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On the Issue of Simple Postpositions in the Tibetan Language

Alexander Zorin
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*If it looks like a duck,
swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck.*
The Duck Test

Initially, I wrote this paper with the idea that it could serve as both a theoretical and practical contribution to Tibetan linguistics and the teaching of Tibetan as a foreign language, even though I was fully aware that I am not a professional linguist. However, after further reflection, I decided to focus on the practical aspect and take a more reserved approach to the theoretical side.¹ That said, I chose to keep the original epigraph, even though my final approach to the material is more cautious than the epigraph might suggest. After all, *probably* is not the same as *definitely*.

I regard this work as a logical extension of Nicholas Tournadre's illuminating paper "The Classical Tibetan cases and their transcategoriality: From sacred grammar to modern linguistics" (2010). This work systematically and coherently organized a group of the fundamental function words crucial for all levels of Tibetan learning, without being bound by the perspectives of indigenous Tibetan tradition. These function words were termed by Tournadre as 'casemarkers', and, defining them so, he followed the traditional point of view regarding their role in the Tibetan language. But he argued about their number and exact understanding of their syntactic functions.

Tournadre wrote: "This traditional analysis in 8 cases based on the Sanskrit model has created a great deal of confusion for linguistic description as well as for the teaching of Literary Tibetan. The problems connected with the Sanskrit 8 cases model have been noted by both native and foreign scholars" (p. 94). He replaced this artificial model with his own paradigm. According to him, "Literary Tibetan

¹ I am grateful to my colleagues, Marieke Meelen, Alla Sizova and Uri Gabbay, for their valuable comments. In addition, I would like to thank my students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, with whom I have discussed these and other topics since the autumn of 2022.

has ten grammatical cases: absolutive རྩོམ་ཙམ་; agentive རྩེད་མཁུ་; genitive འབྲེལ་མཁུ་; dative ལ་མཁུ་; purposive གྲུ་མཁུ་; locative ན་མཁུ་; ablative ལས་མཁུ་; elative ནས་མཁུ་; associative རྒྱུ་མཁུ་; and comparative བས་མཁུ་” (p. 98). Tournadre also discussed four fundamental properties of the case markers: “cliticity, multifunctionality, transcategoriality and optionality” (p. 117; see pp. 99–101, 114–116). He provided examples for each function of each marker that he defined. Thus, for every case, they were listed in the following order: “a) case functions (after nouns or NPs), b) connective functions (after verbs or nominalized verbs), c) adverbial functions, d) postpositional functions, e) sentence particle functions” (p. 102).

When considering his ideas along with all the examples, I formulated for myself the following prominent features of these lexical elements:²

- They do not change the preceding syllables, except for three situations such as, for instance, *pas*, *pa'i*, and *par*.³

- They are attached only once to the noun phrases they relate to; for instance, *bla ma la* — *bla ma mtshan ldan la* — *bla ma mtshan ldan gcig la*, and so forth.

- Some of them have close albeit not quite identical meanings, cf. *la*, *du*, and *na*; *las* and *nas*; *las* and *bas*; *gyis* and *nas*.

- They are used with virtually all parts of speech, including verbs and verbal phrases.

- Most of them can be used to form complex postpositions, e.g. (*'i*) *rgyab la*, (*'i*) *rgyun du*, (*'i*) *nang nas*, (*'i*) *rkyen gyis*, etc.

- They can work as conjunctions between clauses in complex sentences, and can be also used to form complex conjunctions for the same purpose, e.g. (*'i*) *stobs kyis*, (*'i*) *ring la*, (*'i*) *tshe na*, etc.

- They are used to compose adverbs: *dal gyis*, *ga ler*, *re shig na*, *snying nas*, etc.

- Some of them can be used in couples to form compound conjunctions, adverbs, postpositions and introductory words: *des na*; *dper na*; *mdor na*; *bltas na*; *pas na*; *mtshar gyis*, etc.

The more I pondered this combination of features, the more it reminded me of the part of speech known in English and Russian,

² Some of them are common for the case markers in agglutinative languages regarded as suffixes; see no. 5.

³ Each of them has a fuller equivalent in which the function word is written separately: *pa yis*, *pa yi*, *pa ru*. In spoken Tibetan, the short forms do exhibit fusion since the host and the case marker are pronounced as one syllable. However, such a phenomenon is known in other languages, e.g., in Hebrew the prepositions *b'* and *l'* get fused with the definite article, and yet they remain prepositions. Besides, this paper is dedicated to Classical Tibetan, and there might have been no fusion in old times.

among other languages, as **simple prepositions**.⁴ In some languages, such as Panjabi, the corresponding group of function words is designated by exactly the same term. Eventually, I became convinced that this conceptualization perfectly captures the nature of the Tibetan function words under study. My conviction, however, is not supported by specialized linguistic research involving formal and functional diagnostic tests. Therefore, in this paper, I will limit myself primarily to the practical significance of this identification for teaching literary Tibetan, as this aspect allows for the simplification of subtle linguistic nuances, much as is done in normative educational programs for learning English or Russian, even as a first language.

I need to clarify my approach to the term 'simple postpositions' first, however. I do not believe it contradicts the term 'case markers,' as the latter's use in reference to prepositions and postpositions aligns with the concept of analytic case marking, as opposed to the synthetic case marking found in languages like Latin, Sanskrit, or Russian.⁵ At the same time, I am more reluctant to accept the terms 'clitics' or 'case particles', used by Tournadre and some other authors. This may be due to the fact that the normative approach to my native language, Russian, is quite strict (and clear!) in categorizing lexical elements into parts of speech. In this system, 'prepositions' and 'particles' refer to different parts of speech, while 'clitics' do not belong to any such category. I understand that in-depth linguistic studies may take a different approach. Therefore, what follows is intended only to show that these terms are less suitable for a simplified educational approach.

Already H. A. Jäschke (1817–1883) categorized the function words in question into two groups: particles (for Instrumental and Genitive constructions) and simple postpositions (*la*, *du* and its allomorphs, *nas*, *las*, *na*, *dang*) (Jäschke 1883: 21–24, 67–71). This approach was later supported by B. Kuznetsov (1931–1985) (Kuznetsov [n. d.]: 20–23). In the recent book by N. Tournadre and H. Suzuki, the authors remark: "Tibetic case markers are normally not considered as suffixes: it is easy to demonstrate that the markers occur once at the end of the noun

⁴ The prepositions that consist of 2 or more words are called compound.

⁵ Some languages have both synthetic and analytic case markers, and the former (inflexions) are considered 'natural' cases while the latter (prepositions or postpositions) have a role of function words that help to specify the exact meaning of the cases in particular situations. Usually, prepositions are associated with particular cases. However, sometimes, different cases can be used with the same prepositions, as, for instance, in Russian: *на доме* ('on a house') — *на дому* ('on the house' = 'at home'), where the same noun *дом* 'house' is used with the same preposition *на* 'on' and yet it has two different inflections *-e* and *-y* which refer to the Prepositional and Locative (or Second Prepositional) cases respectively. Locative in Russian is usually included, for simplicity, inside the Prepositional case, but strictly saying, these are two different cases.

phrase and they do not have other properties of suffixes.⁶ Some scholars such as DeLancey (2003a) or Strahm & Maibaum (2005: 809) have considered that Tibetan cases are actually more like postpositions” (Tournadre, Suzuki 2023: 309).

The first of the referred works is a brief overview of Classical Tibetan. Its author, Scott DeLancey, identifies seven postpositions as case markers (‘bas’ and ‘dang’ are omitted), provides them with Latin names, and characterizes them, morphologically, as clitics (DeLancey 2003: 258). This is almost exactly what I think to be a correct point of view. However, two more postpositions are to be added, and some of the Latin names of the (analytic) cases may be disputed. The second work, devoted to Jirel, one of Tibetic languages spoken in Nepal, states: “Jirel nouns and pronouns occur with the following case markers: nominative (NOM), ergative (ERG), associative (ASC), dative (DAT), locative (LOC) and genitive (GEN). The case markers could also be viewed as postpositions. In this dictionary we have regarded only free forms as postpositions, most of them indicating spatial relations. The bound forms, that is the case markers, are therefore not treated as postpositions” (Strahm & Maibaum 2005: 809–810). Analysis of what the authors classify as bound and free forms in Jirel exceeds the scope of this paper. But brief descriptions of the cases and tables of ‘declinations’ provided in their book (ibid.: 815–823) make me think that both types can be treated as simple postpositions rather than grammatically different entities, even though there *is* fusion in certain cases (see no. 3). In the same way, I do not see solid reasons to follow Jäschke’s categorization of these function words into two different parts of speech.

I must admit that I did not attempt to consult all the overviews of Tibetan Grammar. It is possible that the notion of all these function words being simple postpositions has already been expressed by some author(s). However, it has not yet been ascertained by practicing Tibetologists. Tournadre and Suzuki supplied the above-quoted

⁶ The authors might have intended to use the term ‘inflections’ here, as it is commonly used to designate synthetic case markers in inflective (or fusional) languages, which Tibetan does not have. However, the term ‘suffixes’ *is* used to designate case markers in agglutinative languages, including situations where they are added to the end of the noun phrase. Notably, Nathan Hill uses the term ‘suffixes’ in Hill 2012 in reference to Tibetan, clearly in this sense. While I have very limited knowledge of classical agglutinative languages, I can see some differences between, for instance, Mongolic suffixes and Tibetan simple postpositions as case markers. Mongolic suffixes lack certain functions that Tibetan simple postpositions possess, such as their ability to serve as conjunctions or to form compound postpositions (see also Yliniemi 2021: 73). One may note also that, in Tibetan, adjectives can be added both after nouns and before them (by means of Genitive construction) which seems to be untypical for the agglutinative principle.

passage with the following commentary about these words: “There are however some arguments suggesting that they behave like enclitics. First, the Tibetan case markers may never occur alone (without the noun) unlike adpositions which often have this property (cf. English, it’s under/after/on, etc.) and they form a prosodic word (together with their host). Tibetan case clitics may not be coordinated unlike some adpositions (in and out, on and off). They often undergo morphophonological alterations depending on the host phonological context, etc.” (Tournadre, Suzuki 2023: 309).

Some other authors define them as ‘particles’. This approach is reflected in the latest significant textbook in Classical Tibetan by Joanna Bialek, who utilized the term ‘case particles’ (Bialek 2022: 45–46). Michael Hahn suggested that they might have been considered as ‘(nominal) postpositions’ ((nominale) Postpositionen’), but he did not delve into this topic, preferring simply to call them ‘case particles’ (‘Kasuspartikeln’) (Hahn 1996: 52–53). Stephen Beyer, in his original survey of Tibetan Grammar, applied the term ‘role particles’ (Beyer 1992: 193). I believe the term ‘particles’ is not quite satisfactory since it refers, in Tibetic languages, to “[t]he class of words <...> expressing different functions, such as negative particles, emphatic particles, plural markers, discourse markers, tag words” (Strahm & Maibaum 2005: 824). Unlike these functions, postpositions (exactly like prepositions) indicate the *relationship* of nouns and noun phrases, numerals, or pronouns to other words in a phrase and in a sentence.

In my opinion, the arguments of Tournadre and Suzuki are not strong enough to contradict the postposition hypothesis. First of all, the argument that these are enclitics and, therefore, they cannot be considered postpositions does not seem valid to me, at least from practical perspective. The rationale for this approach is based on the purely phonological understanding of ‘word’ as “the smallest structural unit that can occur between pauses.” This implies that words (unlike clitics) are not phonologically bound to other morphemes and may hence be used independently, for instance, as short answers to content questions” (Yliniemi 2021: 72–73). However, in well-documented languages such as Russian, a number of clitics, including simple prepositions/postpositions, conjunctions, particles, and certain pronouns, are defined as ‘words’ based on their grammatical functions. I believe this approach works well with Tibetan material as well. (However, I must once again emphasize that a more nuanced linguistic approach may remain uncertain about what exactly constitutes a ‘word’.)

Thus, for instance, in Russian the list of simple (also called primary) prepositions includes three that consist of one consonant only (с, к, в), that is, they are purest clitics from morphological point of view, and

yet they are definitely prepositions. As a matter of fact, all the other simple prepositions of the Russian language (their list contains about twenty words) are proclitics,⁷ forming single prosodic words with their hosts. Certain morphophonological alterations and even prosodic influence on the hosts (similar to what we encounter in the Tibetan syllables *pas* or *pa'i*) are also quite typical for simple prepositions in Russian. Thus, for instance, the preposition *без* has to add sometimes the vowel *o* at the end, e.g., *безо всех*; furthermore, its final consonant is pronounced as 's' before voiceless consonants, e.g., *без связи* [b'issv'az'i], and as 'z' before voiced consonants and vowels, e.g., *без ума* [b'izuma]. At the same time, it may influence the initial vowel *u* in its host, e.g., *без идеи* [b'izid'ei] (the second *i* transforms into *i* = *и*).

I would probably not agree that Tibetan simple postpositions cannot be coordinated in pairs, such as *in* and *out* or *on* and *off*. On the contrary, it seems to me rather plausible that nine simple postpositions plus the absolute construction may be divided into five pairs as shown in the table below:

ø (ར།)	གི of	ལ། on	ན། in	ཏུ to/at
				 ?
ངས། than	གིས། by	ལས། from	ནས། out of	དང་' with

Furthermore, I would speculate that the suffix *-s* transforms the absolute construction and three simple postpositions of a static nature into four dynamic postpositions. The first situation (ø vs *pas*) seems intuitively clear: the absolute relates to static identification, while the second pertains to comparison, which is a dynamic type of situation. The following two diagrams illustrate my ideas about the other three instances:

⁷ Few Russian prepositions can also be used *after* the words they relate to, including one simple preposition, *для*, as in the expression *удовольствия для* 'for enjoyment'. However, the direct word order, *для удовольствия*, is much more common, while the reverse order in the modern language is perceived as a stylistic device.

ལ།	
ན།	ལས།
	ནས།

Subject	↔	O གི།	S གིས།	→	Object
relation			action		

The fifth pair is even more speculative, but it certainly deserves attention that both *du* (which seems to be the primary alloform of the group of five variants of this postposition) and *dang* start with the same root letter. Semantically, *du*, as a primary marker of direction, can be paired with the static *dang* to indicate the result of directed motion: A is *with* B because A has come *to* B.

ད།	དང་།
A → B	A&B

Even if, from a theoretical point of view, this is pure fantasy, these schemes may still serve as useful illustrative material for mnemonic purposes.

Besides, if I am wrong and these pairs are fictive, the pairing that Tournadre and Suzuki discuss with regard to English is more of a feature of particular simple prepositions than an essential feature of this part of speech.

Moreover, if these are examples of the prepositions that can be used as independent words, should not we treat as such the numerous situations when *la'o* concludes elliptical sentences as the ending of the nominal part of the predicate with the verbal part missing? One of the most interesting examples is the sentence: *bdag kho na la'o* '[It depends] only on me',⁸ where *bdag* 'I' and *la* 'on' are separated with an adverb

⁸ BDRC: D1, 'dul ba gzhi.

kho na 'only'. It seems to be very difficult to read this expression as an agglutinative construction and, therefore, there should be no doubts that *la* functions here as a *word*.

It is evident that simple prepositions, for instance in English, can be used to form compound conjunctions ('in case of', 'on condition that', 'at the time when', etc.), compound prepositions ('out of', 'because of', 'due to', 'by means of', etc.) and adverbs ('upward', 'outside', 'backwards', 'at the same time', etc.). A clear parallel with English prepositions 'into', 'onto', 'within', 'upon', etc., in which couples of simple prepositions are glued together, is drawn in Tournadre, Suzuki 2023: 309. I could add that Russian also has such prepositions: *уз-за*, *уз-под*, *по-над* and some others.⁹ Some of the English and Russian prepositions may have similar meaning, cf. *in* and *at*, *by* and *with*; *о* and *на*, *у* and *с*, and some others. The English prepositions are normally used with gerund phrases, and the preposition 'to' is even used with the verbs to compose their infinitive forms.¹⁰

In comparison with the Russian language, English provides better equivalents for the Tibetan postpositions, as the former, with its case system, does not need any prepositions for certain situations, such as Genitive or Instrumental constructions. I believe English, an analytic language with almost no 'natural' cases, is generally quite similar to Tibetan in this aspect.¹¹ Just as we do not need to label English

⁹ It is noteworthy that the Mongolic languages have similar combinations; some authors treat them as double cases, some claim that the first suffix is a lexical formant and only the second suffix serves as a case marker (Trofimova, Shagdarsuren 2009). Perhaps both approaches may be correct depending on exact combination of elements. I would like to thank Jargal Badagarov for his consulting me in this issue.

¹⁰ Cf. with Tibetan verbal phrases containing *du sgra* such as '*gro ru 'jug, len du mngags, bsgrub tu bcug*', etc. The last example here utilizes the so-called "future" form of the verb *sgrub*. Thus, it is not a direct equivalent of the infinitive construction, yet it is close to it.

¹¹ Hua Cai, Bai Guan, and Kai Li, in their recent paper following the traditional Tibetan model of the eight cases, assert that a combination of one verb and four nouns or noun phrases can yield 24 different sentences with generally the same meaning but various perspectives in Tibetan. They argue that this feature distinguishes Tibetan syntax from that of English and Chinese (Cai, Guan, Li 2022: 203–204). However, this assertion may be contested since English also allows for various word sequences. The purported richness of variety in Tibetan structures might be more theoretical than practical. In English, even the subject and object can be reversed using the passive voice, which could be seen as a conventional equivalent to the reversed Tibetan construction with the object placed before the Ergative subject. The ergative construction, however, presents a problem since English is classified as an accusative language and by its nature cannot have a direct equivalent to it. The closest parallel is found in a somewhat artificial

prepositions with Latin terms that typically relate to real cases (formed by changing the inflections of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, etc.), we can similarly avoid doing so with simple postpositions in Tibetan. The list provided by Tournadre will remain the same: nine simple postpositions + the meaningful absence of any marker which is known as Absolutive in Ergative languages. All we need to do, at least in teaching, is to stop trying to ascribe Latin names of cases to them as these attempts bring about many controversies, such as whether the (analytic) case marked with *la* may be called ‘Dative’ and not ‘Dative-Locative’ or somehow else, or whether ‘Terminative’ is an appropriate term for the *du* marker, and so forth. However, descriptive expressions such as ‘(analytic) Genitive case’ or ‘Ergative construction’ can certainly be used when the exact functions of these words as analytic case markers need to be explained.

In my opinion, the proposed approach has a significant practical advantage: clear parallels with the material of the English language, the modern lingua franca, can make learning this aspect of Tibetan easier for students.¹² As for the theory, I hope my observations will contribute to further research on Tibetan syntax.

As Tournadre, in his analysis of the case markers, only listed the main functions of these words and suggested that other minor functions might be added (Tournadre 2010: 117) I decided to provide below an extended table based on his model (with minor

sentence of the type: ‘Through Norbu, Yeshe drowned’; cf. Tibetan, *nor bus ye shes chus bsnubs*, and a standard accusative parallel in English: ‘Norbu drowned Yeshe’. Note that, if the same sentence is expanded with a part with an intransitive verb, the translation will be ‘Norbu drowned Yeshe and went home’, and not ‘Through Norbu, Yeshe drowned and went home’. It is important to mention, finally, that there are languages where ergative (or agentive) markers are treated as prepositions or postpositions. I know at least two examples: Panjabi with the postposition ‘ne’ (Tolstaya 1981: 60) and Egyptian that has three types of “ergativoid” constructions, one of them with the preposition ‘jn’ (Satzinger 2001: 174–178).

¹² For instance, English word ‘of’ can help in understanding the full forms of compound postpositions, such as *khang pa’i nang la* ‘inside **of** the house’. I am less certain about complex verbal predicates in Modern Tibetan, such as *nga na gi* (or *yi*) ‘*dug*. Perhaps it could be rendered as ‘There is me [in the aspect] **of** being sick’. A similar situation occurs with subordinate clauses attached to the main clause by means of the *pa’i* construction, as in the phrase *skra ring po yod pa’i bu mo* ‘a girl **who** has long hair’. A literal translation might be ‘a girl [in the aspect] **of that [who]** has long hair’. However, I am not sure whether this is a productive way to help students clearly understand the connection between the two parts of the phrase or sentence. It may be preferable to treat *pa’i* directly as a conjunction in which *pa* equals ‘that’. I plan to expand on this topic in a separate paper.

modifications¹³). I am also uncertain whether it is exhaustive. Perhaps, it may be extended further in the process of continued studies of the syntax of Classical Tibetan. I marked the added functions with an asterisk and provided them with examples in the footnotes.¹⁴ The examples of functions described by Tournadre may be found in his paper (Tournadre 2010: 102–114).

Tib	Eng (Basic equi- valent) ¹⁵	Primary grammatical roles	Connective function	Adverb- ial function	Compound post- positions & conjunctions	Predicate- part & sentence- particle
ø	ø	1*) both subject and nominal part of the predicate in the equation sentences; 2) medium-voice subject; ¹⁶	* a subordinate clause that functions equivalently to 1) a subject in equation sentences; 2) a direct object in	—	—	—

¹³ The main modifications are as follows. 1) Simple postpositions can be used to form not only compound postpositions, but also compound conjunctions. There are instances where the same compound word functions as both a postposition and a conjunction. (Compare with English: ‘He stood *before* the man’ vs. ‘I saw the man *before* I went home’.) Further research is needed to establish precise criteria for distinguishing between these two roles. 2) In the last column, I observe some instances where postpositions are utilized as part of the predicate rather than as (final) sentence particles.

¹⁴ They were borrowed from canonical texts (siglum D in the quotations refers to their numbers according to the Derge Kangyur and Tengyur) and Tibetan texts composed in the pre-Modern period — all the quotations are easily found in the rKTs and BDRC online libraries. Therefore, I do not provide the references to exact texts in the List of literature. More examples might have been added from the recently published texts written in Literary Tibetan, as well. The footnotes also include references to some functions that are typical for Modern Central Tibetan; they should be treated separately from the analysis of Classical Tibetan constructions.

¹⁵ I tried to find the closest parallels in English. Of course, most of them are not exact, additional equivalents are provided in the next column.

¹⁶ I am not sure whether Tournadre includes this function into the one designated as “Single Argument of monovalent verb”. In any case, I prefer to consider the

		3) patient: direct object in active voice 4*) patient: syntactical subject in passive voice; ¹⁸ 5*) active- voice subject in certain cases; ¹⁹	active-voice sentences ¹⁷			
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equation separately, because it can operate with two nouns and/or pronouns: the subject and the nominal part of a complex predicate, e.g., *nga bla ma kun dga' grol mchog yin* 'I am Lama Kunga Drölchok' (tA ra nA tha/ gsung 'bum (dpe bsdur ma). Vol. 34). I use the term 'medium-voice' since the definition of *tha mi dad pa* verbs suggested by the Tibetan grammarians clearly refers to this linguistic concept. However, it requires further research.

¹⁷ This construction seems to be very productive in modern literary Tibetan, and I did not have to spend much time searching for a few good examples for each situation in canonical texts either (in these and subsequent examples, I assign numbers to clauses, starting the count from the main one): 1) ②**bdag** *cag 'di nyid na gnas bzhin du bcom ldan 'das la bsnyen bkur mi byed pa ni* ①**bzang** *po ma yin* 'The fact that we, while staying here, are not serving Bhagavān is not good' (rKTs: D1, 'dul ba gzhi); 2) ①**tshe dang ldan pa shA ri'i bus kyang** ②**khyi de** ③**bdag gi thad nas phyir ldog pa'i 'og tu** ②**khyi gzhan dag gis ji ltar bsad pa** ①**shes so** 'Venerable Śāriputra was aware of how this dog, upon returning home from him, was killed by other dogs' (rKTs: D340, las brgya tham pa pa).

¹⁸ It is a debatable issue whether Tibetan has passive voice. Some complex verbal predicates, primarily those that combine past participles with auxiliary *intransitive* verbs such as *'gyur*, do look like passive constructions, e.g., *sangs rgyas 'bum gyis chos bstan par gyur*, which may be translated as 'Dharma was taught by one hundred thousand Buddhas' (rKTs: D82, 'phags pa sangs rgyas thams cad kyi gsang chen thabs la mkhas pa byang chub sems dpa' ye shes dam pas zhus pa'i le'u zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo). However, it is not entirely clear to me whether *'gyur* should be understood as an impersonal main clause, with the preceding part functioning as a subordinate clause: "[It] turned so that one hundred thousand Buddhas taught Dharma". The same question applies to the future/optative construction, see no. 31.

¹⁹ Involuntary actions can be rendered this way. I have encountered several examples in Classical Tibetan literature, as, for instance, in stanza 20 of Chapter XV of Aśvaghoṣa's "Buddhacarita": *de nas kha cig 'di yi na bza' blangs pa ste* 'Then, one [of the five ascetics] took his [Gautama's] garment [against his own will]' (rKTs:

		6*) direct address ²⁰				
gis, kyis, gyis, yis, °s	BY	1) ergative; ²¹ 2) instrument, cause, manner; 3) specification	1) connection between clauses: 'while, and'; 2) causal / temporal <i>pas/bas</i> : 'when, because'; 3) adversative: 'although' 4*) causal: <i>dbang gis</i> , etc., also <i>pa / ba des</i> ²³	<i>rim gyis</i> 'consequently', <i>rab kyis</i> 'at best', <i>skad cig gis</i> 'instantaneously', etc.	ppos. & conj.: <i>stabs kyis</i> 'because, use, since', <i>dbang gis</i> 'because, by means of', etc.	a promise, an intention ²²

D4156, *sangs rgyas kyi spyod pa zhes bya ba'i snyan dngags chen po*). In modern Central Tibetan, the subject of active-voice sentences often lacks the Ergative marker (as well as possession), potentially indicating a shift in the language from Ergative to Accusative.

²⁰ This function is not mentioned by Tournadre. Of countless examples that could be provided here, I would like to refer to all the names of Tārā from the famous canonical hymn to this goddess in 21 stanzas. Being put in Vocative in the Sanskrit original, they are rendered in Tibetan without any markers, starting from the first line: *sgrol ma myur ma dpa' mo* 'Tārā, the Swift One, Heroine!', etc.

²¹ This may include cases where the ergative construction is used with intransitive verbs for emphatic purpose. While it is a well-known feature of Spoken Tibetan, it is not typical of literary texts. However, at least one example appears to be attested in canonical literature—though only as an alternative to the normative absolutive construction (both variants appear in different editions of the Bstan 'gyur): *mi bskyod pas ni rjes zhugs pas* vs. *mi bskyod pa ni rjes zhugs pas* 'Akṣobhya enters' (rKTs: D1796, *sgrub pa'i thabs mdor byas pa*). This sentence is discussed in Bendor, Penpa Dorje 2024: 151; the ergativized variant is preferable here, as the other may be ambiguous. A series of examples of this kind is also contained in Milarepa's song to the hunter in a famous episode from his *Mgur 'bum* (chapter 26), starting with: *bla ma 'di gsum gyis 'ong na ras pa'i phyi la shog* 'If these three gurus fit [you], go after [Mila]repa!' Some other old texts, including the famous *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, also contain such examples.

²² In Modern Tibetan, the construction of the type 'main verb + *gyi* + 'dug' is often shortened to 'main verb + *gyis*' (Bartee, Droma 2000: 62–63). It is unclear whether it has any connection with the construction of a promise or intention encountered in Classical Tibetan. Besides, in Modern Tibetan, *pas / bas* serves as an interrogative particle at the end of the sentence.

