

THE *BLA MA MCHOD PA TSHOGS ZHING* OF THE DGE LUGS PA TRADITION: INTRODUCTORY ANALYSIS TO THE OLDEST IMAGES OF THE “FIELD OF THE ACCUMULATION OF MERITS”

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This article focuses on a specific iconography of the dGe lugs pa school. This iconography is known by the name of *tshogs zhing* (a spiritual field for the accumulation of merits), here analyzed in its 18th century form. The images described here are an essential tool for the religious practice prescribed by the dgGe lugs pa’s *bla ma mchod pa* tantric literature. As an esoteric literature, the *bla ma mchod pa* is based on an “essential instruction” (*man ngag*) which gathers teachings on the main *tantras* of the so called *niruttara* classes. This paper will discuss the oldest iconography of the *bla ma mchod pa tshogs zhing*, directly related to the root text of the first Paṅ chen Bla ma Blo bzang Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1567–1662). Among the many images of *tshogs zhing* I have analyzed¹ – almost identical in the representation of this specific subject – I present here a xylograph (Fig. 2) and a *thang ka* (Fig. 1). The xylograph, realized in the style of the 18th century’s woodblocks of sNar thang,² is an uncatalogued item of the Tucci Tibetan Collection (IsIAO Library, Rome). The *thang ka* is property of a Tibetan private citizen living now in Bodhgaya, in the Indian state of Bihar.³

Within the dGe lugs pa order, the *bla ma mchod pa* literature stems from essential tantric and esoteric instructions (*man ngag*) related to the *guru* devotion liturgies and practices prescribed by *guruyoga* literature.⁴ In order to receive these particular *man*

1 Research has been done in the dGe lugs pa monasteries of Ladakh, McLeod Ganj and the Kathmandu Valley. Further sources of comparison were several catalogues on Tibetan art (see below) and the web site www.himalayanart.org. As primary sources, I also studied and translated two texts, Sangs rgyas ye shes’s *Bla ma mchod pa’i cho ga dngos grub kun ’byung*, and Ye shes rgyal mtshan’s *Bla ma lha’i mal ’byor gyi khrid dmigs kyi bsdu don snyan rgyud gter mdzod ’byed pa’i lde mig* (see the bibliography for complete references).

2 A monastery located 15 km west of Shigatse, in gTsang (Central Tibet), which is famous as a printery.

3 I wish to thank the former President of IsIAO, the late Professor Gherardo Gnoli, and Mr. Thinlay Nepali for allowing me to study and show the xylograph and the *thang ka* presented here.

4 *Bla ma mchod pa* translates the Sanskrit term *gurupūjā*. Concerning the meaning of *mchod pa*, see Makransky 1996.

ngag, practitioners must obtain the four complete initiations in one of the *niruttarayogatantra yi dam* cycles. The *bla ma mchod pa* practice focuses on the devotion of the main figure of the *guru* as a deity, a result of mixing together the instructions of the *Vajrabhairavatantra*, *Cakrasaṃvaratantra* and *Guhyasamā-jatantra*. Among the three, the latter is considered to be the main *tantra*.

One of the main preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*) connected to the *bla ma mchod pa* instructions is the visualization of a group of *gurus* and deities gathered together as a spiritual field, called *tshogs zhing*.⁵ In particular, the *sngon 'gro* enables the practitioner to receive from the deities and the *gurus* of the lineage blessings, inspiration and transformative energy (*sbyin rlabs*) which are necessary for accumulating spiritual merits.⁶ This is the reason why the *tshogs zhing* is also known as the field of the accumulation of merits, or “merit field”.

