs* emphasize the simultaneous presence of all twelve links in every single moment, equating the twelve links of the dependent origination of *samsāra* with the “confusion that does not recognize the nature of a moment of misconception.”⁹ The correspondence of a numbered object or group with a numbered list from Buddhist doctrinal literature is a standard convention of Buddhist visionary writing. Here, rather than using the twelve spokes of the vajra as an opportunity to review the twelve links of dependent origination, the author asserts that every moment of conceptual thought that does not recognize its own awakened nature is itself the cause of *samsāra*. The *dākiṅīs* urge Mchog gyur gling pa to “cut through misconceptions.”¹⁰ Instantaneously, Mchog gyur gling pa finds himself seated in the center of the vajra as they lift him into the sky and head southwest. Compared to other works of visionary literature, the story of Mchog gyur gling pa’s journey to the Copper-Colored Mountain contains little symbolic interpretation of this type. It is interesting to note that one of the few places that we find such a clear identification of a particular symbol is at the very beginning of the story, where the mode of conveyance is defined as the dependent origination of *samsāra* itself.

Seated upon the crossed-vajra, Mchog gyur gling pa is lifted into the sky as his flying escort carries him off to the southwest. Despite a great deal of disagreement regarding the location of the Copper-Colored Mountain, there is almost universal agreement that it is to be found in the southwest. Some of the confusion results from the simple fact that directional terms are relative and that a place to the southwest of Tibet could simultaneously be northwest from parts of India. The first part of the journey follows a southwestern path that would be familiar to most of Mchog gyur gling pa’s contemporaries: the way from the eastern Tibetan region of Kham to the sacred sites of Central Tibet. Although much of the travel between these regions

⁹ *Yan lag gsal byed*, 103.2-3: *rnam par rtog pa skad cig ma’i rang ngo ma shes pa’i ’khrul pa*.

¹⁰ *Yan lag gsal byed*, 103.4: *sgro dogs gcod pa*.

involved mercantile, political, or social concerns, the journey from Kham to Lhasa is also envisioned as a pilgrimage. The popularity and centrality of pilgrimage to Tibetan religious life has been amply documented and aspects of Tibetan pilgrimage practice have received significant scholarly attention.¹¹ The Tibetan literary genres associated with pilgrimage (*gnas yig*, *dkar chag*, *lam yig*, etc.) bear striking similarities to aspects of this visionary journey narrative. On his flight to the southwest, the first site that Mchog gyur gling pa reports is the holy Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, the primary destination of most terrestrial pilgrims from his native region. His conduct there ("offering the seven-branch supplication prayer and a maṇḍala with measureless faith and devotion") also conforms to the expected practice of an ordinary pilgrim to Lhasa. This is repeated in the briefly mentioned second stop on his itinerary, Tibet's first monastery, at Samye.

The connections between this account of a visionary journey and Tibetan pilgrimage traditions become most clearly apparent as the party approaches the third stop:

Then, there was a tent of rainbow light pitched on a five-peaked mountain. The central mountain was like a crystal stūpa. At the horizon there were dense forests, rocky outcroppings, caves, valleys, small valleys, lakes, ponds, great rivers, various streams that flowed together, great mountains entirely surrounded by many small mountains. On the mountain slopes, herds of wild animals roamed and stayed still. Just as the gods ceremonially bathe the feet of the great god Viṣṇu, great rivers from all directions flow along like silk unfurling and looking there [he] saw the shimmering bodies of the deities of the three roots. The ocean of his faith and reverent devotion was churning and he said, "Over there! What's that?"¹²

The movement from the historic temples associated with the beginnings of Buddhism in Tibet to the landscape of Tibet itself brings a shift in language with much more detailed and evocative descriptions. Although much of the imagery may seem to indicate a vision-

¹¹ Some of the most important work in this topic may be found in McKay 1998, Huber 1999a & 1999b.

¹² *Yan lag gsal byed*, 104.3–105.1: *de nas gangs ri rtse lnga pa la 'ja' 'od kyi gur phub pa/ dbus ri shel gyi mchod rten 'dra ba/ mthar nags tshal stug po dang/ brag gi skyibs dang/ ke'u tshang dang/ lung pa dang/ lung phran dang/ mtsho dang/ mishe'u dang/ chu chen dang/ chu bran sna tshogs pa 'bab pa/ ri chen dang ri phran mang pos yongs su bskor ba/ ri bo'i sul ri dwags kyi tshogs rnams bag phebs te gnas pa/ lha chen khyab 'jug la lha rnams kyiis dga' ston zhabs bsil phul ba bzhin phyogs mtshams nas chu bo chen po rnams dar yug brkyang bltar ngang lhang lhang du 'bab pa'i bar bar nas rtsa gsum lha yi sku gzugs khra chem chem mthong bas dad pa dang mos gus kyi chu gter rab tu g.yo ba zhig dug pa pha ki gang lags zhus pas/.*

ary mode (rainbow tents, crystal stupas, etc.), this language is found in most Tibetan pilgrimage guides. In fact, the guidebooks themselves often present a poetic vision of the landscape intended to aid the pilgrim in the quest to infuse the mountains and rivers of Tibet with religious meaning. The fact that Mchog gyur gling pa immediately sees the landscape in this way demonstrates the purity of his perception. Although he was able to see the landscape in this way, when he is overwhelmed with faith and devotion, he still turns to his guides (the five *dākiṅīs*) for assistance and asks in a very informal and colloquial manner, "Over there! What's that?" This conversational tone further emphasizes the sense that Mchog gyur gling pa's visionary journey is not that different from the pilgrimage that anyone might take.