²³ E.g., ② *smon lam btab pa'i dbang gis* ① *'di lta bur skyes pa yin no* 'By power of a prayer that was offered, [she] was born like this' (rKTs: D6, *'dul ba phran tshogs kyi gzhi*). The expression *smon lam btab pa* is a complex predicate that consists of a nominal part (originally, a direct object of the Ergative construction) and a verb.

gi, kyi, gyi, yi, °i	OF	genitive	a) relative clause marker (with <i>pa / ba</i> : <i>pa'i, ba'i</i> , <i>pa / ba de'i</i>): 'that, who, which', etc. b) adversative: 'but, while'	—	* initial element in full forms of comp- lex ppos.: <i>[de]i</i> <i>nang la</i> 'inside of [it]', etc.	* a pro- mise, an inten- tion ²⁴
la	ON	a) dative (benefici- ary); b) possessor; c) super- essive location: 'on, at'; d) allative: 'to, in, into'	connective for adjective and verbs: 'and', ²⁵ while'	<i>mtshan mo la</i> 'at night', etc.	ppos. & conj.: <i>ring la</i> 'du- ring', <i>rjes la</i> 'after', <i>rgyab la</i> 'be- hind', etc.	Sente- nce final par- ticle: an excla- mation ²⁶
du, tu, ru, r, su	TO/AT (cf. Latin <i>ad</i>)	1) purposive: 'for, as'; 2) inessive: 'in, at'; 3) allative: 'towards, to';	<i>par / bar</i> : 1*) relative clause marker: 'that, about that', etc. 2*) gerund phrase;	<i>myur du</i> 'swift- ly', <i>shin tu</i> 'very, much', <i>legs par</i> 'well',	1) ppos. & conj.: <i>ring du</i> 'while', <i>rgyab tu</i> 'be- hind', <i>dus su</i>	1) final clause marker: 'to, in order to' ²⁷ ; 2*) <i>par / bar</i> :

²⁴ This variant appears to be less frequent than the one with *gis*, etc. I encountered it in songs ascribed to the Sixth Dalai Lama, e. g., ② *sha 'dris pags 'dris byung kyang* ① *ri yar rgyag grab gnang gi* 'Although treated with "flesh and skin", [you] are still ready to flee up to the mountains [like a wolf]' (Zorin 2023: 343). However, it is also attested in canonical literature: ② *dper na skyes bu mde'u dug can zhig his phog na* ① *yid la byed pa gzhan mi skyed kyi* 'For instance, if a man is hit by a poisonous dart, [he] does not produce another thought [but...]' (followed by the formulation of the thought) (rKTs: D12, 'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa brgyad stong pa). In Modern Tibetan, *gi* and its allomorphs are used to make constructions for the present and future 'tenses' (the term is used conventionally, while it is not quite adequate in the context of Tibetan).

²⁵ Note that it often has a sequential meaning; therefore, the conj. 'upon' can be also used here.

²⁶ I agree with Tournadre 2010: 108 that we cannot be sure whether it is the same function word *la* and not something else (e.g., an alteration of the copula *lags*).

²⁷ This construction is very similar to the infinitive, see no. 10.

		4) trans- formative: 'into'; 5*) possessor ²⁸	<i>par / bar</i> , also <i>pa / ba der</i> ; ²⁹	<i>yongs</i> <i>su</i> 'fully', etc.	'when', etc.; 2*) conj.: <i>par / bar</i>	part of com- plex predi- cate ³⁰
na	IN	locative	1) conditional: 'if' (often with <i>gal te</i> , etc.); 2) temporal: 'when'; 3*) adversary: 'although, while' ³¹	—	1) ppos. & *conj.: <i>tshe na</i> 'when', <i>steng na</i> 'upon', etc. ³² 2*) intro- ductory	* middle part of a com- plex verbal predi- cate with a verb that

²⁸ E.g., *rgyal po der bu mo zhig yod pa dang ming la bsod nams sgrol ma zer* 'That king had a daughter, and her name was Sönam Drölma' (BDRC: Lho kha'i dmangs rtsom legs btus byis pa dga' ba'i gnam, Vol. 1). Note that in his 2010 paper, Tournadre considers the postposition *-r* an allomorph of *la*, admitting that it can also serve as an allomorph of *du* (Tournadre 2010: 97, 106). In the recent monograph, however, *-r* is only considered an allomorph of *du* (Tournadre, Suzuki 2023: 311). In my paper, I also hold this position, although I see some advantages in the idea that *-r* and *la* may be allomorphs.

²⁹ E.g., 1) ② *de ni sngags kyi mthu las byung bar* ① *shes par bya'o* '[One] should know that it will appear by the power of the mantra' (rKTs: D2626, bcom ldan 'das de bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brji); 2) *de ma bshad par sgrub pa'i lung mi sbyin* 'Not having explained it, [I] will not grant permission to practice [it]' (BDRC: shAkya mchog ldan / gser mdog paN chen shAkya mchog ldan / gsung 'bum, Vol. 13). The second function may turn out to be mistaken—perhaps *par/bar* always functions as a relative clause marker. The given example could instead be understood as: 'While [I] have not explained [it] I will not grant permission to practice'.

³⁰ See an example of possible past passive construction in no. 17. A standard example of the future passive / optative construction is: *de'i dkyil du 'khor lo bsam par bya'o* 'In the center, a circle should be visualized' (rKTs: D1188, byed pas na lus la gnas zhes bya). It is not entirely clear whether examples like this should be syntactically treated as impersonal sentences, such as '[One] should visualize a circle in the center' (unlike English, many languages do not require any subject here).

³¹ This grammatical function is employed to indicate a contradiction between a previous action or state and a subsequent one, e.g., *bdag cag sngon ni bcu bdun sder gyur na da ni bcu drug sder gyur* 'While previously we were a group of seventeen, now we are a group of sixteen' (rKTs: D3, 'dul ba rnam par 'byed pa).

³² An example of sentences where these words are conjunctions and not postpositions is: ③ *sems can thams cad sangs rgyas pa'i tshe na* ② *sangs ma rgyas pa'i sems can med par* ① *thal* 'It follows logically that, when all the sentient beings get enlightened, there will be no non-enlightened sentient beings' (BDRC: *se ra rje btsun chos kyi rgyal mtshan / gsung 'bum*. Vol. 7).

					words: <i>dper na</i> 'for instance', 'o na 'now then', <i>des na</i> 'there- fore', etc.	denotes a wish to do some- thing ³³
las	FROM	1) ablative - 'from' *- 'except for', ³⁴ 2) compa- rative 'than'	relative clause marker (after <i>pa/ba</i>): 1) adversa- tive: 'but, other than, apart from'; 2) temporal: 'while'; *3) tempo- ral/ causal: 'when; since' ³⁵	—	* <i>nang las</i> 'from inside', <i>rjes las</i> 'after', etc.	—
nas	OUT OF	1) elative 'out of, from'; 2) ergative; 3*) compa- rative 'among', ³⁶	relative clause marker (with past forms of verbs): 1) sequential: 'after, and'	<i>gzhi nas</i> 'fun- damen- tally', <i>gtan nas</i> 'absolu- tely', etc.	<i>thog nas</i> 'from the top of, on', <i>nang nas</i> 'from inside, among', etc.	—

³³ E.g., *ngas sba gsang med par drang brjod byed na 'dod* 'I want to tell sincerely, without keeping [anything] secret' (BDR: *sprel nag pa blo bzang rgyal mtshan / mi yul la bzahag pa'i bsam gzhi*, Vol. 1). In such sentences, *na* can be translated as 'to'.

³⁴ The meaning of separation or exclusion aligns with the semantic function of the Ablative case. E.g., *'tsho ba'i thabs ni de las med de gzhan du na nges par 'chi bar 'gyur ro* 'There is no way to survive apart from that, in any other case [you] will certainly die' (rKTs: D6, *'dul ba phran tshegs kyi gzhi*).

³⁵ E.g., ② *des de lta bus rkyen byas te gnas de nas song ba las* ① *dbyar ral na ltung ba med do* 'When/since he leaves that place for such a reason, there is no violation of the summer retreat' (rKTs: D1, *'dul ba gzhi*).

³⁶ E.g., *lha rnam s kyi nang nas brgya byin gzugs mdzes* 'Out of all [among] the gods, Indra is the [most] beautiful one' (see Duff 2009: 17).

		4*) inclu- sive 'from [up to]' ³⁷	2*) connective ³⁸			
bas, pas ³⁹	THAN	compara- tive	comparative (after <i>pa/ba</i>): 'rather than, more than'	—	—	—
dang	WITH	1) associa- tive: used directly with certain verbs and adverbs; 2) conne- ctive: used with nouns and noun phrases ⁴⁰	clause and temporal connective (after <i>pa/ba</i>): 'and, along with'	—	—	— ⁴¹

Conclusion

This paper builds on Nicholas Tournadre's studies of Classical Tibetan 'case markers' and their transcategoriality, fully endorsing his view that these elements do not fit into the traditional Tibetan scheme of eight cases.

My approach differs from his only in how I categorize these elements, viewing them as simple postpositions with broad functionality in the Tibetan language.

I believe this perspective may simplify the study of Tibetan for students familiar with English, an analytical language that almost entirely lacks 'natural' cases. Just as students of English learn to use various prepositions, students of Tibetan may only need to understand

³⁷ E.g., *spyi gtsug nas rkang mthil gyi bar* 'from the top of the head to the soles of the feet' (Duff 2009: 18).

³⁸ E.g., *gshog pa brkyangs nas 'phur* '[The bird] flies by flapping wings' (borrowed from the Monlam dictionary). It remains unclear to me whether this should be classified as a gerund phrase.

³⁹ On the allomorph *pas*, see Hill 2012: 29, no. 19.

⁴⁰ Although the correct literal translation would be 'with', it is more natural in English to translate it as 'and'.

⁴¹ Tournadre considers the word *dang* as an Imperative particle. In my view (of course, just tentatively), it is the verb *dang* 'to be sincere, pure, clear' that is used as an auxiliary verb (similarly to English 'please'), rather than the homonymous simple postposition.

these simple postpositions in a similar way. The terminology for analytical cases, such as ‘ergative construction’ or ‘genitive construction,’ remains valid within this framework as well.

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Online resources

(access 27.02.2024)

BDRC: <https://library.bdrc.io/>

Monlam dictionary: <https://monlamdic.com/>

rKTs: <http://www.rkts.org/index.php>



Enlightenment in a Dance Song: A Study on the *Life and Songs of Rgod tshang pa Mgon po rdo rje* (1189-1258)*

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Introduction

The Tibetan literary genre, *Life and Songs* (*rnam mgur*), combines life stories (*rnam thar*) of Buddhist teachers with their songs of realization (*mgur*). These two aspects, the *Life* and the *Songs*, are closely related to each other. Their interdependent relationship is best described by Don grub rgyal in his remarks on one of the most influential works in the genre, *The Life of Milarepa*: "If one studies Mi la ras pa's *Life* without the *Songs*, one is unable to gain a deep understanding; and likewise, if one doesn't know about the *Life* while reading Mi la ras pa's *Songs*, one is unable to understand the background for the stories of the songs."¹ Traditionally, *mgur* is described as spontaneous poetic expressions of a highly accomplished yogi-adept's meditative experiences and realizations, which are often generated after the yogi engages in extensive meditation practices.² With growing studies on the innumerable Tibetan biographical works written in the genre of *Life and Songs*, scholars have underscored the rich autobiographical material contained in the songs and analyzed the strong connection between the life experiences of ascetic yogis and their poetic expressions.³ In this research, I hope to expand our understanding of the relationship between *Life* and *Songs* and seek to understand the literary effects of their combination.

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¹ This translation is referenced from Quintman 2014, 141. The original Tibetan, as noted in Quintman's book, is: *gal te mi la ras pa'i «mam thar» la slob sbyong byed na «mgur 'bum» med tshe go ba zab mo zhig len mi thub pa dang/ de mtshungs mi la ras pa'i «mgur 'bum» klog skabs «mam thar» ma shes na'ang mgur de dag gi lo rgyus kyi rgyab ljongs zhes mi thub pa Ita bu'ol*. This quote is from "Bod kyi mgur glu byung 'phel gyi lo rgyus dang khyad chos bsdus par ston pa rig pa'i khye'u mam par rtsen pa'i skyed tshal." In *Dpal don grub rgyal gyi gsung 'bum*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997 (6 vols.), vol. 3, 316-601.

² On the tradition of *mgur*, see for example: Jackson 1996; Larsson & Quintman 2015.

³ On the large number of studies on works in the genre of *Life and Songs*, see for example: Schaeffer 2005, Quintman 2013.

First, I study how *mgur* can function as a form of life writing with pedagogical purposes and interact with other forms of life writing. Then, I situate biographical accounts related to *mgur* in the broader context of artistic performances. By reviewing passages in biographical works describing the performance aspect of *mgur*, I analyze how narratives about *mgur* symbolize transcendental moments in the biography and contribute to constructing the protagonist's charisma.

Specifically, I focus on a compelling case example: the biographical corpus of Rgod tshang pa Mgon po rdo rje (1189-1258). Rgod tshang pa's biographies are some of the most popular works of *rnam thar* in Tibet, still in print and available in major bookstores in Lhasa. As a wandering yogi, Rgod tshang pa's life was characterized by adventurous pilgrimages, rigorous meditation practices, and an ascetic lifestyle. Considered an emanation of Mi la ras pa, Rgod tshang pa also taught the dharma through *mgur* to a broad range of audiences, from his close disciples, children, and local government officials to animals and non-human beings. What is idiosyncratic about Rgod tshang pa's life experiences is that he was a professional singer and dancer before he became a full-time Buddhist practitioner. In most biographies, it is recorded that Rgod tshang pa was talented in the performing arts from an early age, and he became a "*pag shi*,"⁴ a Chinese/Mongolian loan word meaning "a skilled person/artist",⁴ in his teenage years. Later on, as he became a Buddhist practitioner, he continued to have numerous experiences associated with artistic activities. Rgod tshang pa's unique relationship to artistic activities makes his biographies an ideal subject to study *mgur* not only as a form of Buddhist teachings but also as songs, a genre of artistic expression essential to Tibetan cultural life.

Besides Rgod tshang pa's unique artistic talent, there are other reasons why Rgod tshang pa's biographical corpus is important for the study of *Life and Songs*. Rgod tshang pa was one of the most influential early teachers of the so-called "Practice Lineage" (*sgrub [b]rgyud*), which is a title that later came to be most associated with the Bka' brgyud school, given its emphasis on meditation practice. Rgod tshang pa was the founder of the Upper 'Brug (*stod 'brug*) branch of the 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud school, which is one of the lineages in Tibetan Buddhism that valorizes the ascetic yogi ideal and the benefit of meditation practices over intellectual scholarship to the greatest extent. As a teacher of the Practice Lineage, Rgod tshang pa emphasized that life writings about his spiritual path encompass all the necessary practical knowledge to attain enlightenment. Therefore, life writings take up a large proportion of Rgod tshang pa's teachings, and the number of biographies dedicated to him is remarkably high for the thirteenth century. Rgod tshang pa taught that life stories about how he practiced are the very content of his oral instructions (*gdams ngag*). Rgod tshang pa also taught *mgur* as a form of oral instruction, serving as "a primary signifier of the 'oral transmission' of esoteric instructions between teacher and disciple," echoed by other authors

⁴ van der Kuip 1995, 277.

in the Bka' brgyud school.⁵ In Rgod tshang pa's biographies, his disciples combined life stories and his *mgur*, producing some of the earliest works written in the style of *Life and Songs* in Tibet. His disciples also compiled some of the earliest works in the genre of "Golden Rosary" (*gser 'phreng*),⁶ which later became the major genre of Tibetan hagiographic collection that traces a lineage unbrokenly back to India. Generally speaking, Rgod tshang pa and his disciples were pivotal to the development of Tibetan hagiographic literature in the thirteenth century.

To begin with, I study Rgod tshang pa's *mgur* as a form of life writing. Firstly, I observe that in Rgod tshang pa's biographies, *mgur* is vividly described as the "biography of the mind" (*thugs kyi rnam thar*), which theorizes *mgur* as a form of life writing about his spiritual experiences. Then, I look at how biographical narratives are combined with and incorporated into his *mgur* and how they contribute to the efficacy of *mgur* as authentic oral instructions. Throughout Rgod tshang pa's collected works, *mgur* is always accompanied by some biographical information. Even the *Collected Songs* (*mgur 'bum*) is not a mere compilation of all his *mgur*, but it is a collection of *mgur* combined with and organized by Rgod tshang pa's life stories. The biographical narratives not only make the *mgur* more personal and embodied, but they also attest to the speaker's spiritual attainment, which legitimizes the virtue of these songs as oral instructions. Moreover, *mgur* serves as a highly condensed form of life writing about Rgod tshang pa's meditation experiences, which supplements the biographical narratives in prose when describing such experiences. In general, the combination of *life* and *songs* serves the purpose of drawing the reader's attention to the teachings taught in the *mgur* while emphasizing the necessity to understand *mgur* in the context of his life experiences that informed these teachings.

Next, I study *mgur* as a type of song from an artistic perspective, and I specifically situate *mgur* in the biographical narratives about a wide range of artistic activities throughout Rgod tshang pa's life. Overall, textual information on *mgur*'s performance is relatively lacking compared to our resources on studying the literary aspects of *mgur* as a written genre. The case of Rgod tshang pa brings forth unique perspectives for our understanding of *mgur* as an artistic expression thanks to his artistic talents and the great variety of his life experiences related to singing and dancing. Through synthesizing these life experiences, I seek to understand how his artistic talents contributed to his spiritual activities, with *mgur* being one of the ways he generated transformative experiences that enhanced spiritual progress. After surveying the biographical materials, I categorize episodes related to Rgod tshang pa's singing and dancing into three major themes: the first category includes his artistic performances as a professional artist; the second consists of songs and dances associated with tantric practices; and the last one is his *mgur*, the songs he sang to teach the dharma to benefit beings.

⁵ Quintman and Larsson 2015, 88.

⁶ Miller 2006, 19.

Through examining these life stories about songs, I argue that Rgod tshang pa's talent in singing and dancing is an important basis for the literary construction of his charismatic persona, and these artistic activities highlight moments of transcendence in the biographical narratives. I observe that Rgod tshang pa's biographers, on the one hand, attempt to interpret such artistic activities to accord with Buddhist worldviews on various levels, and on the other hand, they highlight the unique power of songs as an art form that inspires human connection.

Literature Review

There are twelve independent biographical works found in different versions of Rgod tshang pa's *Collected Works* (*gsung 'bum*).⁷ Eleven of these biographies were written by his immediate disciples. Such a large number of biographies dedicated to one teacher is rather rare in the thirteenth century. It reflects the significance placed on biographies as an essential form of teaching in Rgod tshang pa's lineage. Rgod tshang pa regarded his biographies as his unique, profound dharma, and he instructed his disciples to study and apply these teachings to their spiritual practices. Honoring Rgod tshang pa's philosophy, his disciples dictated these life stories Rgod tshang pa taught during his dharma teachings and arranged them into many works of biographies. These early biographies were written in the thirteenth century, which was the period when the genre of *Life and Songs* was beginning to develop.⁸ Many of these early works include Rgod tshang pa's *mgur*, either in full length or partially, and they also contain many passages related to Rgod tshang pa's songs and other artistic activities.

In this research, I mainly examine biographies that include relatively more content related to Rgod tshang pa's songs. Firstly, the following three biographies are among the longest biographies written by Rgod tshang pa's disciples, and they contain many passages related to his songs. They are *The Life Stories of Rgod tshang pa Written in Red Earth* (*rje rgod tshang pa'i rnam thar btsag bris ma*, hereby referred to as *Red Earth*) and *Opening the Gate of Good Qualities: The Life of Dharma Lord Rgod tshang pa* (*chos rje rgod tshang pa'i rnam thar yon tan sgo 'byed*, hereby referred to as *The Gate of Good Qualities*), both written by Rgod tshang pa's disciple, Byams sems sher gzho; and *Treasury of Jewels: The Life of the Incomparable Lord Rgod tshang pa* (*mnyam med rgyal ba rgod tshang pa'i rnam thar rin chen gter mdzod*, hereby referred to as *Treasury*

⁷ There are several existing versions of Rgod tshang pa's *Collected Works*, in the forms of both traditional manuscripts and modern computer input. The manuscripts include the five-volume version printed by Sungrab Nyamso Gyunphel Parkhang (Pelampur, 1972); another five-volume version reproduced from rare manuscripts at Tango monastic community (Thimphu, 1981). The version I use in this paper is the four-volume modern computer input version published by Mtshur phu dgon gtsug lag dpe rnying dpe tshogs (Stod lung, 2019), which is the most complete and well-edited version.

⁸ Quintman (2014, p. 58-81) observed the earliest development of the genre in his study of the biographical corpus of Mi la ras pa.

of *Jewels*) written by another disciple, Dbang phyug rgyal mtshan. *Red Earth* is the longest among all the biographies, with a length of 556 folio pages. According to its colophon, the title *Red Earth* refers to the fact that its author, Byams sems sher gzhon, wrote most of these stories right when Rgod tshang pa told them, therefore sometimes needing to write with red ochre on the spot when the dictator did not have pen and paper. *Red Earth* is a collection of anachronistic, anecdotal short stories that best reflect how Rgod tshang pa actually told these stories, containing a large amount of autobiographical quotes. The other two biographies are mostly arranged in chronological order, with a major biographical narrative accompanied by some direct quotes.

Next, two of the early biographies are written in the style of *Life and Songs*. One is *The Life of Rgod tshang pa Adorned with Songs* (*rje rgod tshang pa'i rnam thar mgur chen 'gas brgyan ma*, hereby referred to as *Life Adorned with Songs*). This is one of the earliest Tibetan biographies written in the style of *Life and Songs*. Its author, Rgyal tshang pa Bde chen rdo rje was a direct disciple of Rgod tshang pa, who also wrote one of the earliest biographies of Mi la ras pa in the style of *Life and Songs*.⁹ In *Life Adorned with Songs*, Rgod tshang pa's life is divided into sixteen phases, with the *mgur* he sang during each phase included. There is also *The Sealed Teachings of Lord Rgod tshang pa's Secret Life* (*rje rgod tshang pa'i gsang ba'i rnam thar bka' rgya ma*, hereby referred to as the *Secret Life*) that offers very relevant material, which is a collection of his teachings imparted to a close group of disciples on his experiences practicing at various holy sites organized around a *mgur* with the same title. Besides these works, *The Collected Songs of the Glorious Incomparable Lord Rgod tshang pa* (*dpal mnyam med rgyal ba rgod tshang pa'i mgur 'bum chen mo*, hereby referred to as the *Collected Songs*), which was compiled by Rgod tshang pa's disciples, also demonstrates the style of *Life and Song*. Even though this work is not a biography, it contains many biographical narratives. And the editor organized Rgod tshang pa's *mgur* by the occasion when it was performed in chronological order.

Lastly, there is a later biography, which remains the most popular one up to this day, titled *Garland of Jewels Liberation Upon Sight: The Life of Lord Rgod tshang pa Mgon po rdo rje* (*rgyal ba rgod tshang pa mgon po rdo rje'i rnam thar mthong ba don ldan nor bu'i phreng ba*, hereby referred to as *Garland of Jewels*), written by Sangs rgyas dar po. He was a 16th-century yogi connected to Gtsang smyon Heruka and his disciples.¹⁰ In the colophon, Sangs rgyas dar po disclosed that the biography was proofread and edited by one of Gtsang smyon Heruka's chief disciples, Lo pan 'jam dpal chos lha, who edited many texts produced by the so-called "Gtsang smyon Heruka Literary School."¹¹ Gtsang smyon Heruka's main religious affiliation is the Upper 'Brug lineage founded by Rgod tshang pa. Therefore, Gtsang smyon Heruka paid great respect to Rgod tshang pa, making mental offerings to him and Mi la ras pa

⁹ Quintman 2014, 72.

¹⁰ Schaeffer 2011, 472.

¹¹ On the increasing literature on the "Gtsang smyon Heruka Literary School," see for example, Sernesi 2021.

continuously as recorded in Gtsang smyon's biography.¹² In Gtsang smyon's commentary on the tradition of *mgur*, titled *Opening the Eyes of Faith*, studied by Quintman and Larsson, Gtsang smyon places Rgod tshang pa in a lineage of Tibetan *mgur* singers that continued up to Gtsang smyon's own lama.¹³ Quintman and Larsson have noted in their study that "*Opening the Eyes of Faith* makes transparent some programmatic ways in which Gtsang smyon employed the song tradition to construct a distinctive religious identity."¹⁴ Through examining a wide range of stories related to songs in *Garland of Jewels*, I argue that stories related to singing and dancing are more thematized in *Garland of Jewels* than in previous works, and this literary attempt is likely influenced by Gtsang smyon's literary movement that "underscored the central role that spiritual songs of realization (*mgur*) played in the expression and transmission of Buddhism across the Tibetan cultural world."¹⁵

In this study, I cover materials in several biographies. While the study does not aim to provide a systematic study on the development of *Life and Songs* as a genre, it underscores the theory and practice of combining these two aspects as seen in a biographical corpus central to the popularization of this genre. While materials from early biographies reflect the formative stage of the genre of *Life and Songs*, *Garland of Jewels* demonstrates how a follower of the lineage undertook a literary project that revitalized the ascetic yogi ideal and celebrated the unique power of songs capable of conveying the entire Buddhist path in the 16th century. As I study passages from *Garland of Jewels*, I try to locate relevant passages in early biographies that Sangs rgyas dar po adopted in his writing. By comparing *Garland of Jewels* with the early biographies, the study unveils how a 16th-century follower of Rgod tshang pa's lineage inherited the literary legacy of the early biographers and conducted literary innovations in his new version of the *Life and Songs* of Rgod tshang pa.

Brief Summary of Rgod tshang pa's Life

Rgod tshang pa was born in Lho 'brag in 1189. As a child, he experienced many struggles in life. His mother abandoned him and his father and remarried a rich doctor when Rgod tshang pa was a mere three-year-old, leaving him and his father suffering from sickness and poverty. Nevertheless, he was very talented, attractive, and brilliant from a young age and soon made a decent living for himself and his father by getting paid by local villagers for reading Buddhist scriptures. Even more so, he had the ability to turn these scriptures into songs spontaneously, which delighted his audience. As he grew older, his good looks and his talents in singing and dancing ensured his success as he became a popular performing artist (*pag shi*). Meanwhile, he developed a keen desire to study Buddhism. At age 19, he finally left

¹² Larsson 2012, 70.

¹³ Quintman & Larsson 2015, 103.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 89.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 87.

home and went to Ra lung monastery, where he met his root lama, Gtsang pa rgya ras (1161-1211), the founder of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school. Gtsang pa rgya ras gave him the dharma name, Mgon po rdo rje, took him as a heart disciple, and granted him most of the oral instructions of the 'Brug pa school.

Rgod tshang pa stayed with Gtsang pa rgya ras at Ra lung for three years before he passed away. Then, at the age of 22, Rgod tshang pa decided to follow his lama's final instructions and left Ra lung to wander in the mountains. From then on, he spent three years at Lho 'brag mkhar chu, one of the four major retreat sites for the 'Brug pa school. Afterward, he embarked on his famous pilgrimage to Gangs Ti se and Jalandhara for a total of four years. It is noteworthy that Rgod tshang pa's travel accounts are the earliest among that of Tibetan pilgrims' intentional travels to tantric *pīṭhas* in India.¹⁶ At the age of 32, he returned to Ra lung monastery and stayed briefly with the nephew of Gtsang pa rgya ras, the second abbot of Ra lung, Dbon ras pa Dar ma seng+ge (1177-1237), from whom he took full ordination vows. After a short while, Rgod tshang pa felt the strong urge to go to the mountains again, so he went to Phom lha khab as Dbon ras pa suggested and practiced guru yoga there for three years. Then, he spent five years at RtsA ri. After that, he went to the region of Rtsib ri, and meditated at Rgod tshang for seven years, where he achieved the highest level of enlightenment. During the seven years he stayed at Rgod tshang, his reputation as an enlightened master attracted a great number of disciples. Thus, he became known by the title of "Rgod tshang pa."

Afterward, Rgod tshang pa continued to travel to various mountain hermitages, with a growing retinue following him. He also performed geomancy to explore new suitable areas to construct meditation retreats, where he and his disciples established retreat sites to practice. The major sites where he stayed in his later life include thirteen years at Steng 'gro, nine years at Bde mchog gling and Dga' ldan gling, one year at Seng+ge gling, and two years at Bar 'grog rdo rje gling. At age 70, he passed away at Steng 'gro in the earth male horse year (1258). His main disciples include Yang dgon pa Rgyal mtshan dpal (1213-1258 or 1287), O rgyan pa Rin chen dpal (1229-1309), Ba ri ba, Ma bdun pa, etc. His teachings cover a wide range of 'Brug pa practices, especially on the practices of devotion (*mos gus*), equal taste (*ro snyoms*), dependent origination (*rten 'brel*), etc.

Mgur as Life Writing with Pedagogical Purposes

As a Buddhist teacher, Rgod tshang pa's *mgur* serves as important teachings about meditation practices, and it is included in many biographies. First, I analyze how Rgod tshang pa's *mgur* functions as a form of life writing with pedagogical purposes and relates to other forms of life writing. Rgod tshang pa repeatedly told his disciples that life writings about his liberation path

¹⁶ This has been noted by a number of scholars, see: Tucci 1940, Huber 2008, Shastri 2009.

are his dharma teachings. Rgod tshang pa directly pointed out to his close disciples in this way: "My oral instructions that are superior to others are my liberation stories (*rnam thar*) in a broad sense. All of my conducts and my liberation stories exist in my dharma teachings and oral instructions. My conducts and liberation stories **are** my profound dharma, which makes it very different from others' liberation stories."¹⁷ This statement is included in several biographies with slight variations. In this quote, Rgod tshang pa draws an equivalence between his liberation stories (*rnam thar*) and his dharma teachings, centered around oral instructions. In other words, the purpose of Rgod tshang pa teaching these life stories is to offer instruction for his disciples' spiritual practices.