In the *bla ma mchod pa tshogs zhing*,⁷ the main figure of the merit field is the founder Tsong kha pa (1357–1419), seen here in a particular emanation known as *bla*

5 In the compound *tshogs zhing*, *tshogs* may be translated either as the noun ‘assembly’, ‘mass’, ‘group’, or the verb ‘to gather’, ‘to collect’, whereas *zhing* means ‘field’. Very often the expression “merit tree” is used to refer to the *tshogs zhing* because of the image of a tree on which *gurus* and deities rest, but such an expression relates to a compound that does not exist in the Tibetan vocabulary. See Yablonsky 2000: 49–50, 63–64. Even if considered as a *sngon 'gro*, the visualization of the *tshogs zhing* should be continuous throughout the whole course of the practice. In the *lam rim* tradition, the visualization of the field of accumulation of merits belongs to the fourth of six preliminary practices known as *sbyor ba'i chos drug* (*sbyor chos*).

6 In the artistic representation of the highest *yoga tantra* class practices, the iconography of the *tshogs zhing* has to be understood as a real “technical instrument” that leads the adept to the deconstruction of his conventional identity. Though it has undergone changes during the centuries, its particular codification leads the practitioner toward a visionary contact with the *guru*, and an assembly of masters and deities who are to be experienced as distinguished emanations of the same true nature of the *guru* himself. The continuous presence of the *guru* through his visualization seems to recall the ancient practice of the *buddhānusmṛti*, the reminiscence of the Buddha through the constant recollection of his characteristics and qualities. This practice helped the practitioners to continuously feel the presence of the Buddha, and receive his teachings and advice. The *tshogs zhing* seems to codify a natural late tantric development of this need, putting the *guru* in the place of a Buddha as the primary source of every spiritual refuge. See Samuel 2008: 220; Williams 1989; Williams 2000.

7 The dGe lugs pa order has three traditions concerning the merit field. In the first one, the Buddha Śākyamuni has to be visualized alone, with no *gurus* or deities around him, because he represents every master and deity. The second tradition relates to the non-esoteric *lam rim* instructions: the merit field of *gurus* and deities is arranged around the figure of the Buddha Śākyamuni. This type of *tshogs zhing* is called *khrom tshogs*. It belongs to the fourth preliminary practice, mentioned above in footnote 2. The third tradition relating to the *bla ma mchod pa* literature presents Tsong kha pa as the main deity of the merit field. In this case the *tshogs zhing* is called *mtsho brtsegs*. The visualization of the *tshogs zhing* follows three phases: the taking of refuge, the self-generation in the form of a personal *yi dam* (usually the two-armed form of Vajrabhairava) and the blessing of the offerings. See 14th Dalai Lama 1991: 22, 28–39; 14th Dalai Lama 1988: 63–91; Pabonka Rinpoche 1997: 157–61, 768–69; Panchen Lama 2003: 5–9.

ma Blo bzang rdo rje 'chang.⁸ He has to be visualized surrounded by *gurus* and deities arranged in particular groups on a tree.⁹ According to tradition, the *man ngag* of the *bla ma mchod pa* was originally transmitted orally by a lineage of dGe lugs pa masters known as dGa' ldan snyan rgyud.¹⁰ This lineage, namely “the oral transmission of dGa' ldan”, is believed to have started with the *bodhisattva* Mañjuśrī and Tsong kha pa, and continued through his disciples all the way to the first Paṅ chen Bla ma Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1567–1662).¹¹ He was the first dGe lugs pa master to write a ritual text on *bla ma mchod pa man ngag*, which is now considered the root text of this entire literary genre. In the course of time, the root text underwent evolutions and developments that gave birth to a large corpus of exegetical literature and various lineages of transmission.¹² These elaborations were also the references for the production of the iconographies of the *tshogs zhing* linked to the *sngon 'gro* practices.

Iconography

As mentioned, this research analyzes two texts, one from the 18th century and the second from the 20th century,¹³ and then compares them with a selection of images. This type of investigation has allowed, for the first time, to identify at least three types of iconographical patterns in *tshogs zhing* images, in which the element of the wish-fulfilling tree appears as one of the main objects of the composition. The first pattern can be dated around the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century; the second, analyzed into two phases,¹⁴ to the 19th century; and the third,

8 The name of the main deity was enriched with the new title of *bla ma* Blo bzang Thub dbang rDo rje 'chang within the literary and doctrinal developments of the *bla ma mchod pa* at least from the 18th century. The name can be interpreted in the following way. *Bla ma* is to be understood as the practitioner's own *guru*. Blo bzang is the first part of the name of Tsong kha pa and in the dGe lugs pa's *guruyoga* traditions the *guru* is usually identified with Tsong kha pa himself. Thub dbang relates the *guru* to the same nature of the Buddha Śākyamuni as teacher of the *sūtra* tradition. rDo rje 'chang indicates the *guru*'s nature of Vajradhāra in giving instructions based on *tantras*.

9 In the traditional *bla ma mchod pa* literature, the merit field of masters and deities is placed on an enormous lotus, the petals of which are organized on overlapping levels arranged on the body of a wish-fulfilling tree, called *dpag bsam ljon shing*. The tree is the prominent figure used as the basis for the arrangement of the merit field in the *tshogs zhing* iconographies.

10 See Willis 1995: XIV–XV.

11 See Panchen Lama 2003.

12 See Pabonka Rinpoche 1997: 194.

13 See n. 1. See also Dalai Lama 1991; Huntington & Bangdel 2003: 168–70; Lama Zopa Rinpoche 2004a; Lama Zopa Rinpoche 2004b; Thurman 2005: 245–59.

14 The first phase develops the iconography of the first tipology. The tree assumes a pyramid-like shape. On this new modelled tree, all the divinities are placed on a multilevel structure, a sort of big lotus with eleven petals (overlapped levels for a hierarchical arrangement of different spiritual classes of deities). The lineage of *gurus* of the tantric transmissions is represented in the same way as in the images of the first tipology. The *gurus* of the indian philosophical lineages are no more arranged on the tree, but in triangular-like shape of clouds at the side of the main *guru* Tsong kha

related to the instructions of Pha bong kha bDe chen snying po (1878–1941), to the 20th century.¹⁵ This paper will discuss the first, oldest pattern of the *tshogs zhing*, directly related to the root text of the first Paṅ chen Bla ma.

The *tshogs zhing* shows a wish-fulfilling tree, a symbol of the axis-mundi and a vertical axis for the entire image. According to the visualization prescribed by the root text, the main figure of Tsong kha pa, *bla ma* Blo bzang rdo rje 'chang,¹⁶ must be depicted seated on his throne at the centre of the tree. As prescribed by the text, all the *gurus* and deities should surround Tsong kha pa on the tree “as a sea”,¹⁷ in their particular order, even if the text does not give details about this order (Fig. 2a). To the right of the main *guru* are the *yi dam* of the *yoganiruttara* classes followed by the three main Yogacāra Indian masters (Fig. 3),¹⁸ together with the *bodhisattva* Maitreya. On the left are the *yi dam* of the other three lower classes of *tantra*,¹⁹ followed by the three main Madhyamaka Indian masters (Fig. 4),²⁰ together with the *bodhisattva* Mañjuśrī. Above the head of Tsong kha pa are the figures of Vajradhara with his consort, the *siddhas* Tilopa, Nāropa, Ḍombhi Heruka and the *pañḍita* Atiśa. This group represents the lineage of practices and blessings, the lineage of the transmission of tantric instructions (Fig. 5).

Below the main *guru* Tsong kha pa are other *yi dam* of different tantric cycles and a group of eight figures who make up the *bodhisattva* group (Fig. 6). In a lower area, we find a group of Buddha figures, with Śākyamuni at the centre, to be considered as the Buddhas of this *kalpa*, or the thirty-five Buddhas of confession. In the *tshogs zhing* showed in Fig. 2, the figures of this group also appear on the highest side of the structure of the tree, as a sort of a half moon. Some Buddha figures are also depicted in the registers of the tantric deities.

pa. In the images of the second phase, the representation of the *gurus* of the tantric transmission change as well. As for the philosophical lineages, the *gurus* of tantric praxis are represented in a triangular-like shape of clouds, directly above the head of Tsong kha pa. The number of *gurus* increases, and there are a number of Indian *siddhas* related to the main *niruttarayogatantra* cycles, with the bKa' rgyud pa masters Mar pa and Mi la ras pa as the only non dGe lugs pa Tibetan *blamas* inside the group. A lineage of dGe lugs pa masters surrounds the group of Indian *siddhas*. The evolutions of this second typology show a more rational spatial composition and an ideal arrangement for the figures of the *tshogs zhing*, but the iconography follows as always the instructions of *Bla ma mchod pa*'s text of the 18th and 19th centuries. These texts show new formulations and interpretations of the rules codified by the root text of the first Paṅ chen Bla ma.

15 See Lunardo 2012a; Lunardo 2012b; Lunardo 2014. A study of the second and third types of the *tshogs zhing* will be presented in a forthcoming work.

16 Even if the root text of the *bla ma mchod pa* recognizes the figure of Tsong kha pa as *bla ma* Blo bzang rDo rje 'chang, the following authors and holders of the lineage added another title, calling him *bla ma* Blo bzang Thub dbang rDo rje 'chang. See note 5 and note 29.

17 The text evokes an ideal endless number of deities and *gurus* surrounding Tsong kha pa.

18 Asaṅga, Vasubandhu e Diṅgāga.

19 *Yoga*, *caryā* and *kriyātantra*.

20 Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva and Chandrakīrti.

Below the Buddha group we find the *sthāviras*, usually eighteen, which include the two figures of Hva śang and Dharmatāla.²¹ The group of the *dharmapālas*, which here includes the main protectors of the faith for the dGe lugs pas like Śrī Devī, Yamārāja and Mahākāla, is depicted below the *sthāvira* group. Below the tree, external to the real merit field, are the four guardian kings, the *lokapālas*.

Brahmā and Indra are usually depicted around the trunk of the tree, with some *nāgas* emerging from the cosmic waters from which the tree itself surfaces. To the right of the tree are the depictions of the seven treasures of the universal king, the *cakravartin*,²² and to the left, the cosmic mountain Sumeru, which here also represents the offering of the *maṇḍala* to the main *guru* and to all the merit fields.

Lineage

One of the most important features of the *tshogs zhing* is the representation of the *bla ma mchod pa* transmission lineages. All masters of those lineages are depicted at the top of the images; this is the most important area for depicting figures after the central portion of the work, in this case representing the main *guru* Tsong kha pa. The number of the gurus depicted in the *tshogs zhing* of this first typology is always seventeen, and all the *tshogs zhing* images of the first type I have seen depicted on *thang kas* or in Tibetan art catalogues exhibit always the same figures.

So far it has been difficult to identify those masters in the catalogues of Tibetan art where *tshogs zhing* are shown.²³ We usually find a rough interpretation of these figures, generally analyzed as Dalai Lamas and Paṅ chen Bla mas. This is only partially correct, as in the first type of *tshogs zhing* only three of the seventeen figures are Paṅ chen Bla mas and just one, the last figure, represents a Dalai Lama, in this case the eighth, Blo bzang 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho (1758–1804). According to David Jackson, the representation of a lineage in Tibetan art translates a sort of historical concreteness, the seeds of which are also in the religious literature and practices.²⁴ Moreover, it should be noted that the identification of lineages provides scholars with more elements (other than mere stylistic analysis) to pinpoint chronologically the period in which the image was made.²⁵

In the block print of IsIAO (see Fig. 7a) each master's name is written below his image in *bsdus yig*, making it easier to identify all the *gurus* of the lineage. The first ten figures, starting with Vajradhāra and ending with the first Paṅ chen Bla ma,

21 The number of eighteen members in the *sthāvira* cycle reflects the spread of the cult of the *sthāviras* in China during the Tang dynasty. On this topic and on the meaning of Hva śang and Dharmatāla, see Lo Bue & Ricca 1990: 377–79.

22 These treasures are: the wheel, the gem, the queen, the minister, the elephant, the horse and the general.

23 See for example Rhie & Thurman 1991; Rhie & Thurman 1999.

24 Jackson 2005: 38.

25 See Jackson 1990: 129; Jackson 2005: 14.

correspond to the famous dGa' Idan snyan rgyud lineage to which the transmission of the *mahāmudrā* and *gcod* instructions also belong. From figure n. 11 to figure n. 16 the lineage continues through a line of teachers and disciples; the seventeenth figure represents the eighth Dalai Lama, who died in 1804. According to Tibetan tradition, a *guru* is usually represented after his death; nevertheless, examples of masters depicted before their death are known, so that we could say that images of the first type either precede or follow the death of the Dalai Lama. Since it conforms to the artistic style prevalent in period, these *tshogs zhing* could be dated to the end of the 18th century or the first decade of the 19th century.

A problem with the representation in the first type of *tshogs zhings* of the *bla ma mchod pa* lineage of transmission is how to accurately read the disposition of each figure in respect to the others. As David Jackson noted,²⁶ from the 16th century onwards, the usual reading of the figures of a lineage starts from the central figure, usually Vajradhāra for the *gsar ma* schools, and then jumps in an alternating way so as to have figure one at the centre, figure two at his right, figure three at his left, figure four at the right of figure two, and so on.

However, this rule is not always respected in the *tshogs zhing* images. We could expect, for example, that figure no. 4, Tsong kha pa, who himself has been regarded to have received teachings directly by Mañjuśrī, should appear on the right side of the *bodhisattva*, the figure no. 2. But here Tsong kha pa, apparently for no reason, is depicted only below the *bodhisattva*. The twelfth, fourteenth and fifteenth figures do not appear in their usual right position but rather are placed in a different way (i.e. figure number twelve appears below the eleventh and the other two below figure no. 13). It may be posited that the reason of this apparent chaotic disposition could be the relationships between masters. For example, the master no. 12, namely dKon mchog rgyal mtshan, was a close disciple of the first Paṅ chen Bla ma Blo bzang Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, represented as master no. 11, while masters nos. 14 and 15, that is to say Ngag dbang byams pa and Blo bzang bsod nams pa, were close disciples of the second Paṅ chen Bla ma, Blo bzang Ye shes (1663–1737), namely master no. 13. Thus, despite the general rule that Jackson illustrates in his article, a new convention for depicting lineages – certainly in *bla ma mchod pa tshogs zhing* representations – can be shown.

The scheme is as follows:

7	5	2	1	3	6	8
9	11	4		16	13	10
17	12				14	15

²⁶ Jackson 2005: 15, 25, n. 35. The author indicates a few examples preceding the 16th century that are linked to this kind of disposition. In Lo Bue & Ricca 1990 (433–42), we find a representation of the *lam 'bras* transmission lineage in statues of the sKu 'bum of Gyantse which was made by using the same disposition of the *lam 'bras lha khang* realized in 1425.

- 1) Vajradhāra
- 2) Mañjuśrī
- 3) dPa bo rdo rje
- 4) Tsong kha pa (1357–1419)
- 5) 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho²⁷ (1356–1428)
- 6) mKhas grub rje (1385–1438)
- 7) Ba so Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1402–1473)
- 8) Chos kyi rdo rje²⁸
- 9) dBen sa pa Blo bzang Don yod grub pa (1505–1566)
- 10) Sangs rgyas ye shes (1525–1590)
- 11) Blo bzang Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (First Paṅ chen Bla ma, 1567–1662)
- 12) dKon mchog rgyal mtshan (1612–1687)
- 13) Blo bzang ye shes (Second Paṅ chen Bla ma, 1663–1737)
- 14) Ngag dbang byams pa (1682–1762)
- 15) Blo bzang bsod nams pa (18th century)
- 16) Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes (Third Paṅ chen Bla ma, 1738–1780)
- 17) Blo bzang 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho (Eighth Dalai Lama, 1758–1804)

Further research on different lineages may show whether this model is also applicable to other representations or remains limited to the *tshogs zhing*.

Inscriptions

An inscription usually appears on the lowest edge of the image. This can be found in the IsIAO image as well as in several *thang khas* of the same type.²⁹ The inscription of the IsIAO *tshogs zhing* reads:

Na mo gu ru / blo bzang rdo rje 'chang gi rnal 'byor rim / gang gi bris sku dkon mchog rgyal mtshan lugs / bzhengs pa 'i dge bas 'gro ba ma lus pa / blo bzang rdo rje 'chang gi sa thob shog /

“I pay homage to the *guru*: [from] the system of dKon mchog rgyal mtshan, the image of that stage [of] the yoga of Blo bzang rDo rje 'chang. May all sentient beings attain the level of Blo bzang rDo rje 'chang by means of collected virtues!” (see Fig. 8)

27 Pabonka 1997: 241. The figure of 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho also precedes that of mKhas grub rje in the lineage of the gradual path (*lam rim*).

28 Willis 1995: 180, n. 209. As Willis points out, it is impossible to establish a certain date for this master's birth (as well as for his death). The dGe lugs pa tradition assumes that he achieved the *siddhi* of immortality.

29 See Rhie & Thurman 1991: 372–73; Rhie & Thurman 1999: 473–74.

It identifies the image of this *tshogs zhing* as the symbol of the *yoga* of Blo bzang rDo rje 'chang, the name of Tsong kha pa used in the oldest *bla ma mchod pa* literature. The inscription also tells us that the image and the system of this *yoga* are related to the master dKon mchog rgyal msthan (1612–1687). This master is the same close disciple of the first Paṅ chen Bla ma³⁰ represented in the image just below his beloved teacher. Thus, even if the genesis of the images has to be linked to the 17th century, following the closest instructions of the root text of the Paṅ chen Bla ma, actually the first depictions of this kind of *tshogs zhing* appear at least at the end of the 18th century.³¹ Moreover, some elements in the iconography do not really comply with the closest instruction of the root text.³²

Tsong kha pa

The instructions in the root text and the *bla ma mchod pa* works of the 19th century explain that the *adhibuddha* Vajradhāra must be visualized in Tsong kha pa's heart. However, in the *tshogs zhing* of the first type – as the two presented in the illustrations of this paper – Buddha Śākyamuni can be found in Tsong kha pa's heart together with Vajradhāra. The latter does not sit in the heart of Tsong kha pa, but rather in Śākyamuni's. Only the latest traditions of the *bla ma mchod pa* literature seem to use this iconography. In the 20th century both Pha bong kha bDe chen snying po and the 14th Dalai Lama state that the visualization of both Śākyamuni and Vajradhāra in the heart of Tsong kha pa shows the perfection of the main *guru*'s mastering and teaching.³³ However, these three figures together also represent particular tantric methods to attain the union of the great bliss and emptiness (Fig. 10).

30 See Pabonka 1997: 782.

31 Erberto Lo Bue (1990: 172) has demonstrated how in order to correctly identify the subject of an image in Tibetan art, it is necessary to know the specific literature on which it is based, or the historical situation that led to produce an icon. For what concerns the historical context, an example could be the creation of an image based on the development of the cult of a deity not linked to a philosophical or a tantric source, but based instead on local beliefs, such as a Dharma protector which once was the guardian of a place or of a clan. It may also happen that the creation of an image based on a particular literature can emerge several centuries after the writing of the text(s) on which the image is based, as in the case of the images analyzed in this paper.

32 These elements are, for example, the presence, in some images, of the usual lotuses at the sides of Tshong kha pa's shoulders, bearing the sword and the book, which are the symbols of both the *bodhisattva* Mañjuśrī and Tsong kha pa himself; the absence of a representation of the body *maṅdala* of the *Guhyasamājatantra* prescribed for the visualization of the *tshogs zhing*'s main *guru*; the presence of a small figure of Śākyamuni in Tsong kha pa's heart which is not mentioned by the root text. For further details, see the explanation in the description of Tsong kha pa's iconography.

33 See 14th Dalai Lama 1988: 72–73; Pabongka 1997: 188–89. Blo bzang rDo rje 'chang embodies different emanations: Śākyamuni/Nirmāṅakāya represents experiences related to the sūtras teachings; Vajradhāra/Sambhogakāya represents experiences related to the tantras teachings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the iconography of the earlier *bla ma mchod pa*'s *tshogs zhing* is not completely faithful to its root text. As we can see in Fig. 8, the inscription on the lower edge of the *tshogs zhing* of the first type follows the instruction of the root text. However, the iconography shows something that is not present in the literature of that time. We may therefore assume the existence of a sort of parallel instructions that was transmitted orally until the end of the 19th century, or at least until the instructions of the direct *gurus* of Pha bong kha changed.

Thus, the discrepancy between the inscription and the philosophical intention behind the inscription, as well as what the iconography –most notably Tsong kha pa's one– shows, lead us to argue that in the case of the images of the fist type of *tshogs zhing*, the artistic tool is not a mere symbolic and visual translation of an experience codified only through literature. It is instead a clear indication of the process that keeps alive an instruction based on the practice performed at that time. It reveals the process of change of an instruction that adapts to the needs of new practitioners who implement the *man ngag*, and then transmit it to other practitioners. Thus, the differences between the written inscription and the iconography of the root *guru*, for example, are expressed in the image that suggests passage and transformation. The same codified literature gave birth to different lineages of transmission as well as to different interpretations.³⁴ Until we discover texts describing each details and reasons of changing interpretations of the root instruction, only the artistic representation of a *tshogs zhing* will stand to be the first and, probably, the only witness of an oral transmission of experiences related to the *bla ma mchod pa*'s *man ngag* running parallel to the codified literature (Fig. 11).

Tsong kha pa, or the practitioner's own guru, represents the essence of the whole Dharma. In this way the gurus represent all the Buddhas as expression of the wisdom of the Dharmakāya. In Tsong kha pa's heart we find an image of Śākyamuni, whereas in the heart of Śākyamuni a small Vajradhāra with his consort can be found. According to Pha bong kha bde chen snying po, Tsong kha pa and Śākyamuni showed at his heart, represent the *samayasattva*, the commitment-being; Vajradhāra with his consort represent the gnosis being, *jñānasattva*, and the union of the great bliss and wisdom with emptiness, while the *hūṃ* at the heart of the couple has to be experienced as the *samādhisattva*, the concentration-being.

³⁴ Pha bong ka assumes the coexistence of various lineages of transmission related to the visualization of the *tshogs zhing* of the *bla ma mchod pa*'s tradition. Those lineages were linked to personal interpretations of different dGe lugs pa masters. He quotes his root *guru*, Blo bzang 'Jam dpal lhun grub (1845–1919) in gathering all the instructions of those masters. See Pabonka 1997: 194–195.

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www.himalayanart.org

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Fig. 1: *Tshogs zhing*. Thang ka. Private Collection.

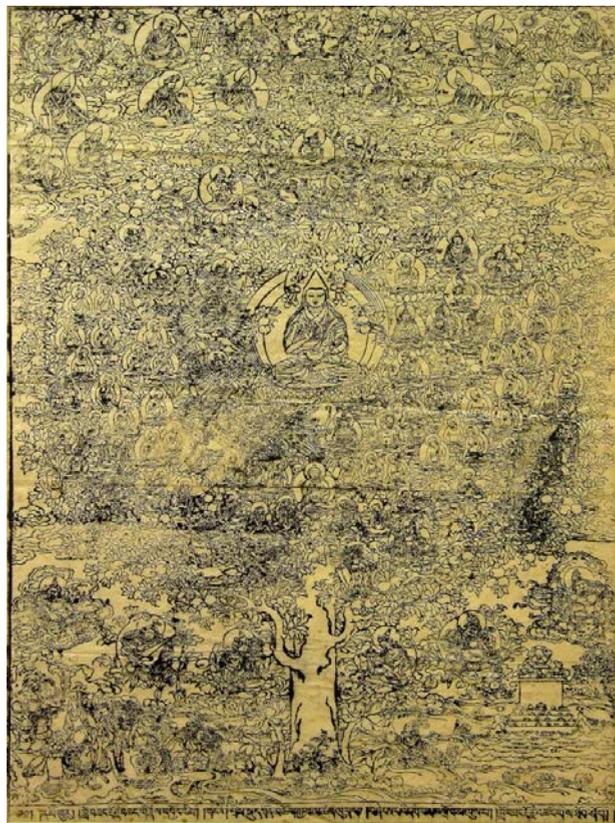


Fig. 2: *Tshogs zhing*. Wood-block. ISIAO Library.

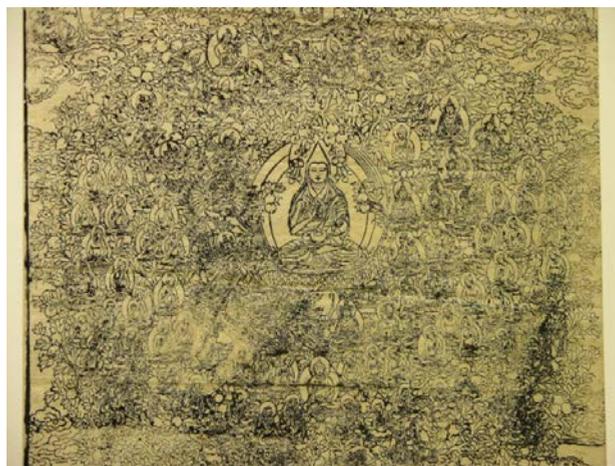


Fig. 2a: Masters and Deities surrounding Tsong kha pa

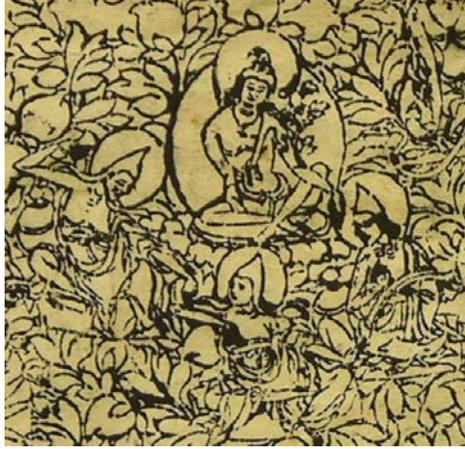


Fig. 3: Yogacāra *gurus* Lineage

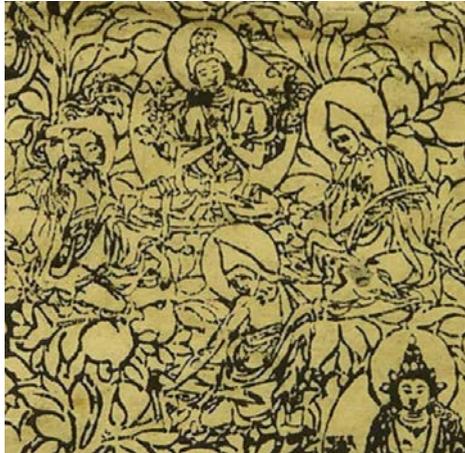


Fig. 4: Madhyamaka *gurus* Lineage

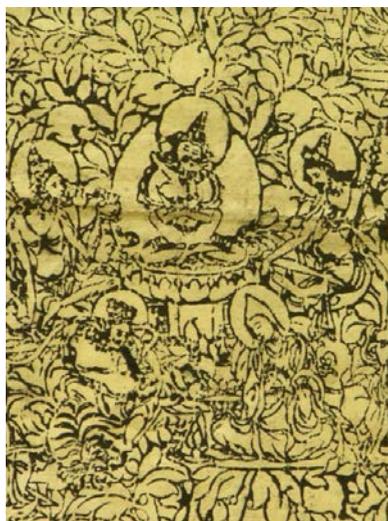


Fig. 5: Lineage of the *gurus* of tantric instructions



Fig. 6: Lower classes of deities and inscription



Fig. 7: Lineage of dGe lugs pa gurus of the *bla ma mchod pa* instruction



Fig. 7a: Reading scheme for understanding the lineage of *bla ma mchod pa* instruction's gurus



Fig. 8: Inscription



Fig. 9: Tsong kha pa



Fig. 10: Śākyamuni and Vajradhara at the heart of Tsong kha pa



Fig. 11: Tsong kha pa