One of the most significant differences between an ordinary pilgrim and Mchog gyur gling pa is the fact that he is guided by five *dākiṅīs* who are direct emissaries of Padmasambhava. Thus, his prosaic question regarding the spectacular sight is met with an extraordinary answer. In fifty-five nine-syllable lines of verse, the *dākiṅīs* sing a melodious response that identifies the place as the sacred site called Tsari. Their verses praise Tsari as supreme among the "twenty-four great sacred places" and describe its characteristics in vivid detail. At the conclusion of the song, the *dākiṅīs* present a brief sacred history of the site, identifying the most important figures who traveled there in the past (Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, Lawapa, Kye-bu Yeshe Dorje, and Karma Pakshi) before proclaiming that Mchog gyur gling pa himself has profound and meaningful connections with Tsari that he must realize in the future.

When they said all of that, while thinking how wonderful it would be, how delightful it would be to directly encounter this particularly glorious supreme sacred place, a place that just hearing about makes one's body-hair stand on end, just seeing purifies one's obscurations; and just circumambulating gives birth to virtuous qualities, he offered completely pure prayers of supplication and aspiration again and again.¹³

The language here, once again, mirrors the most common features of pilgrimage guides by listing the beneficial effects of venerating the sacred place in question. The repeated offering of prayers that Mchog gyur gling pa makes in response also conforms to the standards of

¹³ *Yan lag gsal byed*, 108.2–3: *zhes gsungs pa na/ thos pa tsam gyis pa spu g.yo zhing/ mthong ba tsam gyis sgrub pa dag pa/ bskor ba tsam gyis yon tan skye pa'i gnas mchog khyad par 'phags pa mgon sum mjal bar re dga' re skyid bsam pa'i ngang nas gsol 'debs dang smon lam rnam par dag pa yang yang bgyis so/.*

pilgrimage practice and highlights the importance of embodied (body-hair standing on end) and emotional (delightful) states of devotion in this tradition.

III. Historical and Mythological Geography of Buddhist India

By the nineteenth-century, the monuments of Buddhist India had largely fallen into ruin after centuries of neglect. There were still Tibetans who traveled to India and occasional visitors from India to Tibet, but for most Tibetans, these images of India came from Buddhist literature and most specifically the life story of Śākyamuni. As such, India occupied a space between the worlds of historical geography and the imagined world of mythological narrative. After the lengthy discussion of Tsari, Mchog gyur gling pa expresses his desire to collect some of the earth, water, and medicinal substances found at the sacred place. This further echo of common pilgrimage practice is clairvoyantly understood by the *ḍākiṅīs* who assure their passenger that he is welcome to alight and gather these substances and magically create a horse for him to ride. Again, a standard pilgrimage activity (collecting blessed earth, water, and herbs from the site) is re-framed in a visionary context through the clairvoyance of the guides and the appearance of the magical steed. The seamless interweaving of these two types of narratives continues throughout the text and successfully blurs the distinction we might draw between visionary and actual pilgrimage. Whereas the three specific locations from Tibet (Lhasa, Samye, Tsari) do follow a geographically coherent order and are all places that we could identify on a map, the travel account after Tsari becomes a bit more difficult to follow.

Mchog gyur gling pa sees a white stūpa that appears to have been made from crystal and asks his guides what it is. They explain that this stūpa marks the site where Prince Siddhārtha cut off his royal locks and entered the path of renunciation. From the stūpa marking the site where the prince cut off his topknot, Mchog gyur gling pa sees a particularly beautiful river with clear flowing water. He observes that the river seems to have the purest water he has ever seen and drinking some, notes that its taste is superior to any other. In response to his query, the *ḍākiṅīs* explain that this is the Nairāñjanā River, the site of Siddhārtha's extreme austerities. Of course, in terms of historical geography, an ordinary pilgrim would never be able to see the Nairāñjanā River from the site of the topknot stūpa. The proximity of these two sites in Mchog gyur gling pa's vision reflects their place in the life story of Śākyamuni and not their places in the land-

scape of Magadha. Just as seamlessly, from the banks of the river Mchog gyur gling pa gazes out across flower-filled meadows with mountains in the distance and is lost in reverie at a place of exceptional beauty. When asked, the *ḍākiṇīs* identify this location as Kuśīnagara, the site of Śākyamuni's parinirvāṇa. Overcome with sadness at this direct encounter with the place where the Buddha's absence from the world is memorialized, Mchog gyur gling pa breaks into tears. The chief *ḍākiṇī* consoles him by stating that, "The Buddha has not passed completely into nirvāṇa. The dharma never disappears." She expands on the meaning of this claim through a four-line verse equating Buddhahood with the nature of one's own mind. The fact that relatively more attention is paid to the site of Śākyamuni's death rather than the earlier episodes in his life suggests the entire text's concern with the question of the Buddha's absence from the world. This is a recurrent theme throughout the story and will be highlighted again at the Copper-Colored Mountain itself.

At a glance, this rapid movement from one place to another seems to indicate a lack of geographic knowledge and a more dreamlike mode of travel. However, on the basis of Toni Huber's study of Tibetan pilgrimage to India, the proximity of these various locations may be explained in much more concrete terms. The historic site of Śākyamuni's final passing and cremation has been identified through excavations conducted by the colonial archeologist A. C. L. Carlleyle in 1875-76 about forty kilometers from the city of Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. This site, however, seems to have been abandoned and forgotten by Buddhists by the eleventh century. Even as early as in the seventh century, the famous Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang described the site as being in ruins when he visited. From the sixteenth century, however, many Tibetan pilgrims identified the sacred sites of Śākyamuni's life not with their ancient locations in Magadha, but with a "replica holy land" that had been discovered and established in Assam at a place called Hājo. Toni Huber describes the seventeenth-century pilgrimage to Hājo recorded by Dpag bsam ye shes (1598-1667) in the following terms: "Upon reaching Hājo—which he referred to in Tibetan as the "Town of Kuṣa Grass"—he found not only an alternative Kuśīnagara but, more remarkably, a whole range of relocated Magadhan sites and landscapes, an entire replica Buddhist holy land. This replica Magadha was in fact a highly compressed version of the original Buddhist Magadha."¹⁴

It seems clear that this "highly compressed" Magadha is reflected in the itinerary followed by Mchog gyur gling pa in the vision. The identification of Hājo with Kuśīnagara had been known to the *gter*

¹⁴ Huber 2008: 136.

ston Nyi ma grags pa (1625-1697) who hailed from Mchog gyur gling pa's native Nang chen and was confirmed as the authentic sacred site by no less an authority than 'Jigs med gling pa (1729/30-1798). The theory that this "replica Magadha" was the blueprint for Mchog gyur gling pa's visionary itinerary gains further credence when we consider the pilgrimage accounts collected by Toni Huber. For example, a pilgrim from Kham at the beginning of the nineteenth century named Blo bzang thabs mkhas journeyed to Central Tibet and then proceeded on to Tsari: "From Tsari, it was only a relatively short journey west via Loro before he reached the Monyul corridor, the favoured route to the Tibetan replica Buddhist holy land in Assam."¹⁵ Finally, L. Austine Waddell encountered pilgrims from Kham at the "Kuśīnagara" in Assam during his expedition there in the 1890's, that is, between the date of Mchog gyur gling pa's death in 1870 and Dkon mchog gyur med's composition of his biography in 1921.¹⁶

The seemingly incongruous geography in this section of the journey actually corresponds to a pilgrimage tradition that had established alternative sacred sites when access to and knowledge of the ancient sites had been lost. The proximity of Tsari to the Nairāñjana River and Kuśīnagara could easily be misread as simply a result of the dreamlike or visionary nature of the narrative when, in fact, the geographical proximity of these sites was an accepted fact in Mchog gyur gling pa's time and only came to be thoroughly questioned after Tibetans became familiar with colonial archaeology in the twentieth century. Tibetans have always been concerned with establishing the authenticity of sacred sites but the criteria and methods employed differ from those of the archaeologist. These differences become increasingly clear as the *ḍākiṅis* lead their passenger onward.

If one were to remove the *ḍākiṅis* and the magical travel from the account to this point, there would really be nothing to distinguish it from a Tibetan pilgrimage itinerary. Mchog gyur gling pa's perceptions of the places visited might be considered very "pure" in the spectrum of ways of seeing, but they are basically of a kind with the experiences of any devout pilgrim. With the next destination after Kuśīnagara, we enter into a different landscape altogether:

Then, they traveled many *li* and they came to a land with many villages surrounding a blue mountain the color of a clear sky that was incredibly bright and incredibly high. The summit seemed like it had absolutely no path to it up the smooth face of the mountain. He saw a small red house on the peak and said, "Over there, what's that?" They answered, "Oh son, that is no small house. That is the

¹⁵ Huber 2008: 142.

¹⁶ Waddell 1934: 306-14.

palace of the herukas, with the ornaments of wrath, it is wondrously big but because this mountain is so high you cannot see it clearly. This is the mountain called Malaya Blazing Meteoric Iron.¹⁷

The narrator's passing comment that this next destination was only reached after "many *li*" had been crossed emphasizes the sense of distance. The earlier transitions from Lhasa to Samye to Tsari to the sites connected with Śākyamuni were all quite seamless and gave the impression of great proximity. The sense of distance is further exaggerated by the strange appearance of the mountain, perfectly smooth and blue and of immense height. Mchog gyur gling pa's erroneous sense that the divine palace at the mountain's peak is a "small house" alerts the reader that the scale has shifted, appearances are not to be taken at face value, and that even the hero of the story is now in a realm beyond his previous experience. Failing to account for distance in estimating the size of a building is a common experience and there is a gentle humor in the *ḍākiṅis'* correction. The *ḍākiṅis'* go on to describe the significance of Mount Malaya, well-known as the location where the Buddha subjugated the demon Rudra and where the Buddhist tantras were first taught.¹⁸ Although attempts have been made to locate Mount Malaya in South Asia, unlike the sites connected with the exoteric life of Śākyamuni, archeology has not been able to offer any assistance in determining the historical location.

We might explain this shift from locations that are potentially identifiable on a map to the geographic indeterminacy of Mount Malaya as representing a move from the realm of sacred history into that of myth. However, these categories are not distinguished within the text itself. There is clearly a shift as the journey takes us from Kuśīnagara to Mount Malaya. The earlier stops fit into ordinary human maps without difficulty, whereas this mountain disorients and confuses Mchog gyur gling pa. The author focuses on the unreliability of worldly vision in terms of measuring size at a great distance. Rather than make a mystical claim about Mchog gyur gling pa's divine sight, the text emphasizes the unreliability of ordinary vision in a very mundane way: at great distances it becomes difficult to gauge the relative size of objects. As we read of Mchog gyur gling pa being chided by the *ḍākiṅis'* for the limitations of his vision, the reader may

¹⁷ *Yan lag gsal byed*, 110.3–6: *de nas le bar mang po brgal te phebs pas yul ljongs grong khyer mang pos bskor ba'i dbus su ri bo sngon po nam mkha' dwangs ba'i mdog lta bu gsal zhig 'tsher ba rgya ha cang mi che bad pang mtho ba/ ngos 'jam pa la lam gtan nas med pa 'dra ba zhig gi rtse mor Khang pa dmar po chung du yod pa mthong pas pha ki gang lags zhus pas/ kyai bu/ Khang pa chung ngu ma yin he ru ka'i pho brang drag po'i rgyan bkod dang ldan pa sa ngo mtshar ba yod kyang ri bo dpangs mtho bas mi mngon pa yin te/ 'di ni ri bo ma la [ya] gnam lcags 'bar ba zhes.../.*

¹⁸ See Dalton 2011 for a translation and study of this myth.

easily relate to his experience, and one's attachment to the objective reality of the visible world is loosened. This brief conversation between Mchog gyur gling pa and the *dākiṅīs* about the size of the palace at the summit of Mount Malaya strikes me as a key to understanding the logic of the text as a whole. The reliability of mundane perceptions is questioned and this opens up a space for the possibility of an alternative, more refined way of seeing. The journey to the Copper-Colored Mountain takes place in this spirit, and the pilgrim's progress is marked by his increasing confusion about where he is. After singing verses of praise and offering dances together with the *dākiṅīs*, Mchog gyur gling pa attempts to clarify this geographical confusion by asking his guides, "Is this the place southwest of the Vajra Seat called the demonic land of Lanka-puri?"¹⁹ The *dākiṅīs* provide a fascinating answer that challenges our interpretive temptation to separate the realms of historical geography, cosmology, and Buddhist myth:

That's the mountain peak of the southwestern island of demons and the surrounding Eye-Hand Province. This is neighboring Zahor in India. We will get to the demonic island still further on, but we need to cross the water. Previously, Śākyamuni Buddha was invited to this place by the boy [Rāvaṇa], the 'Ten-necked One' of Lanka, and this is the place referred to in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* requested by Mahāmati. This forest is also the place where the Anuyoga tantras actually descended. These days, it is famous as the island of Siṅgala. These different names for the island refer to the same place. There is also the island of *Rṅga yab* (*Cāmaradvīpa*). This place is near here.²⁰

The precision of this answer defies the presumption that Mount Malaya is located "off the map" in a realm of pre-historical myth. The *dākiṅīs* very clearly set out the relationship between the island of Lanka, known in nineteenth-century Tibet as the island of Siṅgala (and now as Sri Lanka) and Mount Malaya. Referring to another island that is often confused with these locations (and that will feature later in the journey), they take the opportunity to specify the location of *Cāmaradvīpa* as well. Although all this seems quite clear, it must

¹⁹ *Yan lag gsal byed*, 111.4–5: *gnas 'di rdo rje gdan gyi lho nub srin yul langka pu ri yin nam ces dris pas/*

²⁰ *Yan lag gsal byed*, 111.5–112.5: *de ni lho nub srin po'i gling kai ri brtsegs pa dang byan lag ljongs dang 'dabs 'byor du yod/ 'di ni rgya gar za hor dang 'dabs 'brel pa can yin/ srin po'i gling du phyin pa la da dung chu bo las brgal dgos/ gnas 'dir sngon bcom ldan 'das rgyal ba shā kya thub pa langka'i bdag po sgra sgrogs kyi bu/ lang ka mgrin bcus spyab drangs nas blo gros chen pos zhus pa lang kar gshegs pa'i mdo gsungs pa'i gnas de yin/ A nu yo ga'i rgyud rnam kyang nags tshal 'dir glegs bam dngos su bab pa yin/ deng sang singga la'i gling zhes kyang grags la gnas 'di dang ming don mtshan nyid gcig pa'i dngos de rnga yab gling du yod cing 'di ni nye ba'i gnas yin nol.*

be noted that Mchog gyur gling pa was prompted to ask about this owing to his own confusion and that the explanation comes from the *dākiñīs*, beings who may have access to maps unintelligible to ordinary humans.

If Mount Malaya is located at the edge of the map known to ordinary humans but easily located by the *dākiñīs*, the next two destinations take us even further into the world of the *dākiñīs* and yet remain closely tied to worldly geography. From Malaya, the party travels to “a great town with an enormous temple set in the middle. On the outside there were the five types of *stūpa* and on the inside it was encircled by seven rings of iron mountains, as in descriptions of *maṇḍalas*.”²¹ Mchog gyur gling pa’s question to the *dākiñīs* (“Over there, what’s that?”) has now become an anticipated refrain. They identify the site as the Vajra Seat, the location of Śākyamuni’s enlightenment. After offering several verses of praise to the site, Mchog gyur gling pa confesses that he is perplexed because he recollects visions of the Vajra Seat from other treasure-revealers that are much less elaborate than the immense *maṇḍala* before him. When he asks the *dākiñīs* about this discrepancy, they sing a song in six thirteen-syllable lines that urges him to remain steady in his vision of the Vajra Seat as a pure land, contrasting this with the limited perceptions of more ordinary pilgrims. This tells us that Mchog gyur gling pa (or the narrator) was familiar with the visionary accounts of other treasure-revealers and used these descriptions both as a guide for understanding and for locating the sites encountered. At the same time, this account clearly aims to distinguish Mchog gyur gling pa’s vision of the Vajra Seat as superior to that of his predecessor (in this case, Gter ston Bdud ‘dul).

The disorienting experience of Mount Malaya’s immense height and the expansive vision of Bodh Gaya as a pure land stretches the boundaries of ordinary perception and signals a stepping outside of mundane geography and into the realm of tantric mythography. After crossing a turbulent river, the traveling party arrives at a triangular-shaped land with a three-storied temple in the center. Various wild beasts roar and rolling mists, roaring thunder, and rains of flowers generate a scene that is at once menacing and inviting. Hosts of *dākiñīs* fly through the air reciting symbolic incantations. The five guides explain that they have reached *Oḍḍiyana*,²² the land of the *dākiñīs*. As with the previous stops on the itinerary, they offer prayers and supplications in praise of the sacred spot and Mchog gyur

²¹ *Yan lag gsal byed*, 112.5–6: *yang phebs par 'grong khyer chen po zhiḡ gi dbus na gtsug lag khang bkod pa rgya che ba/ phyi mchod rten rigs lnga la nang gzhal yas khang gi mtshan nyid can lcags ri rim pa bdun gyis bskor ba zhiḡ mjal bas...*

²² See Tucci 1940, Lokesh Chandra 1980, and Schweiger 1996.

gling pa experiences great devotion and faith. However, unlike the previous stops, here the pilgrim is also said to have experienced joy and intense delight. The blissful nature of his response to this particular place is an appropriate reflection of the goals of the tantric practices associated with the *ḍākiṅīs*. Perhaps most significantly, these generic feelings of devotion and delight are then followed by a very specific experience: "His own body appeared in clear vision to have the nature of being made of light."²³ The substantiality of the body and the possibility of recognizing the essential luminous nature of the body is an important theme in tantric literature and became particularly central to the Tibetan "rainbow body" tradition.²⁴ The question of whether or not a visionary journey was undertaken in one's own body or in an illusory body became the principal criterion for distinguishing between different types of visions.²⁵ Within the structure of this account, the experience of his own body as made of light serves as the immediate precursor to Mchog gyur gling pa's arrival at his island destination.

IV. Guided Tour of a Tantric Paradise

Up to this point, the five *ḍākiṅīs* have demonstrated complete ascendancy; they travel wherever they please and are able to explain anything they encounter. *Oḍḍiyana* is said to be divided from the demon-land of *Cāmaradvīpa* by a large river. Though the river is spanned by a natural rock-bridge, there is also a naturally formed stone building in the shape of a *stūpa* that functions as a toll-house. The bridge-keeper (*zam dpon*) is identified as *Lha dpal gyi ye shes*, renowned in Tibetan lore as an accomplished adept who was one of the twenty-five principal disciples of *Padmasambhava*. For the first time, the *ḍākiṅīs* are obstructed as *Lha dpal gyi ye shes* demands a payment before they are allowed to cross. The *ḍākiṅīs* are able to magically gather some nutmeg from the air and the bridge-keeper, satisfied with the offering, allows them to pass. In the narrative, this encounter heightens the sense of moving into progressively more sacred ground. Even the apparently all-powerful *ḍākiṅī* guides need to secure permission before crossing the river into *Cāmaradvīpa*. The fact that the bridge-keeper is identified with a historical figure from the eighth century likewise adds an element of greater distance from the sphere of ordinary experience. While the sacred places associated

²³ *Yan lag gsal byed*, 115.5: *rang lus 'od kyi phung po'i rang bzhin du gyur pa'i gsal snang shar rol*.

²⁴ See Kapstein 2004.

²⁵ See Doctor 2005: 96-8.

with the life of Śākyamuni inspired reflections on his absence from the world and the presence of a more abstract notion of Buddhahood in the world, here we encounter an individual who lived in Tibet a thousand years ago in his own body, as himself. As the bridge-keeper he controls access to the island, but he also serves as the first of the many figures from Tibetan religious history, all of whom reside outside of historical time at the Copper-Colored Mountain, that Mchog gyur ling pa will encounter.

Once passage to Cāmaradvīpa has been assured, the *ḍākiṅīs* impart some important advice to Mchog gyur gling pa. The shift in tone again serves to rhetorically heighten the expectations for the next destination. Rather than simply describe the significance of the sacred place they have arrived at, the *ḍākiṅīs* offer a kind of meta-discourse on the way in which Mchog gyur gling pa should view what he is about to see. Aside from providing a direct commentary on the rationale for the entire visionary journey, the instructions also confirm the sense that the *ḍākiṅīs* are entering territory that is a bit intimidating even for them. They proceeded through the most sacred sites of Tibet, India, and Oḍḍiyana without taking the time to really instruct Mchog gyur gling pa about the proper way to approach the journey. As soon as they cross into Cāmaradvīpa, however, they are compelled to make sure their ward understands precisely what to do:

Noble son, secret mantra practitioner whose name is Norbu, like a jewel, in order to obtain the miraculous power of swift-mind[-travel] and the divine eye, keep your mind on all of the demon islands without forgetting. Son, when you return to Tibet you will accomplish a great miracle. For the benefit of your family and disciple lineages, write all of this down and anyone who sees, hears, or thinks of what you have written will definitely be reborn immediately at the time of transference into Cāmaradvīpa.²⁶

Here the benefits of visiting the demon island in the proper manner are presented as twofold: Mchog gyur gling pa's attention during the visit will provide him the magical power "swift-mind" and his later representation of his experience will assure rebirth at the Copper-Colored Mountain to those who see it. In this sense, the *ḍākiṅīs* injunction at the threshold of Padmasambhva's pure land is also an origin story for the very text that we are reading. The evidence of its

²⁶ *Yan lag gsal byed*, 116.4–6: *rigs kyi bug sang sngags kyi rnal 'byor pa nor bu'i ming can nor bu lta bu la/ yid mgyogs gyi rdzu 'phrul dang/ lha yi mig thob par bya yis/ srin po'i yul gling thams cad ma brjed par yid la zungs shig dang/ bu khyod bod kyi yul du phyin tsa na ngo mtshar chen po thob/ khyod kyi bu slob brgyud 'dzin rnams kyi don du yi ger thob la bkod pa bris dang de nyid mthong thos dran pa'i skal ldan thams cad 'phos ma thag tu rnga yab gling du skye ba'i dgos pa yod Ang/.*

existence is the proof that Mchog gyur gling pa did pay careful attention, remember every detail and write everything down for the benefit of his disciples and future lineage-holders, including the author and audience of the text itself.

These twin goals of the personal attainment of magical powers and the benefit for others produced by creating a representation of the Copper-Colored Mountain with the power to ensure rebirth in that pure land are the only explicit ones mentioned in the account. However, we may identify a number of implicit concerns in the text that will serve as an interpretive framework for considering the description of the Copper-Colored Mountain itself. My reading of Mchog gyur gling pa's representation of the Copper-Colored Mountain will focus on four distinct yet related themes: 1. the descriptions of Cāmaradvīpa's denizens as an example of "otherworld ethnography," 2. the vision as authenticating and legitimating the treasure tradition, in general, and Mchog gling's treasures, in particular, 3. the residents of the Copper-Colored Mountain as a model for the perfect tantric community, and 4. the site of the Copper-Colored Mountain as a source of treasure teachings.

Otherworld Ethnography: The Twelve Demon Islands

As soon as the ḍākiṇī concludes her injunction to Mchog gyur gling pa, "all twelve demon lands actually appeared before his eyes, unobstructed by rock mountains or anything, and it was as if he arrived there without needing anything other than the desire to go there."²⁷ The experience of his own luminous body in Oḍḍiyana now seems to have progressed to the point where Mchog gyur gling pa's perception is not impeded by obstacles, distance, or any of the limitations of ordinary vision. He sees the twelve lands simultaneously and completely. The chief ḍākiṇī addresses her guest again, saying, "Son, now listen carefully and don't forget what I am going to tell you. I am going to give you the orientation to the places of the demonic lands."²⁸ What follows is a fascinating gazetteer of the twelve islands around the outer perimeter of Cāmaradvīpa with descriptions of the distinctive topographical and architectural features of each one and observations of the dietary habits, special magical powers, and religious practices unique to the inhabitants of each island.

²⁷ *Yan lag gsal byed* 116.6–117.1: *srin po'i yul gling bcu gnyis po thams cad ri brag sogs gang gis kyang mi sgrib bar mngon sum mig sngar snang ba las 'gro sdod ma dgos pa'i de dang der slebs pa 'dra zhiḡ byung ba na*l.

²⁸ *Yan lag gsal byed*, 117.4: *bu me yeḡs pas nyon la mi brjed pas zungs dang ngas bu la srin po'i yul gling rnam ngo sprad par bya'o*l.

This is the terrifying palace of the east side of the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain, "Demon Land Nutmeg (*Dzāti*) Town." Here there are two million eight hundred thousand [demons]. The guru's emanation, Demon King Rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal teaches the doctrines of Śrī Yangdak Heruka. Their food and drink are only nutmeg. The miraculous power of those who reside here is the ability to fly unobstructed in the sky. The temple and the grove are an assembly-hall for the guru's emanations, a palace of the peaceful dharma.²⁹

The elements of this survey remain the same for each of the twelve lands, with varying degrees of detail regarding each element. Compare the paucity of topographic and architectural detail in the preceding example with the following:

Above that there is a red cliff like a bristled weapon and at the base of that there is a sharp red rock formation and a turbulent lake with churning waves that create steam. Vast forests spread in all directions. Amidst all of that there is a red citadel with many corners, adorned with garlands of heads, hands, and hearts. It is terrifying.³⁰

The inhabitants of half of the dozen kingdoms are said to sustain themselves with flesh and blood (for some, certain varieties of flesh and blood are specified). The name of the guru's emanation³¹ and the principal teaching also match the outer environment, with peaceful or wrathful settings providing the environment for peaceful or wrathful emanations and teachings. The specificity of the descriptive guide offers a further example of the hybridity of real and imagined worlds. Although the journey narrative has moved from the concrete substantiality of the Tibetan pilgrimage sites into increasingly wondrous landscapes, here at the Copper-Colored Mountain the *ḍākiṅī* presents an objective inventory of the demon lands in the manner of

²⁹ *Yan lag gsal byed*, 117.4–118.1: *zangs mdog dpal ri'i shar phyogs kyi pho brang 'jigs su rung ba 'di ni srin yul dzā ti grong khyer yin/ 'di la 'bum tsho nyer brgyad yod/ gu ru'i sprul pa srin rgyal rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyis dpal yang bdag he ru ka'i chos rnam ston/ 'di rnam kyi bza' btung ni dzā ti kho na yin/ 'dir 'khod pa thams cad rdzu 'phrul gyis nam mkha' la thogs med du 'gro bar nus/ gtsug lag Khang dang kun dga' ra ba ni/ gu ru'i sprul pa'i tshogs Khang zhi ba chos kyi pho brang yin no/.*

³⁰ *Yan lag gsal byed*, 120.3–120.4: *de yi gong du brag brag dmar po mtshon cha gzings pa 'dra ba'i zhol du brag dmar zang nge ba dang/ mtsho nag rba klung 'khrugs shing rlang pa 'phyo ba'i phyogs thams cad du ljon shin grab tu rgyas pa na/ mkhar dmar po zur mang po dang ldan pa mgo lag snying phreng sogs drag po'i rgyan gyis 'jigs su rung ba 'di/.*

³¹ Interestingly, one of Mchog gyur gling pa's most important treasure revelations, *Bla ma'i thugs sgrub bar chad kun sel*, includes practices focused on twelve manifestations of Padmasambhava. However, the twelve manifestations in the *Bla ma'i thugs sgrub kun sel* do not correspond with those encountered at Cāmaradvīpa.

an ethnographic survey. This serves to demonstrate the ḍākiṅī's power through her mastery of the territory, her ability to map this inconceivably different realm, and that power is transmitted to Mchog gyur gling pa through her direct transmission.

Authentication of the Treasure Tradition

The ḍākiṅī's survey of the twelve demon lands also serves another function that emerges as a central theme in the story. Regarding the land of the terrifying red citadel described above, the text further relates:

The guru's emanation, Demon King Rdo rje khyung chen teaches Vajrakīlaya here. Son, all of the dharma-cycles of your [treasure] "Sole Dagger of the Most Secret Mind" and in particular, the perfection stage cycle, are here in their entirety.³²

The teachings that are the central practice of the demons inhabiting each of the twelve lands represent a variety of canonical Buddhist traditions, primarily (though not exclusively) drawn from the tantras. The inclusion of one of Mchog gyur gling pa's own treasures in this list indicates that his revealed teachings are considered to be just as authentic as these other texts. Skeptics and critics who might consider his nineteenth-century revelations as inauthentic novelties are here told that one of his treasures devoted to Vajrakīlaya³³ is taught by an emanation of Padmasambhava to an assembly of rākṣasas at one of the outer regions of Cāmaradvīpa.

After the ḍākiṅī's overview of the twelve demon islands, the party proceeds across another large body of water on a ferryboat with a horse figurehead at the prow. On the other shore, Mchog gyur gling pa is led up the "Secret Path of the Ḍākiṅīs" to the Copper-Colored Mountain itself. At this point, the organizational scheme of the Copper-Colored Mountain is introduced through the description of four boulders that are associated with the four tantric activities and located in the four cardinal directions, each bearing the footprints of Padmasambhava: a circular diamond boulder in the east representing acts of pacification, a square gold boulder in the south representing acts of expansion, a half-moon-shaped ruby boulder in the west representing acts of power and a triangular emerald boulder in the north

³² *Yan lag gsal byed*, 120.6–121.1: *gu ru'i sprul pa srin rgyal rdo rje khyung chen gyis rdo rje phur pa'i chos gsungs/ bu khyod kyi yang gsang thugs kyi phur gcig gi skor thams cad dang/ khyad par rdzogs rim gyi skor yongs rdzogs bzhugs so/.*

³³ For translations of materials from this cycle, see Doctor 2005: 105-75.

representing acts of wrathful subjugation. Footprints of Padmasambhava are a common feature of pilgrimage places across the Tibetan plateau, where they are revered as markers, simultaneously, of the guru's past presence in Tibet and his present absence.³⁴ It is curious that the perimeter of the Copper-Colored Mountain, a location defined by the fact of Padmasambhava's unceasing presence there, would likewise be marked by footprints. This may serve to again connect the visionary landscape of the distant demon land with the more familiar geography of Tibetan pilgrimage sites. Additionally, the footprints may be seen as a further challenge to the very dichotomy of absence and presence itself, a dichotomy that Padmasambhava is understood to transcend. The circumambulation of the temple complex is described as being completely effortless and the travelers are able to move about simply by thought. After seeing the four boulders marking the four directions and the various groves and lotus-pools surrounding the central structure, the *ḍākiṅīs* pause as an enormous procession passes by. One hundred thousand *ḍākiṅīs* together with a hundred great scholars, a hundred translators, and a hundred knowledge-holders all lead Padmasambhava in a golden chariot. The *ḍākiṅīs* inform Mchog gyur gling pa that arriving at this precise moment is particularly auspicious but insist that they should go see the temples of the four directions before following the procession into the central building.

In each direction there is a temple devoted to one of the four tantric activities and an emanation of Padmasambhava teaches to a large assembly in each one. It is in the southern temple, associated with the tantric activity of expansion, that we find our next explicit example of the authenticating function of the narrative. An emanation of Padmasambhava called Mahāguru Padma Tshe dpag med teaches the practices of the subtle channels and energies (*rtsa rlung*) to a large assembly. Mchog gyur gling pa starts to sing the *Bdag lus phung kham*s prayer composed by Klong chen pa and everyone joins in immediately. Mchog gyur gling pa expresses amazement that this prayer by a fourteenth-century Tibetan is known at the Copper-Colored Mountain and one of the *ḍākiṅīs* assures him that Klong chen pa's words are just like the tantras themselves, they are venerated in all of the buddha realms.

³⁴ For an art historical consideration of footprints in Tibetan Buddhist art, see Selig Brown 2004.

The Perfect Ritual Performance: Goal, Model, Alternative

The most elaborate description is saved for the north, where a group of renowned treasure-revealers perform the "liberation" rites in an elaborate 'chams dance. This type of highly choreographed ritual is an important part of the Tibetan monastic calendar. In Mchog gling's case, it resonates with a famous episode from earlier in his life-story that helped set him on the path to becoming a treasure-revealer. In his youth, as a monk at Tshe bcu Monastery in Nang chen, Mchog gling was appointed to the important role of principal dancer. One day, while leading the dance, he had a vision of Padmasambhava and his twenty-five close disciples performing a different dance and he joined them. The other monks were confused by the sudden change and chaos ensued, which brought on a sound beating for Mchog gling and his eventual expulsion from the monastery. Here, at the Copper-Colored Mountain, Mchog gling recognizes luminaries from the history of treasure-revelation (such as Sangs rgyas gling pa, Ratna gling pa, Zhiq po gling pa) among the dancers and is delighted to find that the dance master ('chams dpon) is none other than the seventeenth-century treasure revealer, Yongs dge Mi 'gyur rdo rje. Mchog gling spontaneously joins the dancers and falls perfectly in step with them. The ease with which he harmoniously joins these great figures vindicates Mchog gling and offers proof that the monastic authorities of his youth were the ones truly out of step. The performance of this dance suggests another role of the Copper-Colored Mountain vision. It is the perfect ritual community, a goal to aspire toward and a standard against which terrestrial rituals might be judged.

Source of New Treasures

Once inside, Mchog gling finally encounters Padmasambhava. The most common depiction of the Palace of Lotus-Light at the top of the Copper-Colored Mountain connects each of the three stories of the palace with the three bodies of the Buddha: Padmasambhava as the *nirmāṇakāya* form on the ground floor, Avalokiteśvara as the *sambhogakāya* form on the middle floor, and Amitābha as the *dharmakāya* form on the top floor. Here, however, different forms of Padmasambhava occupy every level of the palace. On the ground floor, Padmasambhava teaches the *Bka' 'dus chos kyi rgya mtsho* to a vast assembly including a hundred great paṇḍitas, a hundred translators, a hundred vidyādharas, and a hundred treasure-revealers. Guided by the dākiñis, Mchog gyur gling pa joined the teachings and re-

ceived the initiations directly from Padmasambhava. Then, in a corner of this floor of the temple, Mchog gyur gling pa encountered a beautiful sixteen-year-old *ḍākiṅī* surrounded by the five *ḍākiṅīs* who had guided him and a countless assembly of other *ḍākiṅīs*. His questions about the identity of this *ḍākiṅī* are met with mocking laughter and she identifies herself as the chief of all *ḍākiṅīs*, *Ye shes mtsho rgyal*. The five *ḍākiṅīs* who had guided Mchog gyur gling pa all the way from his retreat hut at this point dissolve into the heart of the chief *ḍākiṅī*, demonstrating their ultimate identity with her. After offering some prophetic statements, the *ḍākiṅī* instructs Mchog gyur gling pa to proceed to the next story of the palace in order to receive direct teachings from Padmasambhava. On the middle floor, Padmasambhava was teaching the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) to a large assembly led by the eight Indian *vidyādhara*s. On the top floor Padmasambhava appears as the five "Skull-garlanded" precious gurus. On each of these floors, the direct instruction to Mchog gyur gling pa again focuses on urging him to remember every detail of what he sees and pronouncements regarding the benefits of this memory. Although *Dkon mchog 'gyur med* does not describe an explicit treasure revelation at the Copper-Colored Mountain, elsewhere it is specified that Mchog gyur gling pa did, in fact, reveal his *A ti zab don snying thig* treasure cycle at the Copper-Colored Mountain itself. This illuminates a fourth role of the Copper-Colored Mountain vision: beyond providing authentication and a model of perfection, the vision itself is often a source of new treasure teachings.

V. Bridges Between Worlds

After Mchog gyur gling pa has visited all of the twelve demon-islands, the four temples surrounding the mountain, and the three stories of the central Palace of Lotus-Light, he takes in the view from the very top of the temple on the peak of the Copper-Colored Mountain. From this vantage point, the universe stretches out in all directions and Mchog gyur gling pa observes that the sky and sea in each direction are the same color as the corresponding side of the palace. Thus, the Copper-Colored Mountain has taken the place of Mount Meru, the center of the universe in traditional Buddhist cosmology. While taking in this view, Mchog gyur gling pa wonders whether or not he has fully obtained the ultimate teaching that he was invited here for. In a final discussion with Padmasambhava, the same instructions that he has been receiving throughout the journey are repeated once again, he is urged to remember every detail that he has seen in order to be able to represent the pure land vividly back in

Tibet. Once again, our expectations of a "vision quest" in search of esoteric knowledge are challenged by the fact that the true object of the quest seems to be nothing more than the "vision" itself.

The paramount importance of the visual image of the Copper-Colored Mountain is reinforced by Mchog gyur gling pa's actions upon returning to Tibet (he flies back directly, no longer requiring the *ḍākiṇī* escort). Back in his retreat hut, Mchog gyur gling pa described the visionary journey to some of his close disciples and soon thereafter arranged sponsorship to commission an elaborate narrative painting depicting the events of the journey. Dkon mchog 'gyur med provides not only the name of the sponsor (the Seventh Tre hor zhabs drung rin po che sku phreng bdun pa, Phrin las dbang po) and the painter (Karma bsam gtan), but also explains that Mchog gyur gling pa himself made corrections to the outline drawing in his own hand before the paint was applied to the canvas.³⁵ He also reports that this painting was used as a model for murals executed at important monasteries throughout Khams. At least three *thangka* paintings depicting Mchog gyur gling pa's visionary journey to the Copper-Colored Mountain survive.³⁶ In many ways, the tradition itself considers the most significant and valuable aspect of the visionary journey to have been the public representation of what had been seen. In this sense, Dkon mchog gyur med's text itself offers an argument for the importance of considering literary and artistic representations of visionary experiences in precisely those terms, as bridges between the ordinary world of mundane perceptions and extraordinary worlds such as the tantric paradise where Padmasambhava abides.

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³⁵ See *Yan lag gsal byed*, 142-43.

³⁶ I plan to address the relationship between the text discussed in this articles and these paintings (one in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art in New York, one in the Mkhayen brtse'i bla brang at Rdzong gsar Monastery in Tibet, and one in the collection of Dil mgo mkhyen brtse rin po che at Zhe chen Monastery in Nepal) in a forthcoming monograph on the Copper-Colored Mountain.

[This text also appears as Dkon mchog 'gyur med. 2002. *Mchog gyur gling pa rnam thar bkra shis dbyangs bsnyan*. Hong Kong: Zhang gang then mi dpe skrun khang.]

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