While it is commonly understood that *mgur* serves as an important form of oral instruction, in Rgod tshang pa's biographies, it is specifically described that *mgur* is a form of life writing. In *Treasury of Jewels*, written by one of Rgod tshang pa's main disciples, Dbang phyug rgyal mtshan, the following statement best summarizes the relationship between *mgur* and *rnam thar*:

Furthermore, the profound Dharma that arose in the Lord of Dharma's own mind, which was inconceivable and ineffable in ordinary language to others, is in essence the mastery over the secret of speech. Thus, he was unhindered in simultaneously teaching the Dharma in the languages of the six realms, speaking to each according to their own tongue. All of this is clearly stated in his spiritual songs. Regarding the *biography of his mind*, the perfection of the two types of wisdom, this too is clearly described in his songs and oral teachings, just as it is.¹⁸

In this statement, Rgod tshang pa's *mgur* is framed as a manifestation of his "biography of the mind" (*thugs kyi rnam thar*). This description establishes *mgur* in the genre of *rnam thar*, while specifying that the content of his *mgur* is related to Rgod tshang pa's life experiences of the mind. It is traditionally interpreted that *mgur* is the spontaneous poetic expression of a mahāsid-dha's meditative experiences and realizations. With the term "biography of the mind," it is emphasized that the content of *mgur* is based on the mahāsid-dha's lived experiences. In this framing, writing about these experiences is considered a form of life writing.

Besides this theoretical statement about the relationship between *mgur*

¹⁷ Dbang phyug rgyal mtshan, *Treasury of Jewels*, p. 242: *gdams ngag zab mo gzhan las khyad par 'phags pa'i 'di ka rnam thar chen mo yin te/nga'i spyod lam rnam thar thams cad chos gdams ngag la yod pa yin/nga'i spyod lam rnam thar zab chos su yong ba 'di ka gzhan dang khyad par che ba'i rnam thar yin no/*.

¹⁸ Dbang phyug rgyal mtshan, *Treasury of Jewels*, p. 245: *yang chos rje rang gi thugs la 'khrungs chos zab mo gzhan la skad rang ma grags pa bsam gyis mi khyab ste/mdor na gsung gi gsang ba la mnga' brnyes pas/rigs drug dang rang rang gi skad du dus cig la khang la khang 'tsham du chos gsungs pa la thogs chags med pa'o/ 'di kun mgur na gsal por gsungs so/ thugs kyi rnam thar mkhyen pa gnyis mthar phyin pa yang/ de kho na bzhin du mgur dang gsung sgros rnam na gsal bar gsungs so/*.

and life writings, throughout the biographies, there are many examples showing how Rgod tshang pa taught his *mgur* as a form of life writing. Comprehending Rgod tshang pa's intention, his biographers, mostly his disciples, also deliberately emphasized this quality of his *mgur* and connected *mgur* with other forms of life writing. Specifically, on the one hand, life stories in prose provide context for the creation of *mgur*, which informs the readers that *mgur* is a result of certain life experiences, making the *mgur* personal, embodied, and authentic. On the other hand, *mgur* itself is a form of life writing that focuses on the life experiences of meditation practices, and it is referenced as a condensed, poetic form of expression that serves as a summary, an addition, or a moral takeaway of the major biographical narratives in prose. Lastly, *mgur* is, by nature, autobiographic, as the speaker is the mahāsiddha themselves, and the content is their personal meditative experiences. With the autobiographic voice, *mgur* provides an authentic account of the mahāsiddha's meditation experiences and realizations from their own perspectives.¹⁹

While there are numerous examples of these characteristics, here I analyze a few primary examples that cover these aspects. The first example is centered around a famous *mgur* Rgod tshang pa composed at one of the main mountain hermitages he established called "Steng 'gro." It still stands today in Shel dkar, Ding ri County in Tibet, with Rgod tshang pa's meditation caves and relics preserved there. This *mgur* was composed when Rgod tshang pa first heard about the place "Steng 'gro" and was planning to move there, after having spent seven years at Rgod tshang in the Shri ri/Rtsib ri region and achieved the ultimate level of realization. This *mgur* is a brilliant play of words on the place name "Steng 'gro," literally meaning "going upwards" or "ascending to higher grounds." Rgod tshang pa interpreted the name as an auspicious sign for achieving spiritual progress. In the *mgur*, he used his personal life experience of attaining enlightenment at Rgod tshang and ascending to a new height at Steng 'gro as the major narrative, to illustrate the metaphor of "steng 'gro" (ascending to a height). The *mgur* has nine stanzas in its body part, following the same pattern. I include a few of them here to explain:

I, vagabond of the area, Mgon po rdo rje,
Traveled and dwelled without attachment now and then,
Upholding the life examples of my spiritual forefathers.
I sing a song of ascending, not remaining.

Since I do not dwell in the swamp of attachment,
And I have truly purified wishes and desires,
The young vulture has fully completed non-grasping at the Vulture's Nest.

¹⁹ While *mgur* is commonly weaved into narratives in autobiographies and biographies, it is often atemporal, and it is to be distinguished from certain verses that serve more directly as narratives in autobiographies, such as those in 'Jigs med gling pa's autobiographies. See Gyatso 1998, 104.

I ascend to new heights after extinguishing desire.

Since I do not remain mistaken by wrong consciousness,
And I have truly purified the perfectly natural state,
The young vulture has completely developed self-awareness at the Vulture's Nest.

I ascend to a height where everything dawns as clear light.

Since I do not stay in ordinary afflicted emotions,
I have truly practiced non-duality.
The young vulture has completely developed wisdom at the Vulture's Nest.
I ascend to a height that is without rejection and acceptance.²⁰

The main metaphor of the *mgur* is "not remaining but ascending" (*mi sdod steng 'gro*). As we can see in the repeated structure of the body part of this *mgur*, the first line is about "not remaining" (*mi stod*) in a mental factor that causes suffering. The second line points out the result of the practice in the first line. The third and fourth lines paraphrase the contents of the first two lines, with Rgod tshang pa's biographical details combined in them. The third line talks about an aspect of his realization achieved at the "Vulture's Nest" (*rgod tshang*), which is also the antidote to the negative mental factors mentioned in the first line. Here, he refers to himself in the third person, as the "young vulture" (*rgod phrugs*). The final line is the level of spiritual attainment achieved as a result of the realization that happened at Rgod tshang, symbolized by the metaphor of "steng 'gro" (ascending to a height). Altogether, the *mgur* teaches the correct practices of purifying negative mental factors through meditation for achieving spiritual progress. Particularly, Rgod tshang pa gave this teaching by speaking about his personal experience of spiritual progress, clearly characterizing it as personal by mentioning his name and the geographical locations he stayed at. This autobiographical account is a concise and artistic expression of Rgod tshang pa's spiritual life experience, which serves as authentic and powerful teachings on meditation practices.

Besides the autobiographical content in the *mgur* itself, it is combined with biographical narratives in prose in works written in *Life and Songs*. Most evidently, in *Garland of Jewels*, the *mgur* is combined with a background story that goes like this:

Then, the dharma lord ended his retreat. At that time, many patrons from the local town, led by the couple named "'Od 'bar" from Byang nge, came to visit

²⁰ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 84: rgyal khams gyi sprang bo mgon rdo rang/ skabs su zhen med kyiis 'gro 'dus byed/ bla ma gong ma'i rnam thar 'dzin/ mi sdod steng 'gro'i glu zhiig len/ chags zhen 'dam la mi sdod par/ dgos 'dod dun la sbyangs lags las/ rgod tshang du 'dzin med rgod phrug 'tshar/ 'dod pa zad pas steng du 'gro/ log shes 'khrul par mi sdod par/ gnas lugs yang dag don la sbyangs/ rgod tshang du rig rgod phrug 'tshar/ gang shar 'od gsal gyi steng du 'gro/ nyon mongs rang gar mi sdod pas/ gnyis med don la sbyangs lags pas/ rgod tshang du ye shes rgod phrug 'tshar/ spang blang med pa'i steng du 'gro/.

the dharma lord. They pleaded: 'Since the dharma lord you realized dependent originations without limit, you have conquered all the humans and non-humans. We folks [had to] travel to this place where vultures, deer, and antelopes are not even able to pass, and where many people fell off the cliffs. Please come to our place where there is an amazing mountain retreat.' The dharma lord asked: 'What is the mountain retreat called?' They replied: 'It is called 'Steng 'gro'.' The dharma lord said: 'I will go to this place with great auspiciousness', and he sang this *mgur* of the Nine Ascendings.²¹

In this preceding biographical narrative, the concept of dependent origination (*rten 'brel*) is central to the story. Overall, accumulating auspicious dependent origination is crucial to the success of one's spiritual practices. In this case, the patrons' plea was an auspicious dependent origination, and the name of the mountain retreat itself is another one. This explanation establishes the motif of the following *mgur*, which emphasizes the auspiciousness of the place name's meaning, "ascending to heights." This exact story is not found in earlier biographies written by Rgod tshang pa's disciples, although skeletal narratives about the invitation of a patron couple named "'Od 'bar" exist in *Red Earth* and *The Gate of Good Qualities*. Also, in the *Collected Songs* and *Red Earth*, it is confirmed that this *mgur* was composed at Rgod tshang.²² Based on the biographical information in the early biographies and the biographical details in the *mgur*, the author of *Garland of Jewels*, Sangs rgyas dar po added this background story and combined it with the *mgur*. With this addition, the auspiciousness of the place's name is highlighted, helping the readers better comprehend and appreciate the wordplay. Moreover, in *Garland of Jewels*, this *mgur* serves as a brilliant transition in the narrative as Rgod tshang pa concludes his time at Rgod tshang and moves to a new location, starting a new period of his life. This is a good example of how *mgur* works as a form of life writing and correlates with other forms of life writing.

Another example shows how biographical narratives make the songs more efficacious by revealing the context of the song's composition. This story is recorded in *Red Earth*, a collection of short stories written down as Rgod tshang pa told them. It goes: "At that time, even when he was sick, he sang a few lines of songs in good spirit, and he taught *mgur*. 'Even when I am sick, my blissful awareness is still uninterrupted.' This *mgur* sang when

²¹ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 83: *de nas chos rje bas sku mtshams grol ba dang/ de'i dus su khrom gyi yon bdag la snga ba byang nge ba 'od 'bar bza' mis thog drangs mang pos mjal du 'ongs nas zhus pa/ chos rje bas rten 'brel chig chog ma gnang du chud pas/ mi dang mi ma yin pa thams cad dbang du 'du bas/ bya rgod dang ri dwags rna bas mi thar ba'i sa phyogs 'dir/ bdag cag pas mi mang po gyang la lhung bar da' bas/ bdag cag gi sa phyogs pha gi na ri khrod ngo mtshar can bdog pas 'byon pas zhu zhus pas/ chos rje'i zhal nas ri khrod ji skad bya ba yod gsungs pas/ steng 'gro bya ba yod lags zhus pas/ chos rje zhal nas rten 'brel bzang der 'gro ba yin no gsung nas/ steng 'gro dgu ma'i mgur gsungs pa/.*

²² Byams sems sher gzhon, *Red Earth*, p. 18: *khyung dkar dang rgod tshang du mgur sum cu so lnga gsungs/ de dus su byon pa re re gnyis la sna len gyis mgur mang du gsungs/ steng 'gror mi sdod steng 'gro'i glu cig len/ la sogs pa'i mgur bcu drug gsungs/ dgon pa byin 'bebs la sogs pa gsungs/ de man chad sgrub pa 'ba' zhig gi mgur lags/ de yan chad la mgur bcu bcu bzhugs sol.*

he said this had a great blessing. He told everyone to read it three times."²³ In this short section, it is described that Rgod tshang pa sang songs in good spirits even when he was sick, using a very colloquial expression of "glu rgyangs rtse le." In this case, Rgod tshang pa taught the dharma through *mgur* about his experience of sickness, demonstrating that even when adversities occurred, he remained in bliss uninterruptedly. Therefore, it is interpreted that the *mgur* contains more "blessings" because of this. This example shows how certain *mgur* is understood to have more soteriological value because of the context of its composition. It also shows us how Rgod tshang pa instructed his disciples to utilize *mgur* for their spiritual practices.

The final example further demonstrates how *mgur* functions as autobiographical writing on its own and how it supplements other forms of life writing in prose. One of the works written in the genre of *Life and Songs* is titled *The Sealed Teachings of The Secret Life* (*gsang ba'i rnam thar bka' rgya ma*). This work is a collection of Rgod tshang pa's esoteric teachings organized by a *mgur* with the same title: *Song of the Sealed Teachings of the Secret Life* (*gsang ba'i rnam thar bka' rgya ma'i mgur*). In this song, each stanza describes one period of Rgod tshang pa's life characterized by the holy site where he practiced in chronological order. Each stanza delineates the practices Rgod tshang pa engaged in at the site, as well as the result and attainment he achieved at this site. This work begins with the complete song, followed by a selection of Rgod tshang pa's autobiographical teachings about his experiences related to each stanza, serving as a commentary to the *mgur*. Here, I am including one of the most relevant stanzas for our current research, which involves stories related to singing and dancing. The stanza in the *mgur* goes:

"When I meditated at the charnel grounds at Kha che,²⁴
I danced on the palms of the *ḍākinīs*.
If you attain common siddhis, there are limits to your attainments.
I am a yogi who embraces the supreme siddhi."²⁵

This stanza describes the period in Rgod tshang pa's life when he famously went on pilgrimage to Jalandhara, a tantric holy site in present-day Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. Rgod tshang pa intended to make a pilgrimage to Jalandhara so that he could practice Equal Taste (*ro snyoms*) at the five major charnel grounds there. In this *mgur*, which is an esoteric teaching, phrases such as "dancing on the palms of the *ḍākinīs*" are coded, metaphorical language

²³ Byams sems sher gzhon, *Red Earth*, p. 25: *de'i dus su/ na yang glu rgyangs rtse le gyin mgur gsung/ nga na yang bde ba rgyun chad med/ ces pa'i dus kyi mgur 'di byin rlabs che/ kun la lan gsum klog gsung/*.

²⁴ The "Jalandhara" Rgod tshang pa visited is located in the present-day Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. In a few biographies, it is said that Jalandhara is in Kha che (Kashmir). While others say that it is in Rgya gar (the Indian subcontinent).

²⁵ Rgod tshang pa, *Secret Life*, p. 352: *nga kha che'i dur khrod du bsgoms tsa na/ mkha' 'gro ma lag pa'i mtshil na 'khrab/ thun mong bsgrub na 'grub tshod 'dug/ nga mchog la gril ba'i rnal 'byor lags/*.

that requires further explanation. In the prose section, the author included stories Rgod tshang pa told about his experiences at the charnel grounds in Jalandhara to elaborate on this. The stories are about him encountering groups of *ḍākinīs* in Jalandhara on various occasions. The lengthiest story is about him having a blissful meditative experience watching a group of *ḍākinīs* sing and dance in a chapel outside Jalandhara. During the performance, Rgod tshang pa had an intense tantric meditative experience visualizing the *Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala*. He visualized the *ḍākinīs* as the sixteen goddesses making offerings to the main deities with singing and dancing, and he eventually beheld the visages of the yidams *Vajradhara* and *Vajrayoginī*. Besides this story, Rgod tshang pa also told other stories briefly about how he benefitted from interactions with *ḍākinīs* at Jalandhara, such as how *ḍākinīs* granted him any siddhi he wished for and how he realized the equality of the three times sitting amidst a group of beautiful women, etc.

With the help of these stories, the audience can better understand the metaphor of "dancing on the palms of the *ḍākinīs*" in the *mgur*. It describes poetically how Rgod tshang pa achieved supreme spiritual attainments at the *Cakrasaṃvara* holy site, Jalandhara, with the help of "female messengers" of the site.²⁶ The stories also provide concrete definitions of other terms in the stanza such as "the supreme *siddhi*," which refers to his realization of mahāmudrā through engaging in esoteric practices of the highest-level tantra, the *yoginītantra*. In turn, in this work of *Life and Songs*, the *mgur* serves as a structural organizer for the writings in prose, providing a chronological order for the biographical narratives in prose characterized by different phases of Rgod tshang pa's life. It also highlights the most important achievements of Rgod tshang pa's life in each period. In this way, the *mgur* functions as a mnemonic device for the followers to memorize Rgod tshang pa's life, his path of complete liberation. In sum, this work written in the genre of *Life and Songs* combines a *mgur* that highly condenses Rgod tshang pa's life experiences of practicing at different holy sites with more detailed biographical narratives in prose to expand on these stories. It utilizes *mgur* as a form of autobiographical account with unique literary qualities distinct from life accounts written in prose, which in this case serve as commentary to the verse. In this case, *mgur* is a concise, poetic form of autobiographical life writing that primarily focuses on the inner experiences of Rgod tshang pa but also includes his physical life experiences of pilgrimage. When combined with related biographical accounts in prose, they complement each other as *mgur* serves as a summary, a testimony, and a mnemonic device, while the prose functions as commentaries and provides contexts for the *mgur*.

Mgur as an Art Form

In the previous section, I have discussed how *mgur* functions as a form of

²⁶ Ngawang Zangpo 2001, 63.

life writing with pedagogical purposes, as well as its distinction from and connection with other forms of life writing. Next, I look at the artistic aspect of *mgur*, which is a type of poetic expression and artistic performance. The questions I put forward here are: why are the ineffable experiences of enlightenment expressed poetically? What are the unique qualities of *mgur* that make it such a powerful means to communicate from mind to mind? In order to study the artistic aspect of *mgur*, I look at the biographical narratives associated with *mgur*, which provide materials for us to understand the performance aspect of *mgur*, as well as its effect on the audience. In this regard, Rgod tshang pa's biographies are particularly valuable because they contain many accounts of his artistic performances. Ever since he was a child, Rgod tshang pa was talented in singing and dancing, and he became a professional performing artist as a teenager. After he became a Buddhist practitioner, he continued to engage in artistic activities in various ways on his path of liberation. I consider *mgur* in the cultural milieu of Rgod tshang pa's artistic activities. Specifically, I observe three categories of stories related to Rgod tshang pa's artistic activities in his biographies, namely his secular, tantric, and pedagogical artistic activities. Through a thorough examination of biographical accounts in these categories, I study how artistic activities are interpreted not only as conforming with the broader Buddhist worldviews but also as Rgod tshang pa's idiosyncratic means to enhance his spiritual practices and to teach the dharma.

While these stories all exist in early biographies written by Rgod tshang pa's direct disciples, they are more thematized and consolidated in *Garland of Jewels*, the most popular version of Rgod tshang pa's biographies written by the 16th-author, Sangs rgyas dar po. I argue that Sangs rgyas dar po intentionally accentuated Rgod tshang pa's artistic talent to construct his distinct charisma in *Garland of Jewel*. Specifically, I analyze a reoccurring phrase, "*glu gar 'bro gsum*", which is employed to describe his singing and dancing activities in vastly different contexts, creating an interconnected relationship between performing arts, tantric practices, and Rgod tshang pa's other enlightened activities. Through drawing connections between different types of artistic activities, Sangs rgyas dar po emphasizes the artistic nature of *mgur* and the transformative power of songs as manifested in various scenarios. He encouraged his readers to not only read the *mgur* as written literature but even more so to imagine themselves experiencing *mgur* as a powerful art form. As an author imagining the life of his religious idol three centuries after he passed away, Sangs rgyas dar po helps his readers experience Rgod tshang pa's life to their greatest capacities. Influenced by Gtsang smyon He ru ka, Sangs rgyas dar po's literary endeavors contributed to Gtsang smyon and his followers' broader literary movement to "disseminate the *mgur* traditions of Mar pa and Mi la ras pa to as broad an audience as possible."²⁷

Surveying the biographies, I specifically study stories in three categories,

²⁷ Quintman and Larsson 2015, 95.

covering several different stages in Rgod tshang pa's life. I primarily analyze the narratives in *Garland of Jewels*, while noting similar passages in the early biographies. The first category includes stories related to Rgod tshang pa's early life experiences as a street artist before he began to formally study the dharma. The narrative justifies these secular singing activities by emphasizing that the contents of these songs are related to the dharma and by interpreting Rgod tshang pa's artistic performances as bodhisattva activities, which transform sentient beings' worldly perceptions of phenomena and remove their sufferings. The second category is related to tantric practices. Scholars have suggested that one of the Indic origins of Tibetan songs of realization is songs performed at tantric feasts.²⁸ As mentioned above, when Rgod tshang pa traveled to the holy site Jalandhara in India, he gained first-hand experiences with vajra songs and dances associated with the *Cakrasamvara* practices at local tantric feasts. He later performed and taught these songs and dances in Tibet, taming non-humans and greatly benefiting his followers. Lastly, at the pinnacle of all these verses is his *mgur*. In the biographies, especially in *Garland of Jewels*, the selected *mgur* are artfully combined with biographical narratives about the various contexts of their performances. I analyze how these narratives are connected to stories about other forms of singing, which highlights Rgod tshang pa's outstanding ability to compose and perform songs throughout different stages of his life.

1. Songs of a *Pag shi*

Tibet's most famous indigenous *mgur* singer, Mi la ras pa, was aptly given the childhood name "Thos pa dga", which means "delightful to hear".²⁹ Considered an emanation of Mi la ras pa, Rgod tshang pa was also born with a beautiful voice. Even more so, in most biographies, he is described to have had an attractive appearance as well, which is a description relatively rare among Tibetan hagiographies. While Rgod tshang pa's natural physical qualities were ideal for the performing arts, he also demonstrated outstanding talent in the performing arts ever since he was a little boy. Eventually, in his teenage years, he became a professional performing artist, a "*pag shi*". In the first part of *Garland of Jewels* about Rgod tshang pa's "ordinary deeds" (*thon mong gi mdzad pa*), there are several stories related to songs and dances. These stories are mostly expansions based on accounts in one of the early biographies, *Life Adorned with Songs*, written by Rgod tshang pa's disciple, Rgyal thang pa Bde chen rdo rje, who also compiled a biography of Mi la ras pa. Both works are among the earliest Tibetan biographical works written in the genre of *Life and Songs*. Compared to other early biographies, Rgyal thang pa highlighted stories related to Rgod tshang pa's artistic talents. Sangs rgyas dar po not only included all of these stories in *Garland of Jewels* but also added more details to them. In these stories, even though Rgod

²⁸ Jackson 1996, 391

²⁹ Quintman 2010, 19.

tshang pa was a layperson at that time, his artistic performances were depicted with strong Buddhist themes, as bodhisattva activities to benefit sentient beings, which set the tone of his artistic activities for the rest of his life. These accounts also help establish Rgod tshang pa's unique charisma by depicting the transformative effect of Rgod tshang pa's artistic performances on the audience, which is relevant to his various artistic activities as a Buddhist practitioner later in life.

Firstly, the stories emphasize the transformative effect of Rgod tshang pa's performances on the audience. In *Life Adorned with Songs and Garland of Jewels*, we have: "Before he was three, he perfected singing and dancing (*glu gar dang bro dbyangs*), and while he performed, all sentient beings became fascinated and people said that he was a Devaputra³⁰ reborn as a human." Here, we can see that his performances have a universal appeal, as "all sentient beings" experience a celestial pleasure watching him perform. Particularly, other descriptions highlight the liberating effects achieved through various senses. In several early biographies, it is described that Rgod tshang pa was born with an attractive look and a strong physique, and he had a beautiful voice since he was born. These descriptions involve the senses of sight, sound, and touch. Later in the biographies, the perspective of sensual attraction is underscored again as he grows up to become a ravishing teenager. In *Garland of Jewels*, it goes like this:

"When Rinpoche turned 15 or 16, there was no one in disharmony with him among all people (of) high, average and low (qualities). Because his insight and knowledge were beyond measure, he respected his superiors, and he took care of his minors. And he had good relationships with people of the same level in a profound way. Furthermore, Rinpoche delighted in songs and dances from the beginning. **His body and look were attractive, and his mind was very pleasing. All his (senses of) seeing, hearing, remembering and touching were ravishing to the mind, and it came to be the case that he transformed all phenomena into artistic play. He became able to clear away the sufferings of all those who have pain through performing arts like songs and dances and such..... His melody of speech was good and soft, and he was endowed with a Brahmin-like voice.** He wrote plenty of verses for melodic folk songs. **Because his marvelous body was very attractive,** at the time when he made his appearance dancing, gods, men, and demons involuntarily gathered. Whatever place he arrived at, many crowds gathered. Some people abandoned their homes and followed him around as attendants. It came to be the case that all the sufferings and the pain of those who had them dissolved by themselves, and people went away then came again."³¹

³⁰ *Devaputra* (Tib: lha'i bu) means the "son of gods."

³¹ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 12: rin po che nyid dgung lo bco lnga bcu drug bzhes pa'i dus na/ mi che 'bring chung gsum thams cad dang mi mthun pa med cing/ shes rig tshad las 'das pas gong ma rnams ni bkur/ 'og ma rnams ni skyong/ thad ka rnams dang 'grogs lam shin tu zab par mdzad cing/ de yang rin po che nyid dang po nas glu gar la dges pa/ sku blta na mdzes shing yid du 'ong pa/ mthong thos dran reg thams cad kyi yid 'phrog cing/ snang ba rol mor sgyur ba zhiḡ byung pas/ glu gar la sogs pa'i rol rtsed kyi mya ngan can rnams kyi sduḡ bsngal sel nus

This paragraph repetitively emphasizes the naturally-endowed physical attractiveness of Rgod tshang pa from different angles, and we learn that he dispelled the suffering of all kinds of audiences through various senses. Moreover, it is stated that the liberating effect results from Rgod tshang pa's ability to transform people's perception of worldly phenomena, to "turn all phenomena into artistic play." Despite the secular setting for these performances, the transformative benefits of these artistic performances are portrayed in accordance with a Buddhist worldview. Specifically, it is specified that Rgod tshang pa's performances possess liberating powers to dispel sentient beings' sufferings. Moreover, his artistic performances covered a wide range of topics, as he was able to "transform all phenomena into artistic play." In doing so, his artistic performances demonstrate the empty nature of phenomena, like a magical display (*rol ba*).

Secondly, besides an interpretation of the effects of Rgod tshang pa's artistic performances from a Buddhist perspective, the stories directly point out Rgod tshang pa's motivation to learn and create songs, and the very content of his songs were related to the dharma. As shown in the following account in *Garland of Jewels*, from an early age, Rgod tshang pa enjoyed listening to the dharma, especially *mgur*, from any dharma practitioner he encountered:

He did anything that was virtuous. He performed many activities like building stone pyramids and such, and he only engaged in activities related to the dharma. He went after any lama, great meditators, or yogis who came near him and stayed close to them. He talked and talked about the dharma and sang *mgur*. When the teachers sang *mgur*, he was particularly delighted and listened with faith. At that time, he got a reputation for people saying that he had activated karmic tendencies for dharma and that he had had great accumulation.³²

While describing Rgod tshang pa's connection to the dharma, the narrative specifically underscores his attraction to *mgur*. This detail shows the popularity of the genre at that time. It also draws our attention to how songs play a unique role for Rgod tshang pa in his spiritual pursuit, as he was attracted to dharma taught in the form of songs. As Rgod tshang pa grew up, he began

par gyur tel/..../ gsung gdangs snyan la bzung zhing mnyen pa/ tshangs pa'i dbyangs dang ldan pa des/ glu dbyangs la sogs pa'i snyan ngag mang du mdzad/ sku mtshar la mdzes pa des byos gar la sogs pa'i rnam 'gyur mdzad pa'i dus su/ lha 'dre mi gsum rang dbang med par 'dus tel gang 'byon sar khrom mang po tshogs tel/ 'ga' zhiq yul spangs nas phyags phyi la 'byangs nas 'gro ba yang byung/ mya ngan can rnam ky i mya ngan dang sdug bsngal thams cad rang sangs la song ba yang byung ba/.

³² Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 9: *spyod pa gang yang mdzad pa/ tho yor khri brtsigs pa la sogs pa slob dpon gyi bya ba chos bshad 'ba' zhiq mdzad pa zhiq yod cing/ sras de'i drung du bla ma'am/ sgom chen pa'am/ rnal 'byor ba la sogs pa gang byung yang de'i rting la gshegs shing rtsa ru bzhugs nas bag phebs pa/ de rnam la chos dang mgur ma gsung dang gsung zhiq/ chos sam mgur ma la sogs pa gsung tsa na shin tu mnyes shing dad pas gsam/ de'i dus su chos ky i bag chags sad pa phun su tshogs ba zhiq 'dug go zer ba'i snyan grags kyang byung stel.*

to compose songs by himself, and the contents of the songs were Buddhist-themed. In *Garland of Jewels*, it says:"

Moreover, since his supreme mind is great, many accomplished continuums of mind along with sutras and tantras, and many treatises of historical figures³³ and bodhisattvas entered his heart. He wrote many beneficial verses of colloquial poems and such.³⁴

This paragraph is adapted from a similar passage in the early biography *Life Adorned with Songs*, which contains more details:

At that time, he had unlimited knowledge of the biographies of kings, ministers, and bodhisattvas, of *Mi chos gnad kyi 'phreng ba*, *Sa skya legs bshad*, and *Skye bo gso thig*,³⁵ and of many other treatises and poems. When he sang these contents, everyone was happy, and many young people left their comfortable homes and followed after Rinpoche.³⁶

Here, both authors explain the content of Rgod tshang pa's songs as Buddhist. The narratives suggest that Rgod tshang pa acquired abundant knowledge of Tibetan Buddhist literature, and he was able to compose folk songs based on these materials. Notably, in the paragraph in *Life Adorned with Songs*, there are three individual works mentioned as sources of Rgod tshang pa songs. Composed by three influential Buddhist teachers, these three works are all collections of didactic verses intended for lay audiences. This account reveals how these verses were disseminated among lay communities through performing arts. On the one hand, the wide range of Buddhist sources of Rgod tshang pa's early folk songs shows how flexible songs are as an artistic form for conveying Buddhist knowledge. Centuries later, Gtsang smyon He ru ka sought to revitalize such a central role of songs in the transmission of Buddhism, to "establish the various Buddhist song traditions (glu, glu dbyangs, dohā, mgur) as encompassing the entire field of experience of the Buddhist path."³⁷ On the other hand, these stories seek to present that Rgod tshang pa's early secular artistic activities were endowed with Buddhist significations and emphasize that these songs are beneficial

³³ Due to the unique history of Tibet, this could refer to royal members who contributed to Buddhist activities in Tibet.

³⁴ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 12: *de yang thugs rab che bas/ mdo rgyud kyi sgrub rgyud mang po dang/ rgyal blon byang chub sems dpa' rnams kyi bstan bcos mang po thugs la chud/ 'phrul gyi snyan ngag la sogs pa'i sdeb sbyor 'grigs po du ma yang mdzad/*

³⁵ *Mi chos gnad kyi 'phreng ba* is written by 'Brom ston pa Rgyal ba 'byung gnas (1004-1064). *Sa skya legs bshad* is composed by Sa skya pan di ta Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182-1251). *Lugs kyi bstan bcos skye bo gso thig* (skt: *nitasastrajantuposanabindu*) is written by Nagārjuna.

³⁶ Bde chen rdo rje, *Life Adorned With Songs*, p. 187: *de dus blon po 'gos dang/ rgyal blon byang chub sems dpa' rnams kyi rnam thar dang/ mi chos gnad phreng/ sa skya legs bshad/ skye bo gso thigs/ bstan bcos dang/ snyan ngag la sogs pa tshad med pa thugs la mnga' bas/ de rnams gsungs pas mi thams cad dga' zhing/ mi gzhon mang po skyid cing dga' ba'i yul spangs nas/ rin po che pa'i phyi bzhin 'breng ba yang byung ngo/*

³⁷ Quintman & Larsson 2015, 100.

in terms of their Buddhist-themed content.

Lastly, in *Garland of Jewels*, there is another story that further demonstrates the virtue of his early artistic activities, which I could not locate in early biographies. This incident occurred after Rgod tshang pa officially became a "*pag shi*." As shown in the quotes above, he attracted many audiences everywhere he performed, and they became obsessed with him. As recorded in early biographies, his stage name was Don grub seng ge, and people said he was an artist who truly was a "wish-fulfilling lion," just like his name suggested. Early biographies also mentioned that *Pag shi* Don grub seng ge went on pilgrimage to Lhasa every year. However, only in *Garland of Jewels*, we see an extended account of his pilgrimage experiences in Lhasa. The story has it that once when he was in Lhasa, he offered a dance song (*bro dbyangs*) to the Jowo in Lhasa. In *Garland of Jewels*, this dance song is included in full, and it is the first complete song in the biography. Compared to the other verses in the biography, this song has a distinctively free form, with the meter varying greatly between lines, whereas Rgod tshang pa's *mgur* is almost entirely written in a 7-foot meter. The source for this song is not clear to me, for it does not appear in any other earlier biographies. Given the literary flourishes in biographical works inspired by Gtsang smyon He ru ka, it is entirely possible that this is an artistic creation of Sangs rgyas dar po. Perhaps Sangs rgyas dar po wrote a song suitable for the story using the style of a popular dance song at his time performed by street artists to make his work more entertaining for the audience.

In the song, *Pag shi* Don grub seng ge expressed his understanding of the dharma, and his intentions to practice the dharma in front of the Jowo. He also offered his precious belongings of a *Pag shi* such as his scepter and his ornaments to the Jowo. The first stanza goes like this:

People superior or inferior seek a home.
 I, the Pakshi, also seek a home.
 For a home, I seek a permanent, profound place.
 If I don't find a permanent, profound place,
 This life is but a fleeting moment.
 The "permanent place" called "next life",
 When you reach that "permanent place",
 Even if it was one's homeland, it is like a deceptive tale.
 I, the *Pag shi*, will not remain but go to the dharma.
 Don grub seng ge, will not remain but go to the dharma.
 I present offerings such as the fine charu³⁸ to the authentic teacher.
 I present offerings such as the deep red staff³⁹ to the authentic teacher.⁴⁰

³⁸ Charu (bya ru): A Charu is a head ornament that has two horns. In this context, it is a dramatic ornament Rgod tshang pa wore as a performing artist.

³⁹ Deep Red Staff (*yo dmar snum po*): This is also a part of Rgod tshang pa's dramatic attire as a performer. In the iconography of Rgod tshang pa, he is depicted wearing the charu and holding a red staff.

⁴⁰ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 13: *mi che med chung med yul zhig tshol/ pag shi nga yang yul zhig tshul/ yul du gnyug ma'i gtan yul tshol/ gnyug ma'i bstan yul mi tshol du/ tshe 'di*

Strikingly, the Jowo spoke back to him, which is a literary trope found elsewhere in Tibetan literature,⁴¹ and the Jowo discouraged him from making that offering. The Jowo's reply was also in verse, following a similar pattern as the song of the *pag shi*. The Jowo told the *Pag shi* that he should put on these adornments himself:

Master *pag shi* don't say this!

The wrathful deity dance is nothing other than (the very act) of benefitting sentient beings.

Put the fine charu on lord *Pag shi's* head.

Adorn the deep red staff on lord *Pag shi's* body.⁴²

To begin with, the song included here emphasizes *Pag shi* Don grub seng ge's strong determination to pursue the dharma. Next, using the literary trope to have these words spoken by the Buddha himself, the author reaffirms and celebrates the beneficial effect of artistic activities. This theme is essential in Sangs rgyas dar po's depiction of artistic activities throughout *Garland of Jewels*, as he highlights the connection between artistic activities and benefitting sentient beings. The brilliance of this story is that the main content is expressed through songs. By adding both the *Pag shi's* and the Jowo's songs, which are written in a folk style, Sangs rgyas dar po made his biography more accessible and appealing to a broader audience that goes beyond Buddhist communities. In a series of depictions of Rgod tshang pa's early artistic activities, Sangs rgyas dar po demonstrates that these activities are not only beneficial given their Buddhist content, but the very performances of artistic activities create transformative experiences that benefit the audience.

2. Song of the yogi

The second category includes stories about artistic activities in the context of Rgod tshang pa's tantric practices. Rgod tshang pa's lineage, the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school, places great emphasis on the tantric practices transmitted by Ras chung pa, referred to as the "Ras chung Aural Transmission (*ras chung snyan brgyud*)."

Rgod tshang pa's lama, Gtsang pa rgya ras Ye shes rdo

dar tsam yud tsam yin/ phyi ma bya ba gtan gyi yul/ gtan yul de ru slebs tsa na/ skyes pa'i pha yul byas kyang slu slu 'dra/ pag shi nga ni mi sdod chos la 'gro/ don grub seng ge mi sdod chos la 'gro/ bya ru legs mo mtshan ldan bla ma'i phyag rten la 'bul/ yo dmar snum po mtshan ldan bla ma'i phyag rten la 'bul/

⁴¹ For example, in *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, in the story about the simple-minded fellow Kongpo Ben, Kongpo Ben left his shoes in the Jowo's custody. Later, as the caretaker was going to throw them out, the Jowo spoke and said: "Don't throw those boots away. Kongpo Ben has entrusted them to me!" O-rgyan-'jigs-med-chos-kyi-dbang-po 1994, 174.

⁴² Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 14: *dpon pag shi de skad ma gsung/ lha bro khro khro bas sems can 'gro don byas kyang logs na med/ bya ru legs mo dpon pag shi'i dbu la mdzes/ yo dmar snum po dpon pag shi'i sku la mdzes/*.

rje (1161-1211), who was the founder of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school, not only received the full transmission of the Ras chung Aural Transmission but also discovered a treasure text (*gter ma*) on the practices of "equal taste" said to have been hidden by Ras chung pa himself. This aural transmission lineage is centered around practices of the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*. As a practitioner in the lineage, Rgod tshang pa went on pilgrimage to many holy sites, which he identified as the outer holy sites described in the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*. Most notably, Rgod tshang pa famously made a pilgrimage to Gangs Ti se and Jalandhara, which he recognized them respectively as the mythological "Himavat" and "Jalandhara" of the "twenty-four holy places" (*yul nyi shu rtsa bzhi*) mentioned in the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*. Rgod tshang pa was one of the earliest Tibetan pilgrims who traveled intentionally to these external tantric holy sites in India, and his travelogues were some of the most extensive records of these early pilgrimages.⁴³

During these pilgrimages, he conducted rigorous tantric practices at the holy sites and participated in many tantric feasts and other tantric rituals. On several occasions, singing and dancing were involved in these practices for a variety of purposes, such as making offerings, showing magical emanations, and tantric meditation practices. In the biographies, there are many accounts of these experiences based on Rgod tshang pa's telling to his disciples. In these experiences, Rgod tshang pa was sometimes the audience and the performer at other times. In either case, it appears to be consistent that these artistic activities in tantric contexts always contributed to the transcendental experiences of both the performers and the audiences. In this section, I look at a few examples in the biographies and analyze how Rgod tshang pa reflected on these experiences.

Chronologically, the first mention of Rgod tshang pa's artistic experience in a tantric context occurred when he watched a group of young women singing and dancing in a chapel outside Jalandhara, which is the same story that appeared in the *Secret Life* mentioned above. According to *Garland of Jewels*, when Rgod tshang pa arrived in the region of Jalandhara, he first visited a chapel named Jwalamukhi, where both Buddhists and non-Buddhists made offerings.⁴⁴ While Rgod tshang pa visualized the deities on the *Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala* as he participated in this ritual, the account does not imply that the ritual was an offering to *Cakrasaṃvara*, and it might not have been even Buddhist. In *Garland of Jewels*, the story goes like this:

At that night, there were about sixty, seventy young women, not defiled by sexual activities, beautiful and attractive like daughters of gods. They were wearing clothes made up of five colors, and many ornaments such as jeweled crowns. In their hands, some were holding flowers, some were holding incense, and all kinds of objects for offerings. The ladies were singing, and while they covered their heads with clothes and went inside the chapel, Rinpoche

⁴³ See Tucci 1940, Huber 2008, Shastri 2009.

⁴⁴ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 44: *ri bo de'i sna la dzwa la mu khe zhes bya ba'i gtsug lag khang chen po cig yod de/ de la phyi nang gnyis ka'i mchod pa 'bul zhing/*.

also went in. The gatekeeper stopped him with a stick due to his low status and didn't allow him to go. Without hesitation, Rinpoche opened the door and went in. (Shocked,) The doorkeeper was unable to hit him and could not keep him out. There, a nun said: "idhibhisha, idhaḍākinī." Meaning: "These are *ḍākinīs*!" Then, they sang songs. The ladies were like the sixteen consorts or the twenty goddesses. They made offerings with all kinds of objects such as flowers and incense. With their speech, they sang songs. With their hands, they performed dances. With their feet, they struck dance moves. As they were making people smile out of joy, Rinpoche thought that these were goddesses of the sense-pleasures making offerings to the chief of the *maṇḍala*, the sixth Buddha, the great *Vajradhara*. At that moment, he also thought that the venerable *Vajrayoginī* herself was there. At that time, he experienced joy. His cognition was blissful, his insight was clear, pure, and blissful, and his conceptual thoughts were pacified just as they were.⁴⁵

In this paragraph, Rgod tshang pa participated in a local tantric ritual coincidentally and practiced meditation there. Similar but shorter accounts of this experience appear in several early biographies, including the *Secret Life* as mentioned above. Given the esoteric content of the story, it was probably told to a few advanced disciples. During the ritual, the ladies made offerings with all kinds of objects and with their singing and dancing. Their beauty, as well as their artistic performances, brought sensual pleasure to the viewers. Rgod tshang pa, being among them, in his meditative experience, visualized them as "goddesses of the sense-pleasures", making offerings to the main yidam, the chief of the *maṇḍala*, *Vajradhara*. More importantly, he beheld the visage of *Vajrayoginī*, which is a particularly beneficial experience for a yogi's spiritual progress at a *Cakrasaṃvara* holy site. In this experience, since he was still at a relatively early stage of his spiritual advancement, he meditated from the perspective of an audience member. This changed later as his spiritual attainment progressed. Towards the end of his time at Jalandhara, he had another meditative experience at the same location, Jwalamukhi, with *ḍākinīs* singing and dancing. Only this time they were making offerings to him:

⁴⁵ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 45: *de'i nub mo grong pa'i chos kyis ma gos pa'i bu mo drug cu bdun cu tsaṃ mdzes shing yid du 'ong ba/ lha'i bu mo 'dra ba dang tshon rnam pa lnga las byas pa'i na bza' gsol ba/ rin po che 'o dbu rgyan la sogs pa rgyan du mas brgyan bdug cing/ de thams cad kyi phyag na/ la la me tog/ la la bdug spos la sogs pa'i mchod rdzas rnam pa sna tshogs thogs pas/ bu mo rnam skad kyi sgyur lha khang gi nang du ras kyis mgo bo btums nas 'gro bzhiin 'dug/ der rin po che yang byon pas/ rigs ngan gyis sgo srung gi dbyug pa thogs nas 'byon du ma bcug pas/ der tsham tshom med par sgo phul nas nang du phyin pas/ kho rang byed nas rdeg ma nus par nang du byon pa dang/ jo mo zhig 'dug pa na re/ i d+hi b+hi sha/ i d+ha Ta ki ni zer/ 'di tsho mkha' 'gro yin bya bar 'dug/ der jo mo de glu skad sgyur ba dang/ sngar gyi bu mo tsho rig ma bcu drug gam lha mo nyi shu ltar du/ me tog dang bdug spos la sogs pa'i mchod rdzas sna tshogs kyis mchod cing/ ngag gis glu len/ phyag gis gar sgyur/ zhabs kyis bro rdung la sogs pa dges pa'i 'dzum mdangs mdzad pa'i dus su/ dkyil 'khor gyi gtso bo drug pa rdo/ rje 'chang chen po la 'dod yon gyi lha mos mchod pa 'bul ba yang 'di ka yin snyam pa byung/ de tsa na rje btsun rdo rje rnal 'byor ma yang logs na med/ 'di rang yin snyam pa byung bas/ de'i dus su nyams dga'/ rig pa bde/ shes pa gsal ba/ dwangs pa/ bde ba/ rnam rtog rang bzhiin gyis zhi ba zhig byung stel.*

Then, after going uphill for a while, he performed *gcod* at a place where there was a charnel ground called *Dwa la mu ge*. Around midnight, all the *ḍākas* and *ḍākinīs* who were dwelling at that holy site gathered. And they arranged a big *gaṇacakra* for Rinpoche. They all joined together in one voice and sang: "I am the sovereign of *ḍākinīs*, Vajradhara. The great *ḍāka*, the great brave one. I, along with the *ḍākinīs* of the three worlds, make offerings to the chief of the assembly."⁴⁶ And they were all fluttering, making the sound of "hrub, hrub." Rinpoche also had a meditative buzz. For a long while, his cognition went into a state that was without any fixed point of reference. In short, he was enthroned as the chief of the assembly of *ḍākas* and *ḍākinīs* at that holy site.⁴⁷

Comparing this experience with the previous one, Rgod tshang pa's role changed from a meditator in the audience to the chief of the assembly to whom the *ḍākas* and *ḍākinīs* make offerings. This reflects his spiritual progress resulting from engaging in tantric practices at Jalandhara. Sangs rgyas dar po's description of this scene is very vivid, engaging several senses, including mimicking the sound of the flying deities with onomatopoeic words. Later, in *Garland of Jewels*, we learn that Rgod tshang pa not only witnessed the *ḍākas* and *ḍākinīs* both sing and dance at Jalandhara, but he also demonstrated their dances to his disciples after he returned to Tibet. At this final stage, he had achieved the highest level of realization. He gained the *siddhi* to directly emanate these deities by himself:

[Rgod tshang pa] said to a few close disciples, such as attendant Rin rgyal: 'Today I will show you an imitation of how *ḍākas* and *ḍākinīs* at Jalandhara performed dancing.' The lord himself held a vajra and a bell and said: 'the *ḍākas* danced like this.' Then, having transformed vividly into Buddha *Cakrasaṃvara*, he performed the nine dances of all the wrathful deities and such. Then, he transformed vividly into *Vajrayoginī*, holding a *ḍamaru* and a *kapāla*, and said: 'the *ḍākinīs* danced like this.' Then he did the robust laughter of the meditative state of the wrathful *ḍākinī*. He also performed many other forms of dancing than the ones mentioned above. In short, everyone generated great amazement towards such dances and became filled with faith.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ This quote of the *ḍāka* is written in verse.

⁴⁷ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 47: *de nas yang re zhing dzwa la mu khi zhes pa na dus khrod gcig 'dug pa'i sa ru byon nas gcod mdzad pas/nam phred tsam na gnas de na dnas pa'i dpa' bo dang mkha' 'gro thams cad 'dus nas/ rin po che la tshogs kyi 'khor lo rgya chen po bshams tel/ thams cad mgrin gcig tu bsdebs nas/ nged mkha' 'gro'i dbang phyug rdo rje 'chang/ dpa' bo chen po dpa' rtags che/ nged gnas gsum mkha' 'gro'i tshogs bcas kyi/ tshogs kyi dpon po mdzad du gsol/ ces gsung zhing thams cad hrub hrub tu 'phag cing 'dug pas/ rin po che yang thugs 'ur tel/ yun rin po'i bar du rig pa gtad med du song ste/ mdor na gnas de nyid kyi dpa' bo mkha' 'gro'i tshogs kyi bdag por mnga' gsol ba yin gsung/*

⁴⁸ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 72: *nye gnas rin rgyal la sogs pa 'ga' zhig drung du gnas pa la/ de ring khyed rnam la ngas gnas dza' lan daha rI dpa' bo dang mkha' 'gro rnam gar mdzad pa'i lad mo gcig bstan gyis gsung/ rje nyid kyi rdo rje dang dril bu bsams shing/ dpa' bo rnam gar 'di ltar mdzad cing 'dug gsung nas/ bde mchog 'khor lor lam gyis bsgyur nas khro bo thams cad kyi gar dgu la sogs pa mdzad cing 'dug de nas rdo rje rnal 'byor mar lam gyis bsgyur cing/ da ma ru dang thod pa bsams nas dpa' mo rnam gar 'di ltar mdzad cing 'dug gsung nas dpa' mo zhi ba'i nyams kyi gad rgyangs la sogs mdzad cing 'dug de la sogs te gar gyi mdzad tshul gzhan yang mdzad pa mang du yod cing/ mdor na 'di lta bu'i gar de thams cad ngo mtshar che ba*

It is important to note that "dance" is a problematic translation of the word "gar" here, as in this context, "gar" refers to the movements and poses of the tantric deities that originated in dancing yet are distinct from the secular performing arts as the word "dance" might imply. If we compare these three stories, Rgod tshang pa shifted from a spectator to an advanced yogi and eventually to a tantric lama. Throughout this spiritual journey, these accounts of his relationship with such songs and dances demonstrate the progress of his spiritual capacities. Eventually, he gained the ability to emanate Buddha *Cakrasaṃvara* as well as his female counterpart, *Vajrayoginī*, and it is emphasized that Rgod tshang pa's unique method of emanating these deities was through "dancing." In the first story, the young women's singing and dancing in Jalandhara provided favorable conditions for Rgod tshang pa's tantric meditation practices. Next, the offerings of singing and dancing of the *ḍākas* and *ḍākinīs* to Rgod tshang pa was a testament to his spiritual attainment. And lastly, Rgod tshang pa benefitted beings through emanating the divine beings in the deity assembly of *Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala* through "dancing." In all three scenarios, artistic performances were crucial to creating transcendental experiences for both the audience and the performer. These life stories not only highlighted Rgod tshang pa's spiritual progress throughout his changing roles in these events, but they also accentuated the transforming power of these artistic activities in Rgod tshang pa's spiritual practices and enlightened activities.

In *Garland of Jewels*, following a chronological narrative about Rgod tshang pa's path to enlightenment, there is a chapter consisting entirely of Rgod tshang pa's conversations with his disciples in an anachronistic order. In early biographies, there are also many similar passages in the genre of "sayings (*gsung sgras*)." In the beginning of the chapter, Sangs rgyas dar po explains that even though such contents are usually recorded in works of "oral instruction (*gdams ngag*)," in Rgod tshang pa's case, his oral instructions are all about his life experiences, therefore they should be included in the *rnam thar* as a form of life writing. In these conversations, Rgod tshang pa not only speaks about his experiences but also reflects on them, using these experiences as pedagogical material. In this following quote, Rgod tshang pa recollected another story about his artistic activities. In this case, he demonstrated his singing and dancing skills among other yogis at Tsa ri:

Again, the Dharma lord said, 'Great singer, you think that I don't know anything. But I know many songs, I am skillful with dances, and I know thirty-three different kinds of dance. In the supreme holy place of Tsari, through singing and dancing, I transformed the perceptions of all humans and non-humans, and I brought them all under my power. They said there was no one more skilled in dance than me. Everyone else could do twenty-one dances at most. A man called 'Dre sgom' said, 'I have never seen such a spectacle at

Tsari before.' After I changed my clothes, at first no one recognized me.'⁴⁹

It is necessary to understand this comment within the context of Rgod tshang pa's experiences at Tsa ri, which is narrated in the earlier chapters. Rgod tshang pa practiced at Tsa ri after he returned from Jalandhara. At Tsa ri, Rgod tshang pa practiced his spiritual vow of "carrying all beings on the crown of his head," providing service to all beings like they were his guru, as part of his practice of guru yoga. According to the biographies, he selflessly served all the meditators at the retreat, carrying all kinds of supplies for them up and down the mountains. The labor was so demanding that his back was swollen and bruised, and the pus on his feet bled all over his clothes. Therefore, at Tsa ri, he was known as the "yellow donkey." However, one day, all of a sudden, he revealed his level of spiritual accomplishment to the other yogis, as he performed the dances of *Cakrasamvara* in front of them, and emanated the deity in actuality. At once, all of the yogis realized their mistake and bowed before his feet.

Combining the background with this story told by Rgod tshang pa, we see that at this point, Rgod tshang pa's singing and dancing was his method of demonstrating his *siddhi* to emanate tantric deities. What is particularly noteworthy here is that it is not only the magical emanations that were so powerful, but the artistic performances themselves are compelling. Rgod tshang pa claimed that he was more skilled in singing and dancing than other people who were capable of performing these tantric dances. He even added the detail that he changed into special apparel as he sang and danced. One could imagine him transforming from a diminished ascetic yogi into a charming artistic performer. As readers, we are also reminded of the earlier passages about Rgod tshang pa's performances when he was a *Pag shi*, which is that he "transformed the perceptions of all humans and nonhumans." Once again, Rgod tshang pa's artistic performances created transformative experiences for the audience through various senses and altered the way they perceive phenomena. What is highlighted here is that compared to his earlier activities, Rgod tshang pa's spiritual attainment progressed. Thus, the effect of his artistic performances was strengthened due to his *siddhi* of emanating tantric deities. Yet his unique personal artistic talents distinguish him from other yogis' magical emanations, and his artistic talents contributed to the transformative power of his tantric emanations.

⁴⁹ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 161: yang chos rje'i zhal nas/ glu chen pa khyed kyi bsam pa la/ ngas ci yang mi shes bsam ste ngas glu skad mang po shes/ bro mkhas po shes/gar sna mi 'dra ba sum cu rtsa gsum shes/ gnas mchog tsa ri kun tu bro gar glu gsum gyis mi dang mi ma yin pa thams cad kyi snang ba bsgyur/ dbang du bdus/ gar nga las mkhas pa med zer ba kun kyis kyang nyi shu re tsam las mi thon par 'dug/ 'dre sgom bya ba na re/ tsa ri 'di 'dra'i ltad mo mthong ba sngar ma byung zer/ gos bsgyur pas dang po sus kyang mi shes bar 'dug gsung/.

3. Rethinking *mgur* as Arts

Let us now look at both categories together and analyze how they are associated with Rgod tshang pa's teachings through *mgur* singing. In the very beginning of *Garland of Jewels*, in the prologue, Sangs rgyas dar po quotes a verse from the *Vajrapañjara Tantra*:

Since the Buddha wants to protect the world,
The Buddha performs magical displays.
In the forms of rabbits, tigers, lions,
Elephants and so on,
With a compassionate, benefitting mind,
He comes into play through making mudrā.⁵⁰

Sangs rgyas dar po quotes this verse in order to explain that Rgod tshang pa was a bodhisattva who took rebirth in this very emanation body. The phrase "gar gyi rol ba" refers to the Buddha's appearance in magical forms, as if playing different roles on the stage of worldly existence. The first layer of meaning in Rgod tshang pa's bodhisattva activities accomplished through singing and dancing is that he was able to transform the worldly perception of phenomena by demonstrating the dream-like, empty nature of phenomena just as it is in artistic plays. As Martin thoughtfully compares, such understanding of the nature of worldly experiences exemplified through the metaphor of artistic plays is most beautifully encapsulated by Shakespeare in *As You Like It*⁵¹:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts.....

In the case of *Pag shi* Don grub seng ge, his artistic performances directly transformed people's perception of phenomena. As it is adequately summarized in the title of the chapter in *Garland of Jewels*, it is "The way he turned phenomena into artistic play by means of songs, dances and step dances"⁵² (*glu gar 'bro gsum*) in accordance with perceptions of worldly minds, dispelling the sufferings of many miserable people as a *Pag shi*.⁵³ Here, we see an

⁵⁰ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 2: *sangs rgyas 'jig rten bskyab bzhed pas/ sangs rgyas gar gyi rol ba mdzad/ ro bong stag dang seng ge dang/ glang chen la sogs du ma ru/ snying rje'i phen pa'i sems kyis nil phyag rgya 'grub pas skyes bar 'gyur/*.

⁵¹ Martin, Dan. "Gotsangpa Gonpo Dorje", *The Treasury of Lives*, <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Gotsangpa-Gonpo-Dorje/3759>.

The quote is from William Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII.

⁵² I translate 'bro as "step dances" given its usage in one sentence that goes "rkang kyi 'bro mdzad", as well as its modern usage in the Tibetan circle dance "skor 'bro". But it is by no means a perfect translation since I cannot identify the exact type of dance it refers to.

⁵³ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 12: *'jig rten gyi snang ba dang mthun zhing glu gar*

elegant repetition of the word "snang ba", used first to refer to worldly people's perception, and secondly to refer to "phenomena." "Snang ba" here hints at the contrast between "snang tshul," meaning the way things appear to be, and "gnas tshul," the way things truly are. Rgod tshang pa reveals the "gnas tshul" through an artistic display, making it comprehensible for the worldly minds. In such language, Sangs rgyas dar po successfully depicted the first layer of meaning about how Rgod tshang pa's artistic activities were Bodhi-sattva activities that transformed ordinary people's minds.

The second layer is from the tantric perspective, and we can refer to another verse found also in the *Vajrapañjara Tantra* to help explain:

In order to gather sentient beings who are particularly attached to dances and songs,
The Buddha, the dancer, performed artistic plays.
The Buddha, the dancer, brings about enlightenment with the vajra,
In beings who have desires.⁵⁴

Here, "gar" refers to the dance poses and movements of the tantric deity, in this case, the Buddha *Hevajra*. This is a tantric interpretation of the motivation of artistic display, which is to attract and then transform beings with strong attachments to sensual pleasures produced by singing and dancing. In the tantric understanding of artistic activities, practitioners need not reject or abandon attachments to sensual pleasures that these activities bring about, but they can take the attachments onto their spiritual path and transform them through their meditation practices. As a tantric yogi, Rgod tshang pa first experienced watching the *ḍākinīs* making offerings to the *yidams* through singing and dancing that bring about sensual pleasures. Then, he became the chief of the assembly to whom the *ḍākinīs* make such offerings. Eventually, he was able to emanate the deities themselves, and he displayed the dance movements that the tantric deities perform for the purpose of transforming beings with strong attachments.

Despite the differences between the contexts, I argue that Sangs rgyas dar po attempted to draw connections between these various artistic activities in Rgod tshang pa's life in order to highlight Rgod tshang pa's unique charisma based on his artistic talents. I analyze the connections based on the repetition of a phrase used in the descriptions of these activities. The phrase is "glu gar 'bro gsum", with "glu" meaning songs, "gar" and "bro" referring to two types of dances. Since the usage of these words to describe different dances changes over time, it is difficult to know what these types of performances refer to exactly in the thirteenth century. Nonetheless, we see that they are

bro gsum kyi sgo nas snang ba rol mor bsgyur cing/ nya ngan can rnams kyi sdug bsnal bsal te pag shi mdzad tshul ni/.

⁵⁴ *gar dang glu la rab zhen pa'i/ sems can rnam ni bsdu ba'i phyir/ sangs rgyas gar mkhan rdo rje yis/ 'dod chags can gyi byang chub sgrub/.* In *'phags pa mkha' 'gro ma rdo rje gur zhes bya ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po'i brtag pa*, Bka' 'gyur (dpe bsdur ma) [rgyud 'bum], Vol 80, Zhong hua da zang jing gan zhu er (dui kan ben), Beijing: 2006-2009, pp. 123-237.

used separately as two distinct types of dances. "Glu gar bro gsum" appears at the beginning of *Garland of Jewels* in the chapter dedicated to Rgod tshang pa's early career in the performing arts as a *pag shi*. As mentioned earlier, this sentence, "he turned phenomena into artistic play by means of songs, dances and step dances (*glu gar 'bro gsum*) in accordance with perceptions of worldly minds," appears a few times. The second time the phrase appears is found in the story of him watching the *dākinīs* sing and dance in Jalamuge. In this paragraph, "*glu*", "*gar*" and "*bro*" are written in an extended version describing the *dākinīs*' performance: "With their speech, they sang songs (*glu*). With their hands, they performed dances (*gar*). With their feet, they struck dance moves (*'bro*)."⁵⁵ If we compare with the earlier biographies that also include both stories, they don't use the exact same phrasing to describe these two very different types of singing and dancing.

This same phrase appears once again in a direct quote in the chapter of Rgod tshang pa's sayings (*gsung sgros*), describing Rgod tshang pa's performance at Tsa ri, as mentioned before. Here we have: "Again, the Dharma lord said, 'You think that I don't know anything. But I know many songs (*glu*), I am skillful with dances (*bro*), and I know thirty-three different kinds of dance (*gar*).'" Once again, the consistent usage of the phrase "glu gar bro gsum" is not evident in the earlier biographies. I argue that Sangs rgyas dar po draws our attention to the underlying basis for these different activities, which is Rgod tshang pa's unique relationship to singing and dancing. It also emphasizes Rgod tshang pa's spiritual progress with the increasing transformative power of these same three artistic performances. In the beginning, he was able to transform the perception of worldly people's minds and dispel their sufferings, while later he perfected tantric visualizations, and eventually he emanated the deities and gained the ability to speak to all beings in the six realms, of all humans and nonhumans.

As seen in the examples above, artistic activities are strongly thematized in *Garland of Jewels* to a greater extent than in earlier biographies. I believe that this reflects "an increasing awareness of and interest in the forms and functions of songs" in the 16th century as Quintman and Larson suggested in their study on Gtsang smyon He ru ka's writing about *mgur*.⁵⁶ Other than the overall accentuated theme of artistic activities in *Garland of Jewels*, I include here an example that demonstrates how *mgur* is directly related to the folk arts of singing and dancing in *Red Earth*, which is one of the major sources for *Garland of Jewels*. To a certain extent, Sangs rgyas dar po's literary endeavors placing *mgur* in a broader context of artistic activities are inherited from early biographers. This example gives us a glimpse into how *mgur* was composed and performed:

"Namo Ratna Guru
It is sad to forget the kind guru.

⁵⁵ Sangs rgyas dar po, *Garland of Jewels*, p. 45: *ngag gis glu len/ phyag gis gar sgyur/ zhabs kyis bro rdung/*.

⁵⁶ Quintman and Larsson 2015, 95.

It is sad to be separated from the innate mahāmudrā.
 It is sad to experience the suffering of sentient beings in the six realms.
 It is sad to neglect to adopt virtue and abandon sin.
 It is sad to leave the hermitage and solitary retreat places."
 One day when he was taking a break out in a forest, he sang this song based on a melody for dancing.⁵⁷

This is a rare example of the connection between *mgur* and folk singing and dancing. It is specified here that this *mgur* was composed in the melody of a song that accompanies step dancing (*bro rdun gi dbyang rta*). It is particularly significant when we think about Rgod tshang pa's personal artistic talents, as he is equipped with outstanding expertise in such folk songs and dances. While we have no means to know the melody of the song, we see here that the meter in this song is different from most of Rgod tshang pa's *mgur*, which are composed in a seven-foot meter. In this song though, it is written in an 8-7-8-7-8 feet pattern. Combined with the information on the context of composing this song, the meter sounds even more "folksy" than the Rgod tshang pa's other *mgur*. Now, let us compare this song with another song that is specifically described as written in the style of a "dance melody" (*bro dbyangs*). It is the song of the *Pag shi* making offerings to the Jowo in Lhasa that appeared in *Garland of Jewels*. The song of the *pag shi* is also the only song included in *Garland of Jewels* that does not follow a strict seven-foot meter, but it begins with an eight-foot first line and switches to seven-foot in the second line, and then to longer lines again. This comparison is by no means to say that these two dance melodies (*bro dbyang*) are the same, but it shows that Rgod tshang pa indeed adopted artistic traits from folk songs when he composed his *mgur*. Even more so, in this example in *Red Earth*, he might have done that in a context that is similar to the times when people enjoy some casual singing and dancing—he was in a forest relaxing with his disciples. Elsewhere in *Red Earth*, *mgur* is also referred to as "melody of practice" (*sgrub dbyangs*), reflecting the musical aspect of *mgur*. Ultimately, singing *mgur* is interpreted as a method for the teacher to be in accordance with ordinary minds, to speak in a language that touches people's hearts directly. What is a better way than using folk songs that everyone enjoys to convey the profound dharma? From his immediate disciples to his admirers in the 16th century, Rgod tshang pa's biographers perceive *mgur* as Rgod tshang pa's unique skillful means to sing the ineffable experiences of enlightenment through an art form that holds a special place in the heart of the Tibetan people.

⁵⁷ Byams sems sher gzhon, *Red Earth*, p. 223: *drin can gyi bla ma brje du 'phangs/ gnyug ma phyag chen 'bral du 'phangs/ ma 'gro drug sems can sdud tu 'phangs/ dge sdig 'dor len shol du 'phangs/ gnas ri khrod dgon pa bzhaq du 'phangs/ nags khrod cig tu khams gseng pa'i dus su/ bro rdung gi dbyangs rta cig la brten nas gsung so/*.

Conclusion

This paper examines the rich biographical materials about Rgod tshang pa to deepen our understanding of the complex roles Tibetan songs of realization play in the lives of the composers and their broad range of audiences. Fundamentally, like all other Buddhist teachings, *mgur* is one of the ways how enlightened beings teach the dharma to sentient beings. It is particularly suitable as a form of oral, pithy instruction that conveys practical knowledge of esoteric practices between teacher and disciple. Following a long tradition of teaching through personal experiences in the Practice Lineage, Rgod tshang pa particularly emphasized the significance of the embodiment of such knowledge and advocated for the potency of life writing in teaching the most esoteric experiences. Therefore, his *mgur* are more evidently personal and autobiographical, and they call for references from his own life experiences to fully comprehend. Rgod tshang pa deliberately adopted *mgur* as a method to teach the life experiences of his mind, which focuses on teaching his meditation experiences and realizations. But his *mgur* also functions as life writing in a broader sense, as it encompasses all of his conducts. Ultimately, his conduct was his very act of meditation, and life stories about them were taught as oral instructions.

While *mgur* are personal and embodied in terms of their contexts and contents, it is very idiosyncratic that the artistic form of *mgur* is aligned with Rgod tshang pa's personal talent as well. As a bodhisattva who spoke in the languages of the beings to be tamed, he adopted one of the languages most favored by his indigenous Tibetan audience. The intense, transformative experience inspired by his excellent art craft translates perfectly from his secular street shows to his teachings on the profound dharma. By the time of Gtsang smyon He ru ka and his followers, the innate value of songs that make them a distinctively powerful means to communicate the experiences of enlightenment was increasingly appreciated and discussed. Rgod tshang pa was one of the few exemplars who was not only capable of teaching the dharma in spontaneous verses but also a true artist of the craft, in the sense that he mastered the performance aspect of this artistic expression. His example is the perfect material for Gtsang smyon and his followers' projects in their attempt to construct a religious identity centered around the ideal of the ascetic yogin and their hallmark abilities to express the ineffable experiences of enlightenment through songs. Up to this day, Rgod tshang pa is still favored by many prominent Buddhist teachers, who teach Rgod tshang pa's life stories alongside his *mgur*. The long-lasting appeal of his *life and songs* is credited to the artful storytelling of Rgod tshang pa and his biographers, and perhaps also through apparitions of Rgod tshang pa's dazzling singing and dancing.

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Automated Character Recognition in Early Tibetan Canonical Manuscripts

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he use of computational methods is advancing rapidly across all domains of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Tibetan studies, despite its seemingly niche focus, has been actively embracing this trend. Given the significance of textual studies to the field, advancements in this area are particularly prominent and diverse.¹ These include work on automated character recognition of the contents of Tibetan written artifacts, which is an essential step in producing larger corpora of searchable Tibetan e-texts for any kind of subsequent computational analysis. In the past, a more widely known implementation of Tibetan optical character recognition (OCR) was developed under the name Namsel OCR,² and Google's built-in OCR feature in Google Drive/Google Docs has also been (and continues to be) widely used. While these earlier tools were primarily developed to recognize Tibetan *dbu can* script in printed materials, more recent work has included manuscripts as well. Of particular note are the Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) models developed within the TibSchol project at the Austrian Academy of Sciences using the Transkribus platform, which are the first to address Tibetan *dbu med* script.³ Another Transkribus model, focusing on printed Tibetan newspapers, has been published by the Divergent Discourses project.⁴ More recently, collaborative, large-scale efforts to develop Tibetan OCR/HTR for various scripts and media have been supported by the Buddhist Digital Resource Center and included several other related initiatives.⁵

¹ The edited volume by Meelen, Hill, and Faggionato 2024 showcases several important avenues.

² See Rowinski and Keutzer 2016. This also summarizes earlier attempts in Tibetan OCR.

³ See Griffiths 2024.

⁴ Developed by Franz Xavier Erhard as Tibetan Modern U-chen Print, accessible on Transkribus: <https://app.transkribus.org/sites/uchan/about>; accessed Nov. 14. 2024.

⁵ As a result of these collaborative efforts, BDRC has recently released an OCR app with a wide range of applications: <https://www.bdrc.io/blog/2025/03/14/bdrc-announces-the-release-of-ocr-app-for-tibetan/>; accessed Jun. 30. 2025.

New Findings of Early Tibetan Canonical Manuscripts: The Namgyal Sūtra Collection

As a long-term research initiative, the Tibetan Manuscript Project Vienna (TMPV) specializes in the documentation and research of Tibetan canonical literature and, with its Resources for Kanjur and Tanjur Studies (rKTs) archive, hosts the largest online database dedicated to Tibetan canonical sources. Through the activities of the TMPV, several early canonical manuscript collections have been documented. Of particular importance are the so-called “Sūtra collections” (*mdo sde*), an early Tibetan corpus of approximately 435 canonical texts arranged in a specific order in thirty volumes. Several such Sūtra collections have recently been documented in Dolpo and Mustang in the Nepal-Tibet border region.⁶ These include a manuscript collection from Namgyal (*rnam rgyal*) Monastery in Mustang, documented in collaboration with the SOAS-based project Tibetan Buddhist Monastery Collections Today (directed by Christian Luczanits). This fragmented Sūtra collection was not only the first to be comprehensively documented, but its manuscripts are also of outstanding artistic quality in terms of material support, scribal work, and the illuminations that adorn the beginning and end of the volumes. Their codicological features, such as layout and ornamentation as well as orthography and paleography, indicate a rather early date.⁷ While the early fourteenth century has been proposed as an initial tentative estimate for its production,⁸ more recent comparative research with data from related collections in Dolpo, including C14 analysis of paper samples, suggests an earlier date for the Namgyal Sūtra collection as well, potentially as early as the twelfth century.⁹ In addition to its early age for such a large collection of what we can now call canonical texts, the structural features and textual contents of this material make it of considerable interest for further philological research, but work on these manuscripts also poses certain challenges.

⁶ The manuscript features of these local collections are discussed in detail in Viehbeck, forthcoming. The documentation activities are also reported on the TMPV website, under Documentation: <https://tmpv.univie.ac.at/>; accessed Nov. 14. 2024.

⁷ The textual contents of this collection, along with the images, were published at rKTs: <http://www.rkts.org/collections.php?id=1Ng>; accessed Nov. 15. 2024. Additionally, these were shared with BDRC: <https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW2KG229028>; accessed Nov. 15. 2024.

⁸ See Luczanits and Viehbeck 2021, 42–43, 142–143.

⁹ These issues of comparative dating are discussed in detail in Viehbeck, forthcoming.

Challenges and Research Objectives

As outlined in earlier research,¹⁰ the Sūtra collection represents a canonical model that evolved prior to and alongside the model of structured Bka' 'gyurs, which became dominant with its emergence in the early fourteenth century. The differences between these two models relate not only to major structural variations in the arrangement of canonical texts that are already known, but there are also instances in which a Sūtra collection encompasses several texts that are entirely absent from subsequent structured Bka' 'gyurs. On a finer scale, it is apparent that even in cases of commonly identified texts, the version found in the Sūtra collection diverges from versions found in other sources. However, the extent of these differences varies considerably. As a working hypothesis, it seems plausible to assume that some can be attributed to the specific process of production and transmission, i.e., repeated manual copying, while others point to divergent sources and translations, i.e., the use of an entirely different source text for the translation, or a modified translation of the same source.

In order to address this broader set of questions regarding the production and transmission of alternative canonical sources by using computational methods and on a larger scale, the availability of an e-text of this collection is an obvious *desideratum*. The Namgyal OCR model was therefore developed primarily as a first step in addressing these research questions. Furthermore, the model should prove beneficial to others working with similar sources.

While models for Tibetan printed *dbu can* script and several types of handwritten *dbu med* script are currently available, a dedicated model for handwritten *dbu can* script was still missing. Moreover, as these manuscripts date to such an early period, they exhibit some distinctive features. For example, in terms of layout and line recognition, the presence of decorative string hole markings in the center of the folios has presented a major challenge. This is equally true for typical features of archaic orthography (such as *ma ya btags*, *da drag*, *gi gu log*, 'a suffix, *anusvāra*) and paleographic features such as the use of horizontal ligatures as well as the specific shapes of individual characters. The Namgyal model should therefore be of direct utility to anyone working with similar early Tibetan *dbu can* handwritten material. Furthermore, its development has contributed to the advancement of wide-scope OCR models for Tibetan, as described above. The following workflow was used to train this model.

¹⁰ See Viehbeck 2020, Luczanits and Viehbeck 2021, 341–361.

The OCR Pipeline

To digitize the collection, we opted for two-stage approach comprising line, viz. layout detection, via image segmentation inspired by Grüning *et al.* 2019. Due to language-specific features, such as long descending letters and complex letter stacks that occupy significant vertical space, Tibetan manuscripts (and block prints) typically exhibit minimal interlinear spacing, if any, and frequently display instances of characters touching adjacent lines (see examples below).

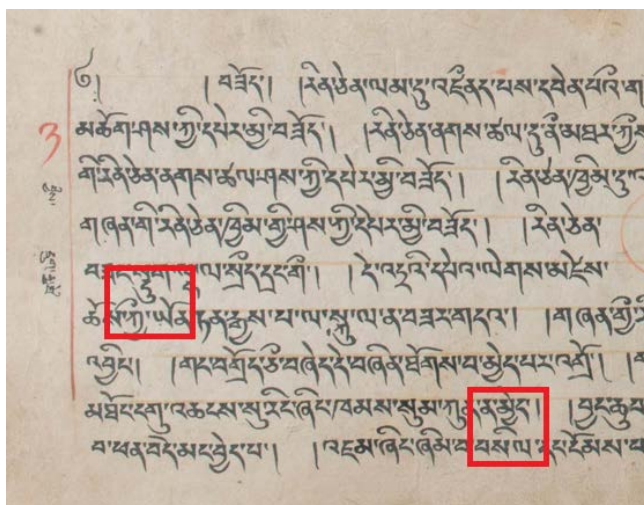


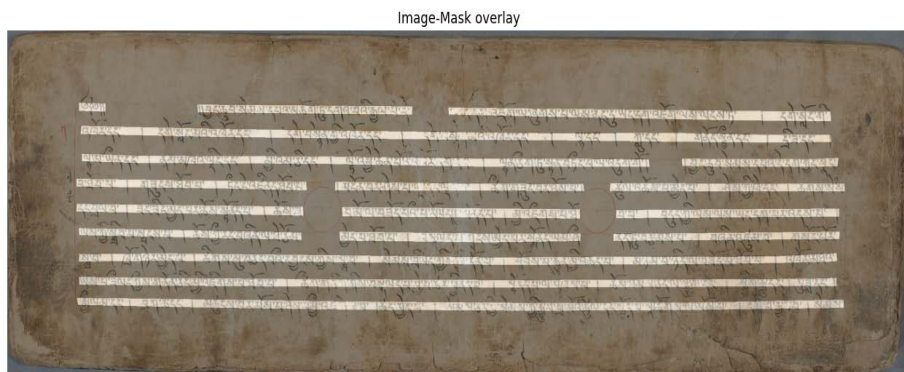
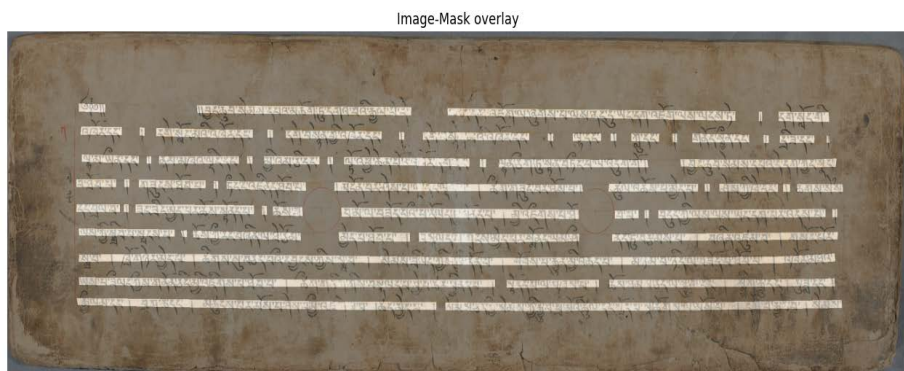
Fig. 1: Examples of characters touching adjacent lines

Therefore, we decided to train a model for line detection, as opposed to determining the interlinear space, and to employ classical post-processing methods using OpenCV for line extraction (including rotation correction, dilation, masking etc.) to extract the final lines. After several experiments with different backbone architectures commonly used in image segmentation tasks (such as U-NET), DeepLabv3+¹¹ in combination with Dice and Focal-Loss proved to be the most promising approach to handle background exclusion most effectively for the given use case.

The prepared dataset comprises 100 annotated images with annotations for images, lines, and marginalia (see examples below). Since Tibetan manuscripts can have significantly discontinuous text segments per reading line (i.e., with substantial gaps between the text segments), we experimented with two distinct versions of the dataset

¹¹ See Chen *et al.* 2018.

to determine whether these gaps necessitate consideration under all circumstances.



Figs. 2 & 3: The same folio being annotated with and without considering gaps in the line

Since the entire collection maintains a relatively consistent page layout and resolution, it proved feasible to train a model based on a down-sampled version of the entire image, rather than employing the more common approach of image tiling. Accordingly, we down-sampled the entire image to a resolution of 1024×320 pixels and trained two image segmentation models to identify different layout elements—primarily lines, but also images, image captions, and marginalia (see figures below). We used Transkribus as an annotation tool and employed a custom export pipeline to prepare the training data. The models were then trained using a custom training pipeline built on PyTorch and PyTorch SegmentationModels.¹² The datasets and annotations are available on Zenodo and HuggingFace, including the

¹² https://github.com/qubvel-org/segmentation_models.pytorch.

original annotations in PageXML format as well as the exported masks for layout elements and lines-only.¹³

Model	Train/Val/Test Samples	Test Dice-Score	Test Jaccard-Index
Layout	80 / 10 / 10	0.95	0.64
Lines	80 / 10 / 10	0.88	0.79

Table 1: Summary of trained segmentation models



Fig. 4: Example highlighting the detected elements: images, image captions, margins, lines (each line numbered), and the determined line breaks (blue circles)



Fig. 5: Example of a multi-class mask used for image segmentation

¹³ All data generated for the project is available on Zenodo: <https://zenodo.org/records/1424773>; further also via HuggingFace: <https://huggingface.co/datasets/Eric-23xd/GlomanThang-ImageSegmentation-sensitive>, <https://huggingface.co/datasets/Eric-23xd/GlomanThang-ImageSegmentation>.



Fig. 6: Overview of the images used in the dataset

Training domain-specific OCR/HTR models remains challenging and working with datasets in under-resourced languages often requires dedicated research to enhance performance in these areas. The OCR dataset for this project comprises 508 pages drawn from different volumes, with an emphasis on covering the variety of slight script variations across the collection as well as the full orthographic range, particularly the more complex and uncommon Tibetan syllables often found in dhāraṇīs or tantric texts. The dataset was prepared using the (now deprecated) Transkribus offline client, and a custom export pipeline was written in Python to generate a line-based dataset for training custom OCR models using the Tensorflow and, subsequently, the PyTorch library. For this project, we adopted Easter2 (“Easy and Scalable Text Recognizer”) by Chaudhary *et al.* 2022, which leverages 1D convolutions in combination with residual blocks and CTC loss to facilitate OCR training. Due to its competitive performance on small datasets and lightweight architecture, it proved to be the architecture of choice for the given scenario and resource constraints. Following initial tests based on the original implementation provided in Keras and Tensorflow 2,¹⁴ we ported the architecture to PyTorch and added custom image augmentations via albumentations (shearing, embossing, pixel dropout, Gaussian noise, etc.).

¹⁴ <https://github.com/kartikgill/Easter2>.

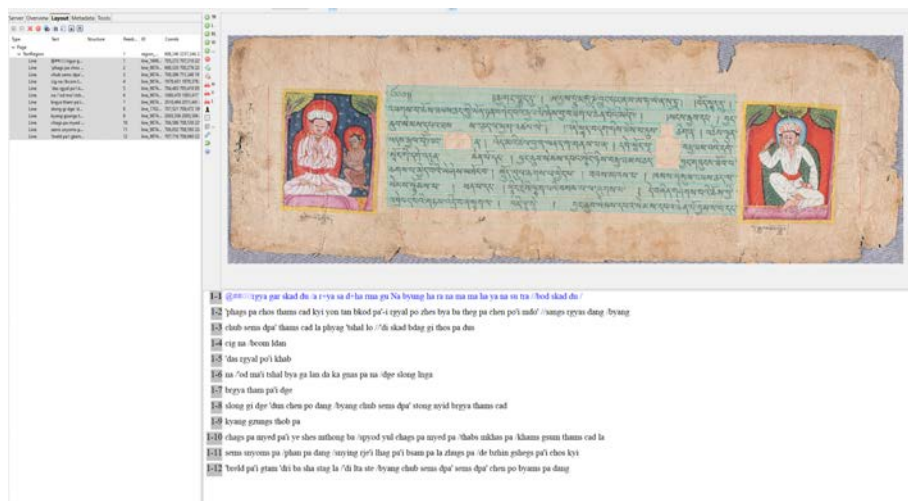


Fig. 7: Dataset preparation in Transkribus

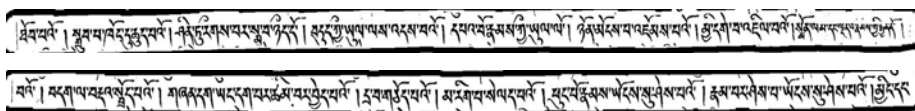
In the course of an annotation process commenced in summer 2022, the following dataset—hereafter referred to as Namgyal dataset—was generated:

Training Samples: 4107

Validation Samples: 411

Test Samples: 644

Each line was resized and padded to 3200x100 pixels. This increased image height (64 pixels being a more common choice) was chosen to mitigate potential information loss from previous down-sampling, given that Tibetan letter stacks are much more complex and detailed than those in Roman scripts.



Figs. 8 & 9: Line image samples extracted from Transkribus

Trained OCR Models

The following overview summarizes the models trained during the course of the project. We generally refer to the models trained on the Namgyal dataset as “Early Tibetan Manuscript Uchan.” For

comparison, a Transkribus model was trained using the PyLaia backend. The other models are based on our PyTorch implementation of the Easter2 architecture using Wylie-encoded labels. We trained models solely on the Namgyal dataset and also fine-tuned BDRC’s latest BigUchan model using the same dataset. The trained models can be used via the inference pipeline provided on Github¹⁵ or as part of BDRC’s desktop application, forthcoming in 2025. The Transkribus model is accessible through the Transkribus ecosystem under the name Early Tibetan Manuscript Uchan. An evaluation of the test set using the BigUchan model without fine-tuning is also provided.¹⁶

Model	Architecture	Encoding	CER / Accuracy on Validation Set
Early Tibetan Manuscript Uchan	PyLaia HTR (Transkribus)	Wylie	1.9% (=0.019?) ¹⁷
Early Tibetan Manuscript Uchan	Easter2	Wylie	CER: 0.041
Early Tibetan Manuscript Uchan	CRNN	Wylie	CER: 0.04
BDRC’s BigUchan 1	Easter2	Wylie	CER: 0.069
Fine-tuned Namgyal model on BigUchan 1	Easter2	Wylie	CER: 0.05

Table 2: Overview of trained models and the mean CER on the test set

¹⁵ The code is accessible on <https://github.com/eric86y/Namgyal-OCR>. The repository additionally includes a Jupyter notebook that demonstrates a sample workflow. However, some technical setup, including a Python environment and requisite packages, is necessary.

¹⁶ The trained models are available on Huggingface. For the Easter2 version, see <https://huggingface.co/Eric-23xd/EarlyTibetan-Manuscript-Uchan>. For the CRNN version, see: <https://huggingface.co/Eric-23xd/EarlyTibetan-Manuscript-Uchan-CRNN>. For the version fine-tuned on BigUchan 1, see <https://huggingface.co/Eric-23xd/EarlyTibetan-Manuscript-Uchan-BigUchan>. All models are also available on the project’s Zenodo page: <https://zenodo.org/records/14247731>. The official Github repository of the project can be accessed here: <https://github.com/eric86y/Namgyal-OCR>.

¹⁷ Transkribus provides CER scores for both training and validation sets. However, it remains unclear whether the validation set is actually used as a proper test set. To facilitate a meaningful performance comparison, we used the Transkribus’s “validation data” as hold-out test set.

Acknowledgements

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Mindfulness from a Mahāyāna Perspective: Sūtric and Tantric Aspects

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Mindfulness in the West has largely been taught and practiced through sources from the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. It is therefore worthwhile to explore an often-overlooked perspective: the practice of mindfulness in Mahāyāna traditions. These traditions have produced a substantial body of literature on mindfulness, both in the context of *sūtras* and *tantras*. A closer examination of these sources provides nuanced insights into the role mindfulness plays within the Mahāyāna framework. For this paper, I have confined my selection of material to a limited number of works, or rather excerpts, from Mahāyāna texts used in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. Regarding the Tibetan works, I have focused specifically on the sources of the Dakpo Kagyupa and its teaching of *mahāmudrā*.¹

In general, with regard to the practice of mindfulness, Mahāyāna sources emphasize the cultivation of non-reifying and non-dual states of mind to enhance a bodhisattva's training in insight and compassion. Some sūtric sources, such as *The Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines* (*Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*), bear similarities to well-known Pāli texts like the longer *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (*The Longer Discourse on the Application of Mindfulness*). Other texts present mindfulness and in particular the fourfold application of mindfulness from the expansive perspective of a bodhisattva's training in generating the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. Notable examples include *The Teachings by Akṣayamati* (*Akṣayamatinirdeśa*) and *The Discourse on the Application of Mindfulness of the Sacred Dharma* (*Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra*). This paper aims to provide insights into the principal views and practical applications of mindfulness within Mahāyāna Buddhist practice in India and Tibet.

To understand mindfulness in the context of Buddhist practice, it is important to first situate it within the broader framework of meditation. Buddhist meditation generally encompasses training in calming abiding (Sanskrit: *śamatha*; Pāli: *saṃatha*) and deep insight (*vipaśyanā*;

¹ For a broader choice of material and further analysis, please see my book *The Buddha's Gift to the World: A Practitioner's Guide to the Roots of Mindfulness. An Exploration across Indian and Tibetan Traditions*. Shambala Publications. 2024.

vipassanā), with mindfulness (*smṛti*; *sati*) playing a pivotal and multifaceted role in this process. In fact, these practices—calming abiding and deep insight—form the core of meditative practice across all Buddhist traditions, including Mahāyāna, which incorporates both sūtric and tantric elements.

In this context, “mindfulness” refers not to the object of meditation but to the manner in which meditation is undertaken. Mindfulness is not an isolated quality; it must be accompanied by other wholesome mental factors. Asaṅga’s *Compendium of the Abhidharma* (*Abhidharmasamuccaya*), a seminal text in Mahāyāna Buddhism, lists mindfulness (*smṛti*) as one of the five mental factors that determine the object of attention during moments of focused perception. The other four are intention (*chanda*), determination (*adhimokṣa*), concentration (*saṁādhi*), and discernment (*prajñā*). By engaging in meditation with these qualities, practitioners are able to immerse themselves deeply in the respective training in stabilizing the mind and familiarizing themselves with the nature of reality. This enables practitioners to approach the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice in Mahāyāna terms: the complete and perfect awakening of a buddha, the cessation of delusion achieved through wisdom imbued with compassion, which transcends ignorance, afflictive defilements (*kleśa*), cognitive defilements, negative karma, and the suffering it generates.

In the context of calm abiding (*śamatha*), Vasubandhu (fourth/fifth century) writes in his commentary on Maitreya / Asaṅga’s *Ornament of Mahāyāna sūtras* (*Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*):

Mindfulness (*smṛti*; *sati*) and clear knowing (*samprajanya*; *sampajañña*) stabilize the focus. Mindfulness means that the mind does not wander, while clear knowing means that the mind knows when it has wandered.²

This definition highlights that mindfulness is essential for maintaining focus, while clear knowing, or meta-awareness, ensures that one is aware when the mind deviates from its object of attention.

In *The Treasury of the Abhidharma* (*Abhidharmakośa*), Vasubandhu further elucidates the role of mindfulness in deep insight (*vipaśyanā*). He states:

Mindfulness is insight (*prajñā*), as it results from learning, reflection, and meditation.³

² Draszczyk 2024, 13. See also *Sūtrālaṅkāravyaṅkyā*, Tibetan version in D 4026, 227a.

³ Draszczyk 2024, 14. See also *Abhidharmakośa*, verse 15a, as cited in Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje 2003, 414.

Here, mindfulness is equated with insight. It sustains awareness of an object, enabling an ever-deepening understanding of its nature. Through consistent practice, mindfulness can evolve into “pure mindfulness”—a refined state that ultimately transforms into nondual wisdom (*prajñā*), no longer a conditioned mental factor. In the Mahāyāna framework, mindfulness can become one of the eighteen qualities exclusive to buddhas, signifying uninterrupted, nondual wisdom.

To further illustrate the role of mindfulness in Buddhist practice, I will draw from excerpts of *The Questions of King Milinda* (*Milindapañhā*), which dates back to the second century BCE and recounts the dialogues between King Menander I (Milinda) and the monk Nāgasena. In one passage, the King asks Nāgasena:

“What, Nāgasena, is the characteristic mark of mindfulness?”

“Noting and keeping in mind. As mindfulness springs up in the mind of the recluse, he repeatedly notes the wholesome and unwholesome, blameless and blameworthy, insignificant and important, dark and light qualities and those that resemble them ... Thus does he cultivate those qualities that are desirable and shun those that should be avoided.”

In this dialogue, mindfulness is portrayed as a means of discerning and cultivating the wholesome while avoiding the unwholesome.

Later, Nāgasena employs the metaphor of a “city of righteousness,” where mindfulness is likened to a key element within this city:

The city of righteousness laid out by the Blessed One ... has constant mindfulness for its main street, and in that main street market-stalls are open selling flowers, perfume, fruits, antidotes, medicines, nectar, precious jewels and all kinds of merchandise. ...

“What is the nectar in the city of righteousness?” “Mindfulness of the body is like nectar, for all beings who are infused with this nectar of mindfulness of the body are relieved of all suffering. For this was said by the Blessed One: ‘They enjoy the nectar of the deathless who practice mindfulness of the body’.”⁴

In short: Mindfulness in Buddhist practice has a wide range of meanings. The following summary sets out to give an overview of the different connotations across the various Buddhist contexts. “Mindfulness” can mean:

- ... recollection; memory; bringing-to-mind; not forgetting the relevant object, instructions, or events but keeping in mind, and even associating, what happened in the past with the future.

⁴ Draszczyk 2024, 123–126. See Pesala 2021, 81–83. See <http://www.aim-well.org/milinda.html>.

- ... the ethical element of knowing what is wholesome and what is unwholesome, what should be done and what should be left undone;
- ... deliberately turning the attention to the immediate present-moment experience, being introspectively aware of it, noting an object and sustaining this attention. This also involves being aware of the filters that may be active in our mind such as desire, aversion, or indifference and such like.
- ... relating to the present-moment experience in a wakeful, alert, relaxed, friendly, and wholesome manner, without manipulating anything. In this case, it means both being with the experience and observing the experience. This does not exclude memories and associations, as the present perception naturally involves tendencies from the past.
- ... the understanding as it unfolds in the course of the practice of deep insight and can thus be quasi synonymous with discerning insight (*prajñā*). This applies in particular for the practice in the context of the fourfold "application of mindfulness."
- ... balancing the mind so that it is affected by neither distraction nor agitation, neither dullness nor torpor, paving the way for other wholesome mental states to be active.
- ... developing certain wholesome states of mind such as loving kindness and compassion, for example through training based on the Mettā suttas or the Tibetan Buddhist Lojong practice.

At a highly advanced level, mindfulness can also relate to a nondualistic mind:

- Embedded in wisdom and compassion, this advanced-level mindfulness is focused on just the present-moment experience, free from the entanglement of reification and thus from any conceptualizations about the experience. In this sense, in certain Mahāyāna traditions such as Chan, Zen, Mahāmudrā, and Dzogchen, it can even relate to nondualistic, direct, and nonconceptual awareness. A "nondualistic state of mind" is a formulation that is not common in Theravāda Buddhism. It is, however, part of the Mahāyāna traditions. Some Indian Buddhist masters chose in this connection to supplement the term *smṛti* with *a-smṛti*, that is, non[dual] mindfulness. Thereby they denote a state of mindfulness beyond the constraints of dualistic dichotomy. Tibetan Buddhist masters also employed the term "pure

mindfulness”⁵ to denote a quality of mindfulness that is cultivated without or almost without conceptual mental factors.

Let us now examine mindfulness in the context of the fourfold application of mindfulness (*smṛtipaṣṭhāna*; *satipaṭṭhāna*). This training is regarded as a direct path toward awakening, as it directly addresses mistaken notions (*viparyāsa*). It does so by cultivating mindfulness with regard to the body, feelings, the mind, and dharmas/dhammas/phenomena. Mistaken notions regarding matter and mind inevitably give rise to proliferations (*prapañca*), which, in turn, trigger various layers of conceptuality (*vikalpa*). These concepts—or, shall we say, the storylines that our deluded minds keep telling us—activate afflictive defilements (*kleśa*), which then lead to karmic actions and their inevitable results of suffering. Insight, capable of seeing through mistaken notions, counteracts this ongoing process. This insight enables practitioners to eventually let go of proliferations, concepts, clinging to a truly existing identity, the associated emotional and cognitive defilements, and harmful actions. In this way, suffering is brought to an end. This is precisely the purpose of the fourfold application of mindfulness. Accordingly, the Buddha is recorded to have said:

This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of *dukkha* and discontent, for acquiring the true method, for the realization of *Nibbāna*, namely, the fourfold *satipaṭṭhāna*.⁶

In *The Questions of Ratnacūḍa* (*Ratnacūḍaparipṛcchā*), a Mahāyāna *sūtra* included in the collection *The Heap of Jewels* (*Ratnakūṭa*), the Buddha explains how the fourfold application of mindfulness counters mistaken views:

Mindfulness of the body overcomes the mistaken notion of the unattractive as attractive. Mindfulness of feelings overcomes the mistaken notion of the unpleasant as pleasant. Mindfulness of the mind overcomes the mistaken notion of the impermanent as permanent. Mindfulness of phenomena overcomes the mistaken notion of the identityless as possessing inherent identity.⁷

The manifold aspects of mindfulness practice described up to this point are foundational across virtually all Buddhist traditions.

In the Mahāyāna, the practice of mindfulness in general—and of the fourfold application of mindfulness in particular—are interwoven

⁵ Tibetan: *yang dag gi dran pa*.

⁶ Draszczyk 2024, 79. Translation from Pāli by Anālayo 2013, 269.

⁷ *Ratnacūḍaparipṛcchā*, Tibetan version H 91, vol. 40, 381b.

with the altruistic mindset of *bodhicitta*, on both the relative and the ultimate level. Bodhicitta—wisdom suffused with limitless compassion—constitutes the central vision of this path: the aspiration to attain the state of a perfectly awakened one, a buddha, for the benefit of all sentient beings, and to engage in the six perfections (*pāramitā*), such as generosity and ethical conduct, in pursuit of this aim. Rooted in this conventional *bodhicitta*, ultimate *bodhicitta*—the generation of wisdom through insight—is developed through studying, reflecting, and meditating. On this basis, tantric Mahāyāna also incorporates mindfulness in general and the fourfold application of mindfulness in particular.

Thus, a common feature of all Mahāyāna instructions on the fourfold application of mindfulness, both sūtric and tantric, is that they implement the principle of *bodhicitta* in its various perspectives. What is emphasized is mental training in a nonreferential or nonreifying manner of meditation allowing for nonconceptual and nondualistic wisdom to unfold. This wisdom realizes the empty, interdependent nature of all outer and inner phenomena, while not forsaking great compassion for sentient beings who are fettered in their delusion. Thus, mindfulness and in particular the fourfold application of mindfulness as taught in Mahāyāna sources—at least in its highly refined form—aims to cultivate a nondualistic mindful awareness imbued with great compassion.

The following excerpts from Mahāyāna discourses are intended to illustrate this. The first discourse presented here is an excerpt from *The Teachings by Akṣayamatī* (*Akṣayamatīnirdeśa*), an early, comprehensive, and influential Mahāyāna *sūtra*. This *sūtra* explores several key topics of the bodhisattvas' spiritual path, including the Thirty-seven Factors Conducive to Awakening. The passage on the fourfold application of mindfulness offers a compelling example of how mindfulness practice integrates the training in both conventional and ultimate *bodhicitta*. In the context of mindfulness with regard to the body, the *sūtra* states:

[Bodhisattvas], by the power of precise discernment let go of [any attachment to] their body, which simply exists as an accumulation of the four great elements, and think: "I will exhaust my body by doing whatever is to be done for all sentient beings. Just as the four great outer elements, the element of earth, the element of water, the element of fire and the element of wind, provide beings in various ways, in various forms, in various manners, by means of various objects, various substances and various kinds of pleasure; so in the same way I will transform this body, which exists as an accumulation of the four great elements, completely into something for the

enjoyment of living beings in various ways, in various forms, in various manners, by means of various objects, various substances and various kinds of pleasure.”

Guided by this motive, [bodhisattvas] consider the body as suffering, but because of their regard for sentient beings, they do not tire from bodily suffering. They consider the impermanence of the body, but do not tire from birth and death. They consider the essencelessness of the body, but do not tire from bringing all sentient beings to maturity. They consider that the body is peaceful, but do not lapse into the passivity of peacefulness. They understand that the body is emptiness, the absence of characteristics, and the absence of longing, void, but do not lapse into the extreme of the body's emptiness, absence of characteristics, absence of longing, and void.

With regard to feelings, the *sūtra* continues:

Through the mindfulness that accompanies feelings, they feel every feeling that arises, pleasant, unpleasant or neither unpleasant nor pleasant, and cultivate the seeing, the wisdom, that arises by virtue of all these feelings ... [Bodhisattvas think:] “With feelings joined to insight and wisdom, through skillful methods in putting an end to all feelings and through accumulating the roots of good embraced by great compassion, I will teach the Dharma so as to set those beings free from all feelings.” ... Furthermore, to the degree that there is reifying, to such a degree there is mental engagement; to the degree that there is mental engagement, to such a degree there are conceptualizations; to the degree that there are conceptualizations, to such a degree there are feelings. That is why the feelings of immeasurable numbers of beings are said to be immeasurable. In this way, bodhisattvas constantly contemplate feelings with regard to feelings. Thereby they develop their understanding of how feelings arise, dissipate, and abide in all sentient beings. This knowledge of feelings, of the virtuous and nonvirtuous feelings of all beings as they arise, dissipate, and abide, is called bodhisattvas' application of mindfulness that comprises contemplating feelings with regard to feelings

With regard to the mind, the *sūtra* states:

[Bodhisattvas] think: “Cause and effect are always unfailing; this dependent arising is therefore very profound. The true nature of the mind is precisely this [that is, manifesting but empty of a self-nature]. Yet, all [conventional] phenomena are dependent on causes and conditions. They do not stray [from that nature,] they are without a doer, without an owner; there is no appropriator. [Therefore, although the mind lacks a self-nature, conventionally everything arises because of causes and conditions.] So, I will deliberately accomplish the required causes [for well-being] and exert myself in wholesome accomplishing without neglecting the mind's nature.”

... By virtue of mindfulness and awareness, they abide in the true nature of phenomena, being engaged with certainty in the fact that everything is unarisen, unborn, and unceasing. ...

With regard to the dharmas or phenomena, the *sūtra* says:

Bodhisattvas constantly contemplate phenomena with regard to phenomena; they do not see any phenomenon, however small, that is not dependent arising. ... they perceive the truth only and they do not perceive that which is not the truth. ... In this way, bodhisattvas constantly contemplate phenomena with regard to phenomena; they see that buddha qualities—awakening, the path, liberation, and deliverance [from the three realms]—can arise from everything. Knowing that every phenomenon [by virtue of its empty nature] leads to deliverance, they reach the gate of [a wise and compassionate] *samādhi* that is called “nonobstruction with regard to all sentient beings.”⁸ They perceive all phenomena and all emotional defilements as being artificial [that is, not partaking of mind’s true nature], thinking: “These phenomena are without emotional defilements; they do not contain defilements. How? They are based in the actuality of the definitive meaning. Therefore, the accumulation of defilements is nonexistent, as is the accumulation of the aggregates. There is neither real desire, nor real aversion nor real delusion. The realization of this [nature] of emotional defilements is awakening, because that which is the essence of defilements is also the essence of the awakened state [both being essentially empty].” ... [Bodhisattvas,] being constantly mindful with regard to all phenomena, do not forget this mindfulness or allow it to weaken until the end of time. Contemplating phenomena with regard to phenomena, that is, the application of mindfulness, is a term that designates the immeasurable; it is all-encompassing; all buddha qualities are fully present in it. It is a term [that designates] what accomplishes the well-being of all sentient beings, vanquishes all destructive forces, and realizes self-arisen wisdom.⁹

The second excerpt is from *The Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines*, the second-longest of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*. It outlines the spiritual training of bodhisattvas across seventy-six chapters, primarily presented as dialogues between the Buddha and his renowned disciples. The excerpt below is taken from the section discussing the Thirty-

⁸ On the one hand this implies the way in which bodhisattvas connect with sentient beings with boundless compassion and wisdom. On the other hand, the expression “nonobstruction with regard to all sentient beings” points to that all sentient beings are endowed with the potential for awakening. Even though they are temporarily obstructed by the defilements, their mind-itself is utterly pure.

⁹ Draszczyk 2024, 105–115. See also *Akṣayamatīrdeśa*. Tibetan version in H 176, vol. 60, 239b–248.

seven Factors Conducive to Awakening. It marks the beginning of the discourse on the fourfold application of mindfulness. Following these introductory statements, the *sūtra* delves extensively into the application of mindfulness with regard to the body.

Further, Subhūti, with regard to the fourfold application of mindfulness in the great vehicle of bodhisattva mahāsattvas—what are the four?

They are the application of mindfulness with regard to the body, the application of mindfulness with regard to feelings, the application of mindfulness with regard to the mind, and the application of mindfulness with regard to the dharmas/phenomena.

What is the application of mindfulness with regard to the body? Subhūti, in this respect bodhisattva mahāsattvas, with regard to the internal body, contemplate the body in a manner which is not reifying. [Refrain] By virtue of being diligent, clearly knowing and mindful, they are free from any desires and discontent in regard to the world. They engage in the practice, but they do not conceptualize with respect to thoughts connected with the body. With regard to the external body, the body is contemplated in a manner which is not reifying. [Refrain] By virtue (...) With regard to the external and internal body, the body is contemplated in a manner which is not reifying. [Refrain] By virtue (...)

With regard to internal feelings, mind and phenomena, these are contemplated in a manner which is not reifying. [Refrain] By virtue of being diligent, clearly knowing and mindful, they are free from any desires and discontent in regard to the world. They engage in the practice, but they do not conceptualize with respect to thoughts connected with these phenomena.

With regard to external feelings, mind, and phenomena, these are contemplated in a manner which is not reifying. [Refrain] By virtue (...) With regard to external and internal feelings, mind and phenomena, these are contemplated in a manner which is not reifying. [Refrain] By virtue (...)¹⁰

While there are many similarities with the long Pāli *Discourse on the Application of mindfulness*, there are also some differences:

- A minor difference concerns the sequence of topics in the contemplation with regard to the body. In *The Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines* the sequence is: (1) bodily postures, (2) physical activities, (3) breathing, (4) bodily elements, (5) anatomical parts, and (6) the corpse in decay.

The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta's (MI 55–63) sequence is: (1) breathing, (2)

¹⁰ Draszczyk 2024, 82–88. See also *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, Tibetan version H 10, vol. 26, 327b–328a.

- bodily postures, (3) physical activities, (4) anatomical parts, (5) bodily elements, and (6) the corpse in decay.
- A major difference relates to *how* attention is to be developed. In the refrain of *The Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines* the following is repeated time and again: as they are engaging in the fourfold contemplations, bodhisattvas are instructed to cultivate states of mind free from all fixations and reference points, free from reifying; in other words, to develop nondualistic, non-conceptual mindful awareness.
 - Another difference concerns the relative lengths of the sections dealing with the four reference points: In *The Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines* the instructions are given in great detail with regard to the body, while the other three—feelings, the mind, and the dharmas/phenomena—are dealt with only briefly. This might be an indication that in early versions the fourfold application of mindfulness was centered on the body; with this as a basis and integrated in the contemplation of the body, the other three were naturally included.
 - A further difference concerns the fourth reference point, phenomena or the dharmas/dhammas. *The Discourse on the Application of mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta)* deals with five topics designed to deepen the practice of the preceding three, that is, the contemplation with regard to the body, feelings, and the mind. The five topics are (1) the five hindrances, (2) the five aggregates, (3) the six sense fields, (4) the seven factors of awakening, and (5) the four noble truths. *The Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines* and the other Mahāyāna versions of the fourfold application of mindfulness usually do not deal with these five topics in connection with the fourth reference point, the dharmas.

All in all, the section on the fourfold application of mindfulness in *The Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines* serves as a fine example of both the similarities between the Theravāda and Mahāyāna scriptures and of the specific emphasis on nonconceptual wisdom that is central to Mahāyāna teachings.

The meditation practice outlined in *The Teachings by Akṣayamati*, in *The Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines*, and numerous other Mahāyāna sūtras, have been further elaborated by various teachers in India and in Tibet. These include masters from the Dakpo Kagyu schools in Tibet, as well as their Indian predecessors, such as Saraha and Maitrīpa (approx. 986–1063). The umbrella term for these teachings, as transmitted by Saraha, Maitrīpa, and Tibetan Dakpo Kagyu teachers, is

mahāmudrā. In Tibetan Buddhism these instructions were significantly shaped by Gampopa (1079–1153) and later often referred to as Dakpo Mahāmudrā.

Before delving further into this tradition, I would like to note that the practice of mindfulness in the context of the Mahāmudrā tradition incorporates both mindfulness (*smṛti*) and non[-dual] mindfulness (*as-mṛti*) to attain profound, non-conceptual realization (*amanasikāra*), which transcends dualistic distinctions. The next section provides background information on this topic:

“Mahāmudrā” is a Sanskrit compound. In the context of Buddhism, it is primarily associated with the practice of Vajrayāna, the Buddhist *tantras*. Literally translated, *mahā* means “great” and *mudrā* means “symbol” or “seal.” In the context of the Buddhist *tantras*, Mahāmudrā usually refers to mind’s inherent wisdom, its emptiness and luminosity, which can be experienced during a tantric empowerment. However, in the Dakpo Mahāmudrā traditions, it can also be practiced outside the framework of the complex Buddhist *tantras*.

The practice of Dakpo Mahāmudrā, particularly in its non-tantric form, became synonymous with the term *amanasikāra* as used by the Mahāmudrā master Maitrīpa. Maitrīpa, a prominent scholar-practitioner, used this term to describe a state of mind that is non-reifying and non-conceptual. The most common English translation of *amanasikāra* is “mental nonengagement,” rendering the prefix “a” as a negation of “*manasikāra*,” that is mental engagement or attention. However, *amanasikāra* can also be interpreted in a more profound sense, with “a” signifying nonorigination or emptiness, and “*manasikāra*” referring to the state of mind that recognizes emptiness.¹¹ Maitrīpa employed *amanasikāra* in this latter sense, representing non-conceptual realization or the “Mahāmudrā of awareness and emptiness.” The term denotes a non-dual, naturally pure and luminous mind, which directly apprehends reality without reification. This interpretation aligns *amanasikāra* with references found in various *sūtras*.

Maitrīpa’s use of *amanasikāra* is in contrast to the way how Kamalaśīla (8th century), another key figure in Indian Buddhist scholarship, used the term *amanasikāra*. For Kamalaśīla, it meant *yoniso manasikāra*—“well-founded mental engagement”—a method of progressively realizing emptiness through reasoning and conceptual analysis. While Kamalaśīla’s approach is analytical, Maitrīpa suggests a more direct, non-conceptual path of wisdom that emphasizes experiential recognition of the mind’s luminous nature. However, both Maitrīpa and Kamalaśīla share the view that—in this context—*amanasikāra* is not an absence of mental activity or a withdrawal of attention in particular

¹¹ For details on Maitrīpa, see Mathes 2021.

ways, but a form of mental engagement that cultivates non-conceptual wisdom. It should also be noted that Maitrīpa's emphasis on direct experience in the framework of the Mahāmudrā tradition includes both gradual and sudden approaches to realization.

The other key figure of Dakpo Mahāmudrā mentioned above is the Indian mahāsiddha Saraha. He is a legendary figure, with little concrete information about his life. While modern scholars place him around the ninth century CE, based primarily on the dating of texts he commented on, traditional Tibetan sources place him within a broad historical range—from two generations after the Buddha, as a disciple of the Buddha's son, Rāhula, to the second century CE, as the guru of Nāgārjuna. This latter view is especially prevalent in the Kagyu traditions. It is said that Saraha was an esteemed Brahmin who encountered a woman—who was, in fact, a wisdom *ḍākinī*—carving arrows in a marketplace. This *ḍākinī* is believed to have introduced Saraha to Mahāmudrā through symbolic gestures or signs, key instructions which helped Saraha realize the true nature of the mind. According to tradition, the two then traveled across the land, teaching others through songs. These songs, known as *dohās*, form a significant source for the Kagyu teachings on Mahāmudrā.

In his songs, Saraha employs these symbolic signs or key instructions in the following sequence: (1) mindfulness (*smṛti*), (2) non-dual mindfulness (*asmṛti*), (3) nonarising, and (4) transcending the intellect.

The first key instruction “mindfulness,” pertains to the common meaning of Buddhist mindfulness practice—registering whatever is experienced, focusing the mind without distraction with the goal to cultivate focused attention and sustained introspective awareness (*smṛti*). Through the second key instruction, “non-dual mindfulness,” practitioners gradually come to understand the emptiness of all appearances and perceptions. It is emphasized that phenomena in the external world are devoid of inherent existence and arise solely in the perceiving mind, which too is empty of an inherent essence (without an object, there is no subject). In this way, the illusory nature of all things becomes apparent. As the dichotomy between perceiver and perceived vanishes, mindfulness transforms into non-dual mindfulness (*asmṛti*). This shift allows the practitioner to relinquish the attachment to “I” and “mine.”

Further cultivating the practice, supported by the third key instruction of non-arising, the practitioner becomes able to unify appearance and mind in “a single taste.” This realization implies the understanding that appearances and emptiness are inseparable. Practitioners recognize that experiences within the duality of self and other never truly

arose. Mind itself, being empty of self-nature and luminous, is recognized as non-arisen.

Through continued cultivation of this insight, practitioners transcend all tendencies toward dualistic perception, ultimately transcending the intellect, the fourth key instruction. Saraha captures the second stage of this process when he states:

Mindfully sustaining the mindfulness of illusion-like appearances, nothing whatsoever is seen; there is only non-dual mindfulness.¹²

With regard to the third and fourth key instruction, he says:

This mindfulness is unborn; it is the source of all accomplishments. Not reifying anything, whether inner or outer, all will be accomplished.¹³

Thus, *asmṛti* or non[dual] mindfulness signifies the mindfulness that is aware of the emptiness and illusory nature of all appearances, free from conceptual reification, leading to *amanasikāra* or nonconceptual realization.

This approach to the practice of mindfulness where *asmṛti* and *amanasikāra* play a key role, can already be found in several Mahāyāna sūtras, such as *The Questions of Sāgaramati* (*Sāgaramatiparipṛcchā*) and *The Teachings of the Buddha* (*Buddhasaṃgīti*). In the former we find the following description:

The body, feelings, the mind, and phenomena are realized as *dharma* [that is, as they truly are], which points to the [fourfold] application of mindfulness, that is non[dual] mindfulness and non[conceptual] realization. (...) ¹⁴

In *The Teachings of the Buddha* (*Buddhasaṃgīti*) it is said:

Mañjuśrī: “How does one constantly practice mindfulness?”
[Buddha:] “By way of non[dual] mindfulness and non[conceptual] realization with regard to all phenomena.”¹⁵

Maitrīpa relied on both these sūtras and Saraha's key instructions and employed *asmṛti* and *amanasikāra* within the context of teaching Mahāmudrā. With his scholarly background, Maitrīpa explained their use in philosophical categories. He points out that *amanasikāra* signifies a so-called implicative negation, indicating the mind's lack of inherent

¹² Draszczyk 2024, 153. See also Saraha 1991a, 214–227, verse 28a–b.

¹³ Ibid., 153. See also Saraha 1991b, 113–115, verse 47c–d.

¹⁴ Draszczyk 2024, 66. See also *Sāgaramatiparipṛcchā*, Tibetan version H 153, vol. 58, 33b.

¹⁵ Draszczyk 2024, 148. See also *Buddhasaṃgīti*, Tibetan version D 228, 415.

self-nature, while affirming its unimpeded luminosity—wisdom and compassion as inseparable. Maitrīpa’s teachings, rooted in this approach, made his instructions accessible even to beginners.

The terminology of mindfulness versus non-dual mindfulness, used by Indian Buddhist masters such as Saraha and Maitrīpa, did not become standardized in Tibetan Buddhism. Nevertheless, it was adopted by some scholar-practitioners, notably Karmapa Mikyö Dorje and Padma Karpo.

Padma Karpo (1527–1592) was one of the most important masters of the Drukpa Kagyu tradition, its lineage holder, and a prolific author. In his *Mahāmudrā Treasury of the Victorious Ones* he delves into the connection between mindfulness and Dakpo Mahāmudrā; as a reference he uses a commentary on the well-known *Mañjuśrīsamgīti Tantra*:

The Great Commentary to the Mañjuśrīsamgīti states: “The essence of mindfulness is emptiness, is absence of characteristics, is absence of longing, and is endowment with natural luminosity. Because it possesses hundreds and thousands of meditative absorptions such as the hero-like *samādhi*, mindfulness [with these] four [features] is the king of *samādhi*.” Thus, mahāmudrā itself is the presence in mindfulness.¹⁶

The Eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorje (East Tibet, 1507–1554), one of the most important philosophers of Tibetan Buddhism and a lineage holder of the Karma Kagyu tradition, states:

The perfection of wisdom as [taught by Maitrīpa] is not separate from mindfulness and mental engagement; it consists in the absence of that type of mindfulness and mental engagement which cling to any form of extreme mental elaborations. It was taught as the unsurpassable view and meditation of the perfection of wisdom as revealed in the *sūtras* and *tantras*. (...)

So the type of mindfulness and mental engagement which is non[dual] mindfulness and non[conceptual] realization is not just the definitive meaning of the *sūtras*, but the unsurpassable definitive view and meditation of the completion processes of *mantra*[-practice].¹⁷

In Tibetan Buddhism, both the general Mahāyāna and specific tantric practices are part of the Bodhisattva’s vehicle, which is considered synonymous with Mahāyāna. “*Sūtra*” refers to the Buddha’s common

¹⁶ Draszczyk 2024, 141. See also Padma Karpo 2005, 305.

¹⁷ Draszczyk 2024, 149–150. See also. See also Karmapa Mikyö Dorje 2013, vol. 3, 81.5–16.

teachings on view, meditation, and ethics, while “*tantra*” refers to uncommon supplementary meditative practices designed to enhance a bodhisattva’s spiritual progress.

In essence, Buddhist tantric meditation—that is, the creation and completion processes—require a stable quality of mindfulness and clear knowing. More precisely, tantric meditations amount to a certain type of the fourfold application of mindfulness with regard to the body, to feelings, to the mind, and to the dharmas/phenomena. In the instructions commonly given on the creation and completion processes, the connection with the fourfold application of mindfulness is not usually explicitly stated. However, some of the basic tantric texts as well as commentaries on tantric practices offer a clear picture of the tantric views and practices regarding the fourfold application of mindfulness.

The following description of a very simple tantric meditation illustrates in broad terms how the fourfold application of mindfulness regarding the body, feelings, the mind, and the dharmas/phenomena is practiced in connection with the Buddhist *tantras*. Usually, certain prerequisites apply to a tantric meditation, such as the relevant empowerment. However, there are exceptions. One of these is an easily practiced but very effective form of meditation on the embodiment of wisdom and compassion called Avalokiteśvara in the tradition of the mahāsiddha Karma Pakshi (thirteenth century).¹⁸ While this meditation can exemplify the basic principle of the tantric fourfold application of mindfulness, we should bear in mind that where more complex tantric meditations are involved, these principles would also require more complex explanations.

(1) Mindfulness with regard to the body: the physical appearance of Avalokiteśvara is generated as a mental image. Focusing on this visualization strengthens inner calm. In his vivid appearance, embodying boundless wisdom, loving kindness, and compassion, the sheer presence of Avalokiteśvara is felt as a stabilizing support. The meditators also cultivate the awareness that the rainbow-like imagined physical manifestation of Avalokiteśvara is insubstantial and unreal, devoid of an inherent self-nature. Meditators thus train in the experience of the unity of appearance and emptiness. They also understand this unity of appearance and emptiness to be the nature of all bodies, of all appearances, that is, of their own body, of the body of other sentient beings, and of any type of physical manifestations such as the “bodies” of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touchable things. All manifestations are experienced as simultaneously appearing and empty of a self-nature:

¹⁸ See for example the explanations on this practice in Karma Chagme 2002, vol. 2, 262–269. See also Wallace 1998, 49–61.

as they manifest, they are experienced to have their features and effectiveness, yet all the while they are devoid of a substantial nature. Furthermore, during this meditation on the unity of pure manifestation and emptiness, meditators allow their minds to be completely at ease and joyful. They are thereby “sealing” their experience with joy.

(2) Mindfulness with regard to feelings: embedded in the mindfulness with regard to the body, in particular as to the physical manifestation of Avalokiteśvara as detailed above, meditators are aware of any type of feelings, pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. They are aware of them as they manifest without attributing a substantial nature to them. This opens the pathway to experiencing feelings as the unity of bliss and emptiness.

(3 + 4) Mindfulness with regard to the mind and to the dharmas/phenomena: having first generated the mental image of Avalokiteśvara and gone through the steps in the visualization and the associated mantra recitation, meditators complete the practice by dissolving the mental image of Avalokiteśvara. Then the mind is allowed to abide in its true nature, self-aware and self-luminous. A text composed by the mahāsiddha Tangtong Gyalpo (1361–1485 CE) describing the meditation on Avalokiteśvara says at this point:

Now, the outer world is the pure land of Sukhāvātī, and body, speech, and mind of sentient beings, the world’s content, are inseparable from Avalokiteśvara’s body, speech, and mind: appearance, sound, and awareness are inseparable from emptiness. (...) Any recognitions and thoughts occur in the expanse of great wisdom.¹⁹

In this phase, meditators cultivate deep insight by abiding in the unobstructed, empty and nondualistic nature of mind, free from any fixation on “I” and “mine.” Whatever is known, felt, or remembered—any *dharma*/phenomenon—is experienced as the simultaneity of appearance and emptiness, of bliss and emptiness, of clarity and emptiness.

The Fifth Shamarpa, Könchog Yenlak (1525–1583), in his commentary on *The Profound Inner Meaning* (*Zab mo nang don*) by the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, encapsulates the tantric practice of the fourfold application of mindfulness by stating:

We could also say that the application of mindfulness with regard to the body, the mind, phenomena, and feelings means that our

¹⁹ Draszczyk 2021, 24–25.

body appears as the buddha aspect, the buddha aspect as the mind, the mind as emptiness, and emptiness manifests as great bliss.²⁰

In closing, I would like to quote from the *Śrī Vajramaṇḍalāṅkāra*:

Those who constantly meditate on the supreme wisdom of nonduality equal the incomparable Buddha. When, by virtue of this supreme *yoga*, we meditate on the supreme ground of the fourfold application of mindfulness, we will soon become like the *vajra*-holder [that is, a buddha].²¹

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List of Abbreviations

- D Derge edition of Bka' 'gyur and Bstan 'gyur. *The Tibetan Tripiṭaka*, Taipei Edition. Taipei, Taiwan: SMC Publishing, 1991.
 H Lhasa edition of the Bka' 'gyur and Bstan 'gyur. Lhasa: Zhol par khang, 1934.

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²⁰ Draszczyk 2024, 139. See also Shamar Könchog Yenlak 2020, 39–40.

²¹ Draszczyk 2024, 139. See also *Śrī Vajramaṇḍalāṅkāra Mahātantrārāja*, H 459, vol. 86, 32b.

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An Introduction to the *sDom gsum kha skong* and Annotated Translation and Critical Edition of Its Third Chapter*

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Introduction to the *sDom gsum kha skong*

he *sDom gsum kha skong* of Go rams pa bSod nams seng ge (Go rams pa, henceforth, 1429–1489)¹ represents a comprehensive and mature work on the various aspects of Tibetan Buddhist doctrines and praxes, by the author, composed in verse form and accompanied by a separate topical outline and a response to scholarly inquiries, where he identifies the proponents of the positions critiqued in the work. In the latter, Go rams pa identifies, by name, his primary intellectual interlocutors and ‘rivals’ whose positions he subjects to systematic critique. The text engages with many of Buddhism’s fundamental philosophical concepts and meditative practices as they were transmitted to Tibet through an extensive process of translation, transmission, and interpretation spanning more than seven centuries. This transmission is most notably exemplified by the rendering of thousands of technical treatises from Sanskrit into classical Tibetan. Given its comprehensive scope, this work can be characterized as an intellectual history of Tibetan Buddhism during its author’s time.

The main body of the text consists of Go rams pa’s critical analysis, evaluation, and exploration of various scholarly positions that emerged in the period between Sa paṅ’s death and Go rams pa’s own entry into Tibetan intellectual discourse. While the title might suggest that it serves *merely as a supplement* to Sa paṅ’s magnum opus, the

* This paper is a revised and expanded version of a section of a master’s thesis submitted at the University of Hamburg in 2019 by the author.

¹ The full title of this work is *sDom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba’i kha skong gzhi lam ’bras gsum gsal bar byed pa’i legs bshad ’od kyi snang ba*. For a discussion on sources of Go rams pa’s life, see Heimbel 2020, and for brief sketches of his life, see Cabezón et al 2007. For a detailed list of Go rams pa’s works, see Jamtsho 2020.

sDom gsum rab dbye,² it is more accurately understood as a continuation of that seminal work, both in spirit and methodology.³ As Go rams pa himself articulates in the epilogue, this work serves as a corrective measure against the proliferation of 'innovative ideas' (*rang bzo*) that he perceived as having deviated from the Buddha's intended meaning.⁴ Such innovations, he argues, lack both scriptural foundation and logical coherence, thereby misleading less informed practitioners and distorting Buddhist practices as embodied in the three sets of vows. In an orthodox tradition, like the Tibetan Buddhist one, an accusation of *rang bzo* is a serious case, and its rhetorical value is great.

Unlike the majority of *sDom gsum* literature,⁵ Go rams pa's *sDom gsum kha skong* is not primarily prescriptive in nature, cataloging the numerous vows, pledges, and commitments incumbent upon Buddhist practitioners. Rather, it functions as an analytical treatise that meticulously examines the theoretical frameworks, practical instructions, and ritual practices established by scholars within their shared Buddhist tradition. Thus, the work possesses both polemical intent and apologetic dimensions.

To contextualize, I will first provide an overview of other scholarly works by the author addressing the three vows and summarize the remaining chapters, which are not translated here, in the *sDom gsum kha skong* text. Additionally, I will compile an inventory of the commentarial literature that has emerged around this work throughout subsequent centuries, followed by a short discussion of the specific chapter being currently translated and edited.

This context is followed by translation and edition. Given the technical nature of Buddhist concepts discussed in this text, I have provided explanatory footnotes to the annotated translation, drawing primarily from Go rams pa's other works. Additionally, I have indicated parallel passages in the author's other writings and

² For an introduction and transition of this work, see Rhoton 2002. On the life and works of Sa paṇ, see Jackson 1987.

³ Sa paṇ, at the end of his *sDom gsum rab dbye*, exhorts learned scholars to engage in refutation of spurious doctrines and practices. See *sDom gsum rab dbye* (p.94): *gal te lung dang rigs pa'i gnad// shes pa'i blo can rnams kyi de// legs par dpyod la dgag bsgrub gyis//*. Go rams pa seemingly took up this challenge and invitation, with gusto and zeal.

⁴ See *sDom gsum kha skong* (p.704): *de dag lung dang rigs pa yis// rnam par bsal nas gnad rnams la// skal ldan ma 'khrul spyod pa'i phyir// bstan bcos chen po 'di byas so//*. The citations from the *sDom gsum kha skong* in the footnotes are based on the reprint of the sDe dge xylograph edition.

⁵ For sources and discussions of some of the representative literature on the three vows, see Sobisch 2002.

referenced ideas expressed in primary sources that Go rams pa considered authoritative. The annotated translation is based on the critical edition included in this article.

The *sDom gsum kha skong* contains extensive references and quotations primarily from Tibetan Buddhist canonical literature. Source identification has been conducted mainly through consultation with the Tibetan canons, with Sanskrit parallels referred to in the endnotes where available. It should be noted that while the works Go rams pa referenced are of Indian origin, he accessed them through their Tibetan translations. For instance, Go rams pa's numerous quotations from the MMK, in this chapter, have been traced to its version as preserved in the two Tibetan canons, documented in a recent edition of this work. All citations are identified and documented in the critical edition's endnotes.

1. Go rams pa's Works on *sDom gsum*

Go rams pa composed numerous works of different genres and various lengths on the theme of the three vows. The following is the list of these works:

a. *sDom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba'i rnam bshad rgyal ba'i gsung rab kyi dgongs pa gsal ba*

This is Go rams pa's seminal commentary on Sa paṇ's renowned and provocative treatise, the *sDom gsum rab dbye*.

b. *sDom gsum rab dbye'i spyi don yid bzhin nor bu*

It is the author's account of the sources, ritualistic practices through which one receives the three vows, the nature of the vows received, and their implications in terms of pledges, and resolution to seemingly contradictory prescriptions in different frameworks of the three vows.

c. *sDom pa gsum gyi bstan bcos la dris shing rtsod pa'i lan sdom gsum 'khrul spong*

Go rams pa's answers to the questions Shākyā mchog ldan⁶ put forward on many of Sa paṇ's remarks in the *sDom gsum rab dbye*.

d. *mDo rgyud kun gyi don bsdus pa snying po yid kyi mun pa rnam par sel ba*

⁶ For an introduction to the life of this scholar, who is contemporary of Go rams pa, see Komarovski 2012.

Go rams pa's textual outline of Sa paṇ's the *sDom gsum rab dbye*, which he used in his commentary on the latter.

e. *sDom pa gsum gyi rab tub dbye ba'i kha skong gzhi lam 'bras gsum gsal bar byed pa'i legs bshad 'od kyi snag ba*

The work discussed below, whose third chapter is translated and edited here.

f. *sDom gsum kha skong gi bsdus don*

Topical outline of the *sDom gsum kha skong*.

g. *Dam tshig dang sdom pa'i rnam gzhas zab don bdud rtsi'i snying po*

It is a short work on the theme of tantric pledges, presented within the framework of different classes of tantras. This and the next works are not included within the reprint of Go rams pa's collected works made in India, but are present in the Xylographic print available in Tibet.

h. *Dam tshig rnam bshad zab don snying po bsdus*

This is a lexical commentary on a basic work that teaches the fourteen root downfalls.

i. *rNal 'byor chen po'i sdom pa'i gnad bye brag tu bshad pa zab don bdud rtsi'i nying khu 'chi ba med pa'i go 'phang sbyin pa*

This is a verse work on the nature, etymology, ritual, etc., associated with the vows and commitments of *yoginītantra*.

j. *Zab don bdud rtsi'i nying khu 'chi ba med pa'i go 'phang sbyin pa'i rnam bshad bdud rtsi spel ba*

An auto-commentary on the previous work.

k. *'Dul ba rgya mtsho'i snying po*

An independent work summarizing the essentials of *Vinaya*, a literary corpus that primarily discusses the rules and regulations, guiding the behavior of ordained ones in a monastic setting and private life.

2. The Structure and Contents of the *sDom gsum kha skong*

The text is structured in five chapters of varying lengths, composed in verse form, except for a brief prose colophon at its conclusion. The work is organized around the interrelated yet distinct themes of ground (*gzhi*), paths (*lam*), and resultant states (*'bras bu*) in Buddhist soteriology—a traditional framework encompassing Buddhist doctrine, praxis, and the transformational state that practices are

purported to bring forth.

In the first chapter of the *Kha skong*,⁷ Go rams pa examines the theoretical framework and complex questions surrounding Buddha-nature. He presents his interpretation alongside what he considers “erroneous” understandings held by various Tibetan scholars, critiquing them through scriptural citations and logical reasoning. For Go rams pa, as for other Buddhist scholars, these two approaches are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary, demonstrating both natural and cultivated philosophical sophistication. The concept of Buddha-nature is analyzed from both sūtric and tantric perspectives and is contextualized within the broader framework of *gotra* (*rigs*), which encompasses the notion of innate spiritual disposition and intellectual propensities.

In this chapter, he examines five distinct perspectives on Buddha-nature and related issues. Go rams pa’s theoretical position maintains that Buddha-nature represents a union of unconditioned, continuous-unimpeded luminosity and emptiness free from the four extremes (*gsal stong zung ’jug ’dus ma byas*)—his interpretation of Buddha-nature from the Madhyamaka philosophical perspective. This chapter can be used cautiously as a valuable historical record of Tibetan Buddhist intellectual discourse, documenting how scholars theorized and systematized various conflicting ideas regarding the ontological nature of Buddha-nature (*Tathāgatagarbha*, *de gshegs snying po*) presented in diverse Indian sources. The subject matter is both historically multifaceted and conceptually complex. Go rams pa provides a concise overview of how the concept of Buddha-nature was understood and explicated across various doxographical schools of Buddhist philosophy.

In the first chapter’s discussion of *gzhi*, Go rams pa addresses the positions of five scholars:

a) The perspective of dGe lugs scholar Darma rin chen,⁸ who proposes that Buddha-nature constitutes merely a negation of inherent existence concerning the mind afflicted by defilements, and this is effected through and established with logical reasoning. This non-implicative negation (*med dgag*) follows the logical refutation of the inherent nature concerning the mind. Go rams pa argues that this conception cannot represent Buddha-nature nor serve as a foundation for spiritual training, as it functions neither as a basis for saṃsāric experiences nor for nirvāṇic bliss, being merely a negation.

⁷ For a translation of this chapter, see Jorden 2003.

⁸ For this identification and summary of the position criticized, see *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.56). For the presentation of the idea and its criticism, see *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.648.5-649.1).

b) The interpretation of Rong ston Shes bya kun rig,⁹ who categorizes Buddha-nature into two types: Conditioned and Unconditioned. Go rams pa contends that accepting Buddha-nature as a conditioned phenomenon represents a fundamental error characteristic of Buddhist realist philosophy.

c) The position maintained by Bu ston Rin chen grub and numerous contemporary scholars across western, central, and eastern Tibet,¹⁰ who assert that Buddha-nature is exclusively possessed by Buddhas and absent in unenlightened sentient beings. Go rams pa argues that this contradicts both worldly conventions and numerous scriptural pronouncements where the Buddha explicitly states that all beings possess Buddha-nature.

d) The theory proposed by many contemporary philosophers (*deng sang gi mtshan nyid pa phal cher ro*),¹¹ who maintain that two purified states—the naturally pure reality (*rang bzhin rnam dag*) and reality free of adventitious stains (*blo bur dri bral*)—are contradictory. Go rams pa argues that these states are not only non-contradictory but identical, differentiated only provisionally within the context of practitioners' spiritual development.

e) The philosophical stance of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan,¹² who maintains that the Perfected Nature (*pariniṣpanna*, *yongs grub*) is hypostatically established, possessing inherent nature.

Go rams pa's analysis demonstrates remarkable intellectual independence, extending his critique across multiple schools and scholars, including his teachers, here Rong ston being an instance. The chapter's primary focus, however, centers on his critique of Dol po pa's views, a prominent proponent of the influential and controversial 'Emptiness of Other' (*gzhan stong*) school of Middle Way philosophy in Tibet. Go rams pa's principal contention with Dol po pa's position lies in the latter's attribution of absolute quality to Buddha-nature and its various implications, particularly regarding the hermeneutics of sūtras from the second and third turnings of the wheel of dharma and their associated treatises. Furthermore, Go rams pa identifies what he

⁹ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.56), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.649.1-649.3).

¹⁰ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (pp.56-57), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.649.3-651.5).

¹¹ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.57), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.651.5-652.4).

¹² See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.56). Go rams pa also adds some other scholars, to whom he attributes the positions under investigation. See *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.652.4-659.6). On this figure, see Stearns 2010. For a collection of essays on the literature and doctrines of Jonang, see Sheehy et al, 2019.

perceives as an inconsistency between Dol po pa's theoretical framework and meditative practices. Through meticulous analysis, Go rams pa demonstrates divergences between Dol po pa's views and those of Nāgārjuna, whom Dol po pa claimed as authoritative. Notably, despite his philosophical criticisms, Go rams pa appears to maintain profound personal respect and admiration for Dol po pa, as evidenced by several laudatory¹³ verses in this work and explicit expressions of admiration in other influential writings, even while critiquing his positions.

The subsequent three chapters address matters concerning the Vows of Individual Liberation (*prātimokṣa*, *so sor thar pa'i sdom pa*), the Vows of Bodhisattvas (*byang chub sems dpa'i sdom pa*), and the Vows of Awareness Holder (*rig pa 'dzin pa'i sdom pa*). According to Go rams pa, these three tiers of vows comprehensively encompass the entire spectrum of Buddhist paths¹⁴ and spiritual practices, ranging from monastic disciplines through meditation on emptiness to advanced tantric practices and constructions of receptacles. These practices, far from being contradictory, serve to reinforce and deepen one another's experiential dimensions. Moreover, Go rams pa emphasizes that successful engagement with the more advanced practices necessarily requires a firm grounding in the foundational ones.

In the second chapter, Go rams pa defines the essential nature of the Vow of Individual Liberation as "the avoidance of harming others and its causes" (*gzhan gnod gzhi dang bcas pa spang ba*). These causes comprise the afflictions—the underlying psychological and emotional states from which physical and verbal actions arise, rooted in both the misidentification of the person and dichotomizing conceptualities. In this chapter, he again conducts a comprehensive analysis of five distinct doctrinal positions and practical applications of Vinaya liturgies and rituals concerning the Vow of Individual Liberation, as practiced and disseminated by five prominent Tibetan scholars.

The scholars whose views Go rams pa critically examines are:

a) Numerous Piṭaka holders who,¹⁵ confining themselves

¹³ For example, Go rams pa speaks of Dol po pa, in the *sDom gsum kha skong* (p.659), as follows: *bdag ni dpal ldan dus 'khor gyi// srol 'dzin nyams rtogs mthar phyin pa'i// skyes chen brgyud pa 'di dag la// yid ni shin tu dang mod kyi//*, and in his *lTa ba'i shan 'byed*, he says (p.420): *mkhyen rab dang thugs rje phul du byung zhing nyams dang rtogs pa'i dbang phyug kun mkhyen dol bu ba shes rab rgyal mtshan...//*.

¹⁴ For example, see the author's comments in *sDom gsum spyi don* (p.331): *de yang sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa'i nyams len ma lus pas dom pa gsum gyi khong su 'dus pa yin te/*.

¹⁵ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.58), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.660.2-661.3).

exclusively to the *Abhidharma* and *Vinaya*, maintain three principal positions: that the *Prātimokṣa* possesses the nature of inanimate matter (*sdom pa gzugs can du 'dod pa*), that its sub-classification is definitively established as eight (*grangs rigs brgyad kho nar nges pa*), and that it is invariably relinquished at death (*'chi tshe gtong bas khyab pa*). Go rams pa critiques their interpretation as overly restricted to a single classical Buddhist philosophical school.

b) Shākya mchog ldan,¹⁶ who proposes a tripartite classification of the *Prātimokṣa* vows while asserting the absence of Indic sources regarding its definition. Go rams pa refutes these claims by citing authoritative Indian textual sources.

c) Nam-mkha'-bsod-nams,¹⁷ who interprets "the avoidance of harming others and its causes" (*gzhan gnod gzhi dang bcas pa spang ba*) as specifically characterizing the Bhikṣu's vow rather than as a general characteristic of the Vow of Individual Liberation. Go rams pa counters this interpretation by referencing widely accepted Indian sources.

d) Nam-mkha'-bsod-nams's¹⁸ practice of conferring bhikṣuṇī vows through exclusively male assemblies (Sangha). Go rams pa addresses this by examining the historical precedent set by Indian masters who established Tibetan monastic practices, highlighting the discrepancies between his opponent's practices and their shared Indian antecedents.

e) Shākya mchog ldan's¹⁹ position that while only three individuals may simultaneously receive Bhikṣu's vows from a single community bestowing the vows, more numerous candidates may receive śrāmaṇera vows concurrently, from a single group of ordainers. Go rams pa challenges this view by citing the authoritative pronouncements of Sa skya masters, who are their shared intellectual and religious predecessors.

This chapter notably demonstrates that Go rams pa's critical analysis extends within the Sa skya tradition itself, as exemplified by his extensive engagement with Shākya mchog ldan, with whom he shared both his monastic preceptor and Vajrayānic Guru. Indeed, these two intellectual giants are renowned for their scholarly disputes concerning the three vows and various other doctrinal matters.

The third chapter, which forms the focus of this article's translation and editorial work, is summarized below.

The fourth chapter examines the conceptual foundations and meditational practices of the esoteric Vajrayāna tradition, analyzing

¹⁶ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.58), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.661.3-662.6).

¹⁷ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.58), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.662.3-662.6).

¹⁸ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.58), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.662.6-663.6).

¹⁹ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.58), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.663.6-664.3).

various positions expounded by Tibetan scholars. The initial section primarily addresses practices related to the four classes of Tantric scriptures and offers *corrections* to what Go rams pa perceived as *misinterpretations* by Tibetan practitioners and scholars. In the first half of this chapter, Go rams pa presents and thoroughly analyzes the views of nine scholars regarding crucial theoretical and practical aspects of the four Tantric classes.

The nine scholars and their respective positions, as documented in Go rams pa's responses to philosophical queries, are systematically analyzed as follows:

a) Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal's position²⁰ that maintains receiving single empowerment in Vajrayāna contexts is equivalent to receiving all multiple empowerments. Go rams pa critically assesses this position as fundamentally contradicting numerous explicit pronouncements made by Buddha in the Tantric texts.

b) The practitioners of Vajrayāna from traditions other than Ngor-pa²¹ who are criticized for disclosing Vajrayāna secrets to uninitiated individuals. Go rams pa emphasizes that maintaining secrecy regarding Tantric practices from those who are uninitiated and have not undergone proper empowerment represents one of the fundamental obligations of Tantric practitioners.

c) The third position being critiqued is Tsong kha pa's²² understanding of 'Vajra sibling' relationships among Tantric practitioners. Go rams pa argues that this interpretation presents an overly restrictive understanding of this crucial tantric social bond.

d) The proponent of the next position being investigated is Bo dong,²³ who contends that beyond the greater path of accumulation (*tshogs lam chen po yan chad*), the paths of all three vehicles are attainable exclusively through Tantric practices. Go rams pa identifies this position as problematic, as it contradicts fundamental Buddhist path structures.

e) Tsong kha pa's position on self-generation²⁴ is the next theory critiqued, and it contends the existence of self-generation (*bdag bskyed*) practice within Kriyātantra. Following Sa skya masters' precedent, Go rams pa demonstrates this as an interpretative error, at least from his perspective.

f) Ngor-chen's students' misinterpretation,²⁵ who misconstrue the

²⁰ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.59), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.675.4-677.5).

²¹ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.60), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.677.5-678.1).

²² See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.60), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (p.678.1-678.6).

²³ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.60), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.678.6-681.3).

²⁴ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.56), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.681.-682.4).

²⁵ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.56), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.682.4-688.1).

retinues in the six worldly *maṇḍala* of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*, interpreting them as actual worldly beings. Go rams pa argues that this interpretation fundamentally diminishes the nature of tantric enlightened deities.

g) dGa' gdong pa, who was one of the main commentators on Sa paṅ's *sDom gsum rab dbye*,²⁶

who maintains that the practice of two stages (*rim gnyis*) exists within the practice context of the three lower tantric cycles. Go rams pa identifies this position as contradictory to Sa paṅ's authoritative teachings, which both scholars ostensibly accept.

h) Tsong kha pa,²⁷ who argues that "phenomena appearing as a deity" should not be interpreted literally as external phenomena manifesting as a deity, but rather that the 'mental image' appears as a deity. Go rams pa contends that this interpretation contradicts the fundamental teachings presented in authoritative tantric scriptures.

i) The last position criticized here is of Jo nang master.²⁸ This scholar maintains that among the three natures, only the perfected nature should be cultivated and meditated upon as a deity. Go rams pa argues that this position reflects Dol po pa's realist ontological commitments more than authentic tantric teachings and practices.

This comprehensive analysis demonstrates Go rams pa's systematic critique of various interpretations of tantric Buddhism, highlighting his commitment to maintaining doctrinal authenticity while engaging critically with contemporary scholarly perspectives. His critiques span multiple dimensions of tantric theory and practice, from ritual requirements to philosophical interpretation, consistently emphasizing fidelity to authoritative textual sources and established lineage teachings.

In the second section of this chapter, he conducts a detailed analysis of seven secondary 'corrupted' practices about Vajrayāna. These positions and their respective advocates are as follows:

a) All Tantric practitioners of his era,²⁹ except for those following the Ngor tradition, who erroneously enumerate 'one' offering substance and mantra as 'ten' during fire offering rituals and associated liturgies—a practice which Go rams pa equates to deceiving the enlightened Buddha.

b) The Bo dong adherents,³⁰ who maintain that the generated deity departs while the guest or the invited deity remains following the

²⁶ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.60), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.688.1-688.6).

²⁷ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.60), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.688.6-691.1).

²⁸ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.60), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.691.1-694.1).

²⁹ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.60), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.694.1-694.4).

³⁰ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.60), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.694.4-695.3).

offering liturgy.

c) The tradition of *sPos khang pa Rin rgyal*,³¹ who, according to *Go rams pa*, introduces an innovative yet problematic practice of depicting the retinue deities' heads facing inward on ceiling-mounted paintings.

d) The meditative visions of the *Myang* meditator³² and his particular interpretation regarding the structural composition of the Medicinal Buddha's mansion.

e) A prevalent practice in the *sGom sde* valley³³ involving the burning of the deceased's name without performing the requisite ritual—an act *Go rams pa* condemns as a grievous transgression.

f) Certain *Jo gdan*³⁴ practitioners, who consider the twelve retinues of Medicinal Buddha as mere worldly beings, thereby deeming them unworthy of prostration or refuge. Additionally, numerous centers in the *gTsang* region engage in prostration and offerings to the deity's seven hundred servants—practices that contradict fundamental Buddhist principles regarding refuge and its appropriate objects.

g) All traditions except *Ngor*³⁵ that roll sacred texts from the end when placing them inside sacred objects, which our author considers an inauspicious practice.

h) *Bu ston*'s doctrinal position³⁶ advocating the depiction of male deities beneath female deities in paintings intended for placement at the base of relics and sacred religious objects.

In this chapter, *Go rams pa*'s critique demonstrates remarkable complexity, addressing both his contemporaries, predecessors, and social practices. While the technical matters discussed herein address fundamental practices of Tibetan Buddhism and present considerable challenges in their resolution, *Go rams pa* approaches these contentious issues with remarkable scholarly rigor and directness.

The fifth and final chapter addresses Buddhahood—the state of complete enlightenment or awakening—manifested through spiritual transformation. The resultant state is examined through the concept of 'body and gnosis' (*sku dang ye shes*). This examination encompasses perspectives from four doxographical schools of exoteric Buddhism and four classes of Tantric scripture with their associated esoteric concepts.

In this chapter, *Go rams pa* analyzes two distinct Tibetan positions

³¹ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.61), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.695.3-696.2).

³² See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.61), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.696.2-697.1).

³³ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.61), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.697.1-697.6).

³⁴ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.61), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.697.6-698.3).

³⁵ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.61), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.698.3-698.6).

³⁶ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.61), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.698.4-699.6).

regarding resultant Buddhahood and its relationship to sūtric and tantric presentations, employing both scriptural citations and logical reasoning. These positions are:

a) Tsong kha pa and certain scholars from Go rams pa's tradition³⁷ who maintain that the eleventh and twelfth stages taught in tantras should be subsumed under the tenth stage of the sūtric path presentation—a position Go rams pa criticizes as conflating distinct perspectives and failing to appreciate their hierarchical relationships.

b) Scholars within Go rams pa's tradition who,³⁸ while accepting the thirteenth Vajrayāna stage, subsume the three kāyas and four gnoses of sūtric Buddhism under the eleventh and twelfth Vajrayāna stages, rather than recognizing them as aspects of final Buddhahood.

Throughout these chapters, Go rams pa demonstrates sophisticated engagement with authoritative scriptures and confrontation with opposing viewpoints, eschewing mere commentary. This work represents a culmination of his contemplation and understanding of the breadth of Tibetan Buddhism's Indian heritage and beyond. It serves as a comprehensive synthesis of his major works and distinctive positions across various subjects, offering valuable insight into the materials. Notably, Buddhist logic and epistemology—subjects on which Go rams pa wrote extensively—remain the only major themes of Tibetan scholastic traditions not addressed in this work.

The pre-colophon verses articulate Go rams pa's motivations, self-assessment, and aspirations for the work. He emphasizes that his composition stems not from philosophical antagonism or desire for recognition, but from genuine concern for preserving authentic Buddhist dharma. He draws parallels between his work and that of Indian scholars like Nāgārjuna, who refuted mistaken views within both Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions, and early Tibetan translators like Rin-chen-bzang-po and masters such as 'Brog-mi and 'Gos, who challenged 'perverted religious paths' while propagating Vajrayāna teachings.

Go rams pa observes that following Sa skya paṇḍita's passing, Tibet witnessed a proliferation of views lacking a scriptural foundation and logical basis, leading to confusion regarding the three vows' essential practices and compromising their efficacy in achieving enlightenment. His treatise thus serves as a corrective measure. The prose colophon details the composition's circumstances, location, timing, scribe, and dedication. The work was composed in 1478, Earth

³⁷ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.61), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.700.3-701.6).

³⁸ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.61), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.700.6-702.3).

Dog year, at Thub bstan rnam rgyal.³⁹

3. Commentarial Literature Inspired by the *sDom gsum kha skong*

The *sDom gsum kha skong* of Go rams pa has been one of the most instrumental and significant texts within the Sa skya lineage, and its influence continues to be evident through its prominent position among the constitutive texts in the curriculum of Sa skya's monastic seminaries. This prominence can be attributed primarily to its authorship by Go rams pa, whose works occupy a distinguished position among Sa skya scholars and, by extension, scholars of other Tibetan Buddhist denominations. Many Sa skya scholars regard it as a natural continuation of Sa paṇ's *sDom gsum rab dbye*, thus considering it a core contribution to the doctrinal position of Sa skya and a robust defense of its orthodoxies.

Another significant reason for this work's continuous study lies in its subject matter. The text presents a sustained critique of Tibetan thinkers and ideas, primarily pertaining to Buddhist theories and practices. However, it is not merely a passive recording of intellectual developments; rather, it represents active participation in and critical assessment of these philosophical deliberations and their implications. The text examines and analyzes subjects ranging from Madhyamaka philosophy to Buddhology, including detailed discussions of Vinaya rituals.

The *sDom gsum kha skong* has attracted the attention and scholarly engagement of numerous prominent Sa skya tradition scholars since Go rams pa's time, resulting in several fascinating commentarial and explanatory works. The following list encompasses works directly associated with this text:

a. The *sDom gsum kha skong gi bsdus don*, a concise work by Go rams pa himself, composed at his monastery. This text serves as a topical outline (*sa bcad*) of the *sDom gsum kha skong*, employing an exegetical methodology widely utilized within Tibetan commentarial traditions.

b. Another significant work essential for understanding this text is Go rams pa's *Dris lan pad mo bzhad pa*, written in response to a series of scholarly inquiries from one of his contemporaries. The first question specifically addresses the identification of scholars whom Go rams pa refutes in his text.

c. *sDom gsum kha skong gi rnam bshad legs bshad nor bu'i phreng ba*, an

³⁹ See *sDom gsum kha skong* (p.705): *sa pho khyi'i lo la rta nag rin chen rtse thub bstan rnam par rgyal ba'i dgon par sbyar*//.

extensive and detailed commentary on the root text by Klu sgrub rgya mtsho, a preeminent Sa skya scholar of his era. This voluminous work, completed in 1565, offers a comprehensive analysis, though it occasionally diverges from Go rams pa's other works. The commentator ingeniously resolves apparent contradictions by distinguishing between the textual intention and the authorial intention (*gzhung gi dgongs pa dang mdzad pa po'i dgongs pa*).

d. *sDom gsum kha skong gi rnam bshad legs par bshad pa rgyan gyi me tog*, composed by mKhan po Nga-dbang-chos-grags, represents another significant commentary that closely follows Go rams pa's interpretative approach. In the colophon, the author acknowledges his primary reliance on Go rams pa's writings while also citing his utilization of Klu sgrub rgya mtsho's commentary.

e. *sDom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba'i kha skong gzhi lam 'bras gsum gsal bar byed pa'i legs bshad 'od kyi snang ba'i rnam bshad 'od kyi snang ba rgyas par byed pa*, another commentary authored by Byams-pa-rab-brtan, who served as one of the abbots of Go rams pa's monastery. In addition to composing Go rams pa's biography, he critically engages with Klu sgrub rgya mtsho's interpretations, particularly challenging the latter's creative distinction between authorial and textual intention.

f. An annotated Commentary on the root text was composed by the recently deceased mKhan po Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin (1904-1990), entitled *sDom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba'i kha skong gzhung don rab gsal*, published in Darjeeling in 1969.

g. Although direct examination has not been possible, there are reliable reports of another significant commentary on this root text existing in manuscript form, written in *dbu med* script by rTa nag Chos rnam rgyal, another future abbot of Go rams pa's monastery.

4. Summary of the Third Chapter of the *sDom gsum kha skong*

The third chapter examines the Buddhist Middle Way through dual perspectives: the practical aspects of Bodhisattva Vows and their supporting theoretical foundations. These interconnected themes are analyzed through the philosophical framework of the Middle Way, specifically regarding the development of perfect understanding (*nges shes*) of its philosophy, meditative practice (*dbu ma'i lam*), and philosophical viewpoint (*dbu ma'i lta ba*).

Go rams pa initiates the chapter by articulating his comprehensive position on the Bodhisattva path. His interpretation emphasizes the simultaneous cultivation of two elements: the magnanimous practice of exchanging self with others, and the cultivation of insight that realizes emptiness devoid of the four extremes.

The remaining section of the chapter synthesizes numerous philosophical arguments he developed in opposition to various Tibetan scholarly interpretations, particularly those of Tsong kha pa's understanding of the Middle Way theory.

The critique encompasses the following philosophical dimensions:

1. Ontological theories examining the nature and relationship of the ultimate and relative truth
2. Investigation of the methods of gaining direct or inferential cognitive access to the ultimate truth and its liberating potential
3. Analysis of the validity of logical principles, such as double negation, in establishing emptiness
4. The hermeneutical principles of reading various authoritative sources
5. The manner of experientially leading neophytes into the meditative cultivation of the view

While Go rams pa's critique primarily addresses Tsong kha pa's work, he additionally examines other contemporary scholarly positions regarding emptiness theory and its meditative cultivation.

a) The first position Go rams pa criticized in this chapter is attributed to Tsong kha pa,⁴⁰ who maintains that the Bodhisattvas' practice of self-other exchange is strictly limited to the exchange of self-cherishing and other-cherishing attitudes, excluding the exchange of virtues/non-virtues and happiness/unhappiness. Go rams pa contends that while the physical exchange of attributes is impossible, mental cultivation should encompass both the exchange of cherishing and the contemplative exchange of happiness and suffering, including their respective causes.

b) The next section also addresses Tsong kha pa's⁴¹ assertion that 'Freedom from four extremes (*mtsha' bzhi spros bral*) parallels mental quietism, attributed to certain Chinese traditions. Go rams pa identifies this as a fundamental misinterpretation of the Madhyamaka view advocated by early Tibetan scholars, including Sa skya lineage founders.

c) Translator sKyabs mchog dpal⁴² proposes that conventional truth transcends both existence and non-existence. Go rams pa critiques this as undermining the principle of interdependent origination governing conventional phenomena.

⁴⁰ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.58), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.665.1-666.3).

⁴¹ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.59), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.666.3-671.2).

⁴² See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.59), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.671.2-672.1).

d) The next position critiqued is the constantly shifting positions of Shākya mchog ldan's,⁴³ who theoretically initially deny the conventional existence of self to later affirm both self and self of person (*bdag dang gang zag gi bdag*) at the conventional level.

e) The last position criticized is the methodology employed and advocated by lCang ra abbot to lead neophytes in the contemplation of emptiness.⁴⁴ He advocates familiarization with the object of grasping (*zhen yul*) through verbalization as essential to cultivating the Middle Way view. Go rams pa criticizes this approach as diminishing the crucial roles of scholarly study and contemplative reflection.

This comprehensive analysis demonstrates Go rams pa's broad critical engagement with diverse Buddhist philosophical traditions and scholars across various lineages and schools of thought.

He ends the chapter with a succinct summary of the bodhisattva's vow or practice as cultivation of a view of emptiness free from all extremes, imbued with compassion.

5. Annotated translation

The following annotated translation of the third chapter of the *sDom gsum kha skong* is based on the critical edition, appended in the next section. Most of the explanatory footnotes are drawn from Go rams pa's other writings.

The Vows of Bodhisattva⁴⁵
are either obtained from⁴⁶

⁴³ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.59), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.672.1-674.2).

⁴⁴ See *Dris lan pad bzhad* (p.59), and *sDom gsum kha skong* (pp.674.2-675.2).

⁴⁵ Go rams pa defined the Bodhisattva vows as 'A special establisher of full enlightenment, an intention with associated mental factors abandoning the contradictory forces.' This definition indicates that the Bodhisattva vows are causes that bring forth complete enlightenment (Buddha-hood) as their result, and their essential nature is a particular mental factor called 'intention' [*sems byung sems pa*]. See Go rams pa, *sDom gsum spyi don* (fol.183a1): *byang sems kyi sdom pa'i mtshan nyid/ rdzogs pa'i byang chub kyi sgrub pa khyad par ba gang zhig / mi mthun phyogs spong ba'i sems pa mtshungs ldan dang bcas pa'o /* . For a discussion of *sems byung sems pa*, see mChims chen, *mNgon pa'i rgyan* (pp.136.3-136.5): *sems pa ni gang zhig yod na khab len gyis lcags ltar yul drug la dmigs nas sems mngon par 'du byed cing sems dmigs pa la g.yo bar byed pa yid kyi las tel*.

⁴⁶ Regarding the differences in liturgies between the two schools in granting the Bodhisattva vows, see Go rams pa, *sDom gsum spyi don* (fols.189a1-191a1) and *gSung rab dgongs gsal* (fols.68b-71b2).

The two great traditions of Māhayāna, the Madhyamaka ⁴⁷ or Cittāmātra, ⁴⁸ or obtained from the ritual propounded in the various tantric scriptures of the mantra.

Having obtained the (awakening) mind of aspiration⁴⁹ [and awakening the mind of] application,⁵⁰

⁴⁷ According to Go rams pa, this tradition originates with the celestial Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī and descends through Nāgārjuna, later being formulated by Śāntideva in the third chapter of his classic *Bodhisattvacaryavatara*. See Go rams pa, *sDom gsum spyi don* (fol.189a1-189a3): *gnyis pa byang sems kyi sdom pa len pa'i cho ga la dbu ma lugs dang / sems tsam lugs gnyis las/ dang po ni/ mgon po 'jam pa'i dbyangs nas 'phags pa klu sgrub yab sras la brgyud de/ rgyal sras zhi ba lha'i phyag srol jo bo pu nya shr'i las byung ba rje btsun sa skya pa yab sras kyi phyag len du mdzad pa de yin la//*. For a detailed explanation of the liturgy and ritual, see Sa paṇ , *Sems bskyed kyi cho ga*.

⁴⁸ According to Go rams pa, the generation of the bodhicitta in the Cittāmātra tradition originates with the celestial Bodhisattva Maitreya and is transmitted through Asaṅga, later being systematized by Candragomin in his *Samvaravimśaka*. See Go rams pa, *sDom gsum spyi don* (fol.189a3-189a4): *gnyis pa ni/ mgon po byams pa nas thogs med sku mched la brgyud de slob dpon tsan dra go mi'i phyag srol jo bo rje dpal ldan a ti sha las byung ba dge ba'i bshes gnyen bka' gdams pa rnam kyi phyag len du mdzad pa de yin no//*. For a detailed academic discussion of these two traditions, see Wangchuk 2007. Sa paṇ, in his *sDom gsum rab dbye*, asserts that even the śrāvaka system encompasses three generations of mind, corresponding to the three different goals to be attained. See Sa paṇ , *sDom gsum rab dbye* (fol.14a6-6): *sems bskyed la ni nyan thos dang // theg pa chen po'i lugs gnyis yod // nyan thos rnam la sems bskyed gsum // dgra bcom rang rgyal sangs rgyas so//*.

⁴⁹ The mind of aspiration (*pranidhicitta*) constitutes a category of bodhicitta that aspires to achieve complete Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings. In his various commentaries on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, Go rams pa presents divergent definitions of this bodhicitta. In his more mature works, which presumably reflect his definitive position, Go rams pa maintains that bodhisattvas on the ten grounds also possess the mind of aspiration. However, in other writings that closely align with his teacher Rong-ston's interpretation, Go rams pa contends that the mind of aspiration exists exclusively within the mental continuum of ordinary beings. See Go rams pa, *sBas don zab mo*, (fol.43b6-44a1): *smoṇ 'jug gi sems bskyed mtshan nyid pa theg chen gyi tshogs lam nas rgyun mtha'i bar du gzhaḡ pa//*. See also Go rams pa, *sBas don rab gsal* (fol.9b4-9b4): *dang po'i mtshan nyid/ so so skye bo'i rgyud kyi theg chen sems bskyed gang zhig /theg chen gyi bslab pa'i grogs kyis ma zin pa*.

⁵⁰ The mind of application constitutes a division of bodhicitta, which represents a vow to practice the path toward attaining complete

The preservation of the three disciplines of training is ⁵¹ becomes the essential practice. {3.1}

Practicing these, in union,⁵²
[namely] the bodhicitta of exchanging self with others ⁵³
and [the cultivation of the] view free of fourfold extremes
is the main aspect of the conduct of this [i.e., Bodhisattva vows]. {3.2}

About this, someone⁵⁴ claims the essence of exchange
is exchanging the cherishing [i.e., the self-cherishing and the
other-cherishing],
not the exchange of virtue [and] non-virtue, happiness [and]
suffering,
since these cannot be exchanged. ⁵⁵ {3.3}

In this case, the exchange of cherishing,
too, will not be the true meaning of exchange,

Buddhahood. In his mature work, Go rams pa asserts that the mind of aspiration and the mind of application are of one nature. For a detailed discussion of these two divisions of mind and their relationship to mental factors and the ultimate bodhicitta, see Go rams pa, *sBas don zab mo* (fols. 41b1-46b4).

⁵¹ The three trainings comprise: the discipline of refraining from harmful actions (*nyes spyod sdom pa'i tshul khrims*), the discipline of accumulating virtuous actions (*dge chos sdud pa'i tshul khrims*), and the discipline of benefiting sentient beings (*sems can don byed kyi tshul khrims*).

⁵² These refer to two fundamental practices: the exchange of self with others and the wisdom of realizing emptiness from the four extremes.

⁵³ The practice of exchanging self with others is an aspect of bodhicitta—a spiritual practice that was developed and refined by the eighth-century Buddhist master Śāntideva in his work *Bodhisattvacaryāvatara*. The fundamental principle involves transforming our conventional mode of relating to others through self-cherishing and egoistic perspectives into other-cherishing and compassion.

⁵⁴ Somebody here is rJe tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa. For an extensive discussion of the life, works, and legacies of this towering figure, see Jinpa 2019.

⁵⁵ Sa paṇ also addresses early Tibetan opposition to Bodhisattva practices of the exchange of self with others. See Sa paṇ *sDom gsum rab dbye* (fol.16a): *byang chub sems kyi bslab pa la // bdag gzhan mnyam brje gnyis su gsungs // kha cig brje ba'i byang chub sems // bsgom du mi rung zhe su smra // de yi rgyu mtshan 'di skad lo // bdag bde gzhan la byin nas ni // gzhan sdug bdag gis blangs gyur na // smon lam mtha' ni btsan pa'i phyir // bdag ni rtag tu sdug bsngal 'gyur // des na 'di 'dra'i byang chub sems // bsgom pa de dag thabs mi mkhas // nor ba chen po'i chos yin lo //*.

since one similarly cannot exchange the cherishing.
 If, though, this cannot be actually exchanged,
 but can be practiced within the mind,
 then it applies similarly to the others, too.
 Who, in actuality, could exchange
 one's and others' happiness and suffering? ⁵⁶ {3.4}

Not exchanging happiness and suffering in the mind
 [and claiming] to exchange cherishing is a contradiction.
 This is like not sharing food with others,
 but instead consuming it by oneself. {3.5}

Refuting the exchange of [one's] virtue [and another's] non-virtue
 is [going against] Nāgārjuna,⁵⁷ the second Buddha,
 who declared, "May [the result of] their non-virtuous [action] ripen in
 me and
 may [the result of] my virtues [action] ripen in them."
 How is your position not contradictory to this?
 Refuting the exchange of happiness [and] suffering [goes against]
 The *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*, which states,
 "If one does not genuinely exchange
 one's happiness [and] others' suffering,
 Buddhahood cannot be attained, and
 There is no happiness even in the saṃsāra."
 How is [your position] not contradictory to this?

How will you answer appropriately?
 If illogical consequences are flung
 based on the meaning of the quote from the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*
 by placing your tenet as a subject [of the debate]? {3.6}

In brief, by bifurcating the desirables and the undesirables in mind,
 [and] granting all desirables to others,
 and accustoming oneself to accept all undesirables for oneself,

⁵⁶ Go rams pa's fundamental assertion is that while one cannot literally transfer one's virtue and happiness to others or assume others' suffering and non-virtuous actions, these qualities can and should be exchanged as a mental training exercise.

⁵⁷ Go rams pa refers to Nāgārjuna as the second Buddha due to his foundational contributions to Mahāyāna philosophy. See Go rams pa, *dBu ma spyi don*, (fol.6a5-6a5): *gnyis pa ni 'dzam bu'i gling du sang rgyas gnyis par grags pa'o//*. For an introduction and translation of the topical outline of this work, see Kassor 2014.

[is taught in] the *mDo sde dByug gsum phreng ba* ⁵⁸ and
In a treatise like the *Śikṣāmuccaya*,
The *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* and so on.

Their intentions are taught to the spiritual teacher [ʼBrom] sTon pa ⁵⁹
by glorious Atisha, ⁶⁰
as the profound meaning of experiential instruction.
Later on, it flourished in this mountainous realm.
[I have] seen the detailed meditation explanation
by Sangs-rgyas-bsgom-pa ⁶¹ and so on. {3.7}

With the supreme, venerable masters of Sa skya,
among the two pith instructions ⁶² of Mahāsiddha Virūpa,
they have the transmission of this practice [i.e., the exchanging self
and others],
that illuminates the practice [of Bodhisattva]. {3.8}

That and the two aforementioned traditions
do not differ [and] are
the essence of Buddha's teaching.
The blessing will arise even for those who merely admire it. {3.9}

Someone ⁶³ asserts that freedom from the proliferation of the four

⁵⁸ I could not locate this text within various currently available Tibetan Buddhist canons.

⁵⁹ ʼBrom ston pa rGyal ba'i 'byung gnas (1005–1064), one of Atiśa's principal disciples, established the Rwa sgrenge monastery, which subsequently became a significant center of the bKa'-gdams-pa lineage. See Roerich 1988: 251.

⁶⁰ For a comprehensive account of this Indian master's life and works, see Roerich 1988: 241.

⁶¹ This master reportedly served as an instructor at sNar thang monastery. For detailed information regarding Atiśa's teachers and his role in disseminating Mind Training teachings in Tibet, consult Klu sgrub rgya mtsho's *Nor bu'i phreng ba* (pp.362-364).

⁶² The two instructions comprise methodologies for guiding practitioners of lesser and greater faculties. The technical Tibetan terminology for these is *sKal dman rim 'jug pa bkri ba'i gsung ngag rdo rje tshig rkang* and *sKal ldan cig char ba bkri ba'i spros med rdo rje tshig rkang*. The practice of exchanging self with others, fundamental to Mind Training, is presented within the broader framework of Triple Experiences (*snang ba gum*) in both contexts. Reference Klu sgrub rgya mtsho, *Nor bu'i phreng ba* (pp.364-365).

⁶³ In this passage, Go rams pa summarizes the distinctive Madhyamaka philosophical interpretation of Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa, one of Tibet's preeminent intellectual and religious figures, as presented in his major commentaries and original works. See Go rams pa, *Dri lan pad mo*

extremes⁶⁴

is not different from the view of a Chinese monk,
[hence] it is an erroneous [view].

[The correct view is, therefore,] grasping at the lack of essentiality,
after logically negating inherent existence.

This is the ultimate view of the Madhyamaka.

All [practitioners of] three vehicles realize this [view of emptiness],
Therefore, there is no difference in the view [of three vehicles].

The delimitation [of] inherent existence according to
Svātantrika school, is, [for an entity, to be established
from its own side without depending on the mind.

Yet, this is a common negandum.

If something is found when seeking the meaning designated by name,
This, then, is the meaning of inherent existence.

The negation of this is an uncommon feature
of the Prāsaṅgika.

If one understands these differences in the negandum,

All of the perverse conceptions of
refuting every object grasped by cognition,

By logical analysis will be undermined.

On the other hand, after having refuted the inherent existence,

If one also needs to refute grasping at the lack of inherent existence,

Then the preceding cognition will turn out to be one with a fault
[and] subsequent [cognition] will become infinite.

[The opponent] says [if one] refutes the lack of inherent existence,
it will become an inherent existence

on account of understanding the true meaning

(fol.30a1-30a2). For a study of Tsong kha pa's philosophy, see Jinpa 2003. For a book-length study of the differences between Tsong kha pa and Go rams pa, see Thakchoe 2007. Additionally, see Cabezon et al, 2007 for a substantial discussion of the differences between these two scholars of Madhyamaka in Tibet.

⁶⁴ The four extremes encompass existence, non-existence, both existence and non-existence, and neither existence nor non-existence. Go rams pa interprets these as potential modes through which the mind apprehends objects and constructs subject-object duality. To pacify the mind's habitual object-grasping, these objects must be analyzed through logical reasoning. For an extensive dialectical examination of establishing freedom from the four extremes, consult Go rams pa, *dBu ma spyi don* (fols.81a5-86a4). Go rams pa's conception of extremes or manifoldness (*spros pa*) includes all characteristics of positive and negative phenomena (*dgag sgrub kyi chos kyi mtshan ma thams cad*), language (*ngag*), and causes (*rgyu*). See Go rams pa, *dBu ma spyi don* (fol.47).

through the double negations. ⁶⁵ {3.10}
 These degenerated views should be refuted
 by scripture and reasoning. {3.11}

[The assertion] that maintains the following two as similar,
 Namely [position] of a Chinese monk, who, without any analysis,
 suppresses conceptual thoughts casually [and]
 espousing this to be the supreme form of meditation,
 And here, the untenability of the proliferation of the four extremes
 On the occasion of examination through reasoning,
 [and] the proposition of non-grasping as the [Madhyamaka] view,
 Is the word of the devil rejecting the profound [view]. ⁶⁶ {3.12}

Moreover, in the *Ratnakūṭa*,⁶⁷
 [Buddha] taught existence [and] non-existence, both as extremes,
 [and] the center as the middle.
 This, too, is proclaimed to be unteachable [and] inexpressible.
 [According to you] this [i.e., Buddha's discourse], too, will become
 indistinguishable from the view of the Chinese [monk].
 Similarly, [in] the *Samādhiraśasūtra*, [Buddha taught],
 Since existence, nonexistence, purity and impurity, and so forth,
 There are two extremes; therefore, one should avoid these and
 should not abide even in the middle.
 In the *Prajñāpāramitā*, engagement with every duality,
 like emptiness and non-emptiness, and so on,

It is said to be engagement with characteristics.
 And also in the *Samputatantra*, it is said;
 "One should not meditate on emptiness,
 Nor should one meditate on non-emptiness.

⁶⁵ These highly technical subjects warrant detailed independent studies beyond the scope of current research. For Tsong kha pa's exposition of his views, see his *Lam rim chen mo*, particularly the *lhag mthong* chapter. For English translation, refer to Cutler & et al 2014. For philological studies, consult Ruegg 2000 and 2002; for philosophical analysis of Tsong kha pa's Madhyamaka writings, see Jinpa 2003.

⁶⁶ Go rams pa's rhetorical language occasionally exceeds conventional bounds. In one notable text, he questions whether the visionary deity allegedly communing with Tsong-kha-pa might have been demonic. See Go rams pa, *lTa ba'i shan 'byed* (fol.244a4): *mdo rgyud kyi gnad dang mi mthun na thabs la bslu ba'i bdud yi dam gyi gzugs su brdzus nas chos log ston par gsungs* / .

⁶⁷ For the same criticism leveled against Tsong kha pa's position, see Go rams pa, *dBu ma spyi ston* (fols.76b6-77b1).

A yogi who has not abandoned emptiness
has not completely abandoned non-emptiness.
Grasping at emptiness and non-emptiness
will generate numerous conceptual thoughts.”
This, too, will turn out to be
not different from the view of the Chinese. {3.13}

Maitreyañātha in the *Uttaratantraśāstra* says,
The truth of cessation cannot be analyzed
In terms of the four modes, existence and non-existence,
and both and neither.
Likewise, