


## Dedication

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 am honored to introduce this collection of essays on “Responding to Epidemic Outbreaks in Tibetan Contexts” with a dedication to Yangga (Dbyangs dga’). Yangga was my teacher, and he was my student. He was an excellent, ground-breaking modern scholar of Tibetan medicine.

At the time of his untimely death at the age of fifty-eight, Yangga was a professor (*dge rgan chen mo*) at the Bod ljongs Gso rig slob grwa chen mo (University of Tibetan Medicine) in Lhasa. He was born in Driru (‘Bri ru) county, Nagchu city, in 1964, where he was educated through high school. He earned a bachelor’s degree from Tibet University in Lhasa in 1989, and another bachelor’s degree from the University of Tibetan Medicine in Lhasa in 1991. He earned a master’s degree from the same university in 2002. His main teachers in medicine were the famous Khenpo Troru Tsenam (Mkhan po khro ru rtse rnam) and Khenpo Tsültrim Gyeltsen (Mkhan po tshul khribs rgyal mtshan). In 2003 he was accepted into the doctoral program in Inner and Altaic Studies at Harvard University, where he worked with myself and Leonard van der Kuijp, and earned his PhD in 2010.

Beginning in 1991, Yangga served as an instructor and then a lecturer at the University of Tibetan Medicine. He was promoted to associate director of the dean’s office in 2000. After returning to Lhasa upon graduating from Harvard, he was promoted to associate professor in 2013 and full professor in 2018. Yangga also taught Tibetan language and medicine at Harvard University, and he served as Lecturer in Tibetan in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Michigan during the 2009–2010 academic year. In 2013, he was offered a postdoctoral fellowship to return to the University of Michigan but was unable to accept because he did not receive permission to travel to the United States. In recent years, Yangga was visiting professor at the Southwest University for Nationalities in Chengdu. He was also deputy director of the Tibet Autonomous Region Ancient Books Protection Expert Committee, and a member of the Tibetan Medicine Standardization Technical Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

As his doctoral advisor at Harvard, I have had the great fortune of knowing Yangga well. I first met him in Lhasa at the International Conference on Tibetan Medicine in 2000. At that time, I was still teaching at Amherst College, and he was finishing his masters' degree at the Tibetan Medical University. During the week of that wonderful conference in Lhasa, with scores of very learned medical scholars from all over Tibet, we spoke about medicine often. I was quite impressed by the nuance and precision in this young man's manner of discussing scholarship on Tibetan medicine. And so, the following year when I moved to Harvard Divinity School, and I suddenly found myself with the privilege and resources to be able to invite international scholars as visitors, I did so. Yangga was thus able to come to Harvard as a visiting scholar in 2002. Then he went back to Lhasa, and applied to the doctoral program at Harvard in Inner Asian and Altaic Studies, and he was admitted as my advisee. He gained his master's degree from the University of Tibetan Medicine in the same year.

Yangga returned to Harvard in the fall of 2003 to start his doctoral work. He proceeded to study at Harvard for seven years. He wrote an important doctoral thesis under my direction on "The Sources for the Writing of the *Rgyud bzhi*, Tibetan Medical Classic" (2010). In that thesis he provides a detailed comparison of the *Rgyud bzhi*'s overall chapter structure, as well as the contents of each of those chapters, with the Indic medical classics of Ayurvedic tradition. He shows how in some portions of the work, the *Rgyud bzhi* is closely dependent on Ayurvedic knowledge. However, in other chapters, its author Yutok Yönten Gönpö (G.yu thog yon tan mgon po) was drawing on other medical traditions from both western Asia and East Asia, as well as a range of indigenous medical knowledges on the Tibetan plateau. Yangga identified many of these other medical streams in his thesis with textual precision. He showed how large sections of the *Rgyud bzhi* are indebted to certain old Tibetan medical works—still extant in Lhasa and to which he and his colleagues there have had access—that predate the *Rgyud bzhi* and are themselves indebted to various medical traditions not related to Ayurveda. These include *Bi ji po ti kha ser*, *Byang khog dmar byang*, and *Sman dpyad zla ba'i rgyal po*.

Next, Yangga turned to pay particular attention to the medical knowledge in the *Rgyud bzhi* on wounds to the upper body. Yangga estimated that this section of Tibetan medicine was connected to empirical knowledge in ancient Tibet regarding how arrows enter the torso in military conflict, and the various surgical procedures to remove them without causing collateral damage in the body. Yet another important aspect of Yangga's thesis concerns the families in Tibetan history that were most active in transmitting the *Rgyud bzhi* in its early years, including the Drangti (Brang ti) lineage of physicians,

as well as the Gongmen (Gong sman) and Tsarong (Tsha rong) families.

Finally, Yangga's very important contribution was his investigation into the figure of Yutok Yönten Gönpo the Elder. Yangga speculated that his life story and even his very existence might have largely been created over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, based on earlier biographical writings which are really about the person whom we now call Yutok the Younger. In this, Yangga was following previous research by outstanding critical Tibetan historians of medicine from the past, with evidence starting in the thirteenth century. Yangga asserts that there is no reference to an "Elder" (as opposed to a "Younger") Yutok in pre-sixteenth-century Tibetan medical historiography. He also rejects the possibility that there was a physician named Yutok who served in the royal court of the Tibetan Yarlung dynasty. But most of all, he sets out convincing reasons to attribute the authorship of the *Rgyud bzhi* to the twelfth-century figure, whom modern scholars have been calling Yutok the Younger. The *Rgyud bzhi* was not translated from Sanskrit and is rather a creative and original treatise by the twelfth-century Tibetan doctor, Yutok Yönten Gönpo, drawing on many medical traditions in Asia and beyond. For the intricate details on this intriguing issue, the reader can consult Yangga's English-language articles listed below, one from 2014 and the other from 2019. Even more so, the reader is commended to Yangga's new book on the life of Yutok Yönten Gönpo, also listed below, which he published in the last year of his life. In this second work, Yangga provides six biographical sources for the figure of Yutok in full, and presents his most up-to-date analysis of the whole issue.

After finishing his thesis and graduating from Harvard, Yangga returned to Tibet and continued to pursue his scholarly work at the same time that he took up teaching and administrative duties. He continued his deep research in the various archives and libraries of Lhasa, and wrote many articles. A full curriculum vitae of his works is being prepared and may be requested from me when it is ready. Most notably, he published three substantial books, including editions of valuable and rare original documents, during the last year of his life. Each of these volumes make major contributions to the study of Tibetan medicine:

Dbyangs dga'. 2022. *Bi ji'i po ti kha ser dang de'i dpyad pa dgyes pa'i gtam*. Lhasa: Bod ljong bod yig dpe nying dpe skrun khang, 2022. 321 pp.

Two versions of, and research on, an early medical work in Tibetan which presents medical knowledge from Western Asia and beyond.

———. 2022. *Bod lugs gso ba rig pa'i khog dbub gces btus rin chen phreng ba*. Lhasa: Bod ljong bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang. 440 pp. Selected rare historical writings on Tibetan medicine.

———. 2022. *Gyu thog gsar rnying gi rnam thar dang de'i skor gyi dpyad pa drang gtam rna ba'i bu ram*. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang. 360 pp.  
Research on the Elder and Younger Yutok Yönten Gönpös, including six Yutok biographies.

Additionally, Yangga edited and compiled material for other volumes, including a catalogue of the medical texts held at Kumbum (Sku 'bum) monastery, published by Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang in 2001, and a volume on the scientific research methods and procedures of Tibetan medicine published by Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang in Lhasa in 2017.

Some of Yangga's work on the multiple medical traditions converging in the *Rgyud bzhi* was addressed in the paper he delivered at the Fifteenth IATS seminar in Paris in 2019, entitled "Preliminary Investigations into Shang Siji Bar [Zhang gzi brjid 'bar] and His Medical Works." He has published numerous other scholarly articles in Tibetan in China, including a study of *Rdzong 'phreng 'phrul gyi lde mig*. Additionally, he is co-author of numerous articles with other scholars of Tibetan medicine, including an analysis of the anti-rheumatic effects of *huang lian jie du tang* from a network perspective, an investigation and analysis of employment psychology of students in Tibetan professional colleges, an analysis of cynandione A's anti-ischemic stroke effects, and a piece on Tibetan veterinary documents from Dunhuang that are held in France.

Among his publications in English are:

Yang Ga. 2014. "The Origin of the *Four Tantras* and an Account of Its Author, Yuthog Yonten Gonpo." In *Bodies in Balance: The Art of Tibetan Medicine*, edited by Theresia Hofer, 154–77. Seattle: University of Washington Press and the Rubin Museum of Art.

———. 2018. "A Comparative Study of the Relationship between Greek and Tibetan Medicine." *Journal of Tibetan and Himalayan Studies* 3, nos. 1–2: 73–87.

———. 2019. "A Preliminary Study on the Biography of Yutok Yönten Gönpö the Elder: Reflections on the Origins of Tibetan Medicine." In *Knowledge and Context in Tibetan Medicine*, edited by William A. McGrath, 59–84. Leiden: Brill.

Each of these essays will give the reader a good idea of the intricate arguments and evidence Yangga amassed and analyzed to establish the historical authorship of the medical classic, the *Rgyud bzhi*, in the twelfth century.

Another area of Yangga's many interests was the origins of the medicinal bathing tradition in Tibetan medicine (*lums*). The paper he had planned to deliver at the IATS conference in Bergen was entitled "Study on the Origin of Tibetan Five Nectars Medicated Bath Therapy." He has published about the matter in several articles in China in 2016.

While I do not know much about the service that Professor Yangga performed for his school and with colleagues inside Tibet at other universities and medical centers, I do know about one big effort in which he was involved. This came after the bid on the part of the Indian government to claim Sowa Rigpa (Gso ba rig pa) as an Indian "intangible cultural heritage" as specified by UNESCO and therefore under Indian jurisdiction and copyright. Who better to refute that too-simplistic claim about the origin of Sorig than Yangga himself? He consulted with me while he was laboriously preparing the appropriate arguments for the Tibetan origin of the *Rgyud bzhi*, together with his colleague at University of Tibetan Medicine, Mingji Cuomu. Then Yangga and Yumpa (Yum pa), astrologer and vice-president of the Lhasa Mentsikhang (Sman rtsis khang), finally travelled to Bogota, Columbia, in December 2019 to testify in front of the fourteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage within UNESCO. The case, which was focused on the *lums* medicinal bath tradition, was decided in favor of China.

Yangga was fierce as a professional academic. He told me that when he returned to Lhasa after graduating from Harvard and gave a talk to an audience of Tibetan doctors and scholars on the paucity of historical evidence for Yutok the Elder, some of the elder scholars in the audience wept. Poignant as the moment was, the story also shows that, in order to weep, his audience must have been convinced by him. And that shows their own basic respect for facts, evidence, and historiographical reasoning—all mainstay values in traditional Tibetan medical pedagogy and scholasticism.

I mourn the thought that Yangga will not be able to produce more ground-breaking work on the history and theory of Tibetan medicine, and be able to mentor many more students. When I visited Lhasa, Kham, and Kongpo in the summer of 2024, I was struck to discover how famous Yangga is in the world of the medical intelligentsia. Various scholars that I met felt the need to tell me whether they agreed with Yangga's Yutok the Younger thesis—that he was the original author of the *Rgyud bzhi*—or whether they were in the Yutok the Elder

camp, which meant they believed that the Elder transmitted the text to Tibet and that it was originally the Word of the Buddha. Most of all, I was deeply impressed by the ongoing devotion of Yangga's principal academic students, who according to his wife number seventeen. I met many of them while I was in Tibet; they heard I was there and they made every effort to meet me as the teacher of their own beloved teacher. Many of them wept when recalling Yangga's great mentorship and intellect. He did indeed inspire an entire generation of scholars of Tibetan medicine within Tibetan regions, as is evidenced by the plethora of new publications coming out on early, sometimes pre-*Rgyud bzhi* Tibetan writings that are still continually being discovered in archives across the plateau and especially in Lhasa.

Yangga took a huge amount of joy in life. He expressed it with a deep and resounding laugh, and he laughed a lot—at himself, at others, at whatever was true. I can hear that laugh in my head right now; too bad I cannot convey it on the page. Yangga also had a very keen sense of people's character. He plumbed the depth of their sincerity, and was attuned to how they try to come across. After all, not only was Yangga a historian of medicine, he was a full-fledged physician who had learned well the art of diagnosis, although I do not think he practiced often. But a big part of what a doctor needs to do is to read the outer signs of a patient for what they portend about what is going on inside. Indeed, the entire field of logic in Indian philosophy, including the arts of induction and deduction, had its first major articulation in the classical Indian medical works.

I found Yangga to be a most intelligent conversation partner, and enjoyed many deep discussions with him about Tibetan history and culture. He was not completely traditional in his attitudes; he was always willing to question received wisdom, although his education with Khenpo Troru Tsenam and Khenpo Tsültrim Gyeltsen was indeed very much in line with old Tibetan medical pedagogy rather than modern critical academic methods. Yangga was very alert to rhetoric, and had a talent for spotting unspoken agendas. He was also deeply aware of the importance and status of evidence—and the implications of the lack thereof—in historiography. In many ways Yangga was a perfect example of the keen values and capabilities that the very texts I was reading with him were promoting as the virtues of the ideal doctor. Yangga taught me to recognize sarcasm and irony, for example, in the way that Zurkharwa Lodrö Gyelpo (Zur mkhar ba blo gros rgyal po) portrayed the authorship of the *Rgyud bzhi*, which I never would have recognized on my own. And I remember him chuckling on many occasions at the audacity of some of the Desi Sanggyé Gyatso's (Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho) own barbs about his colleagues and his fierce criticism thereof.

I perceived the gravity of Yangga's physical condition by early 2022, when he had to return to the hospital for more treatment. I was gripped by a sudden fear that he might die. I shared my fear with him in a text message—we were corresponding on about a monthly basis. He wrote back to me, "My mind is fine. I am not so worried about the disease. It depends on my own karma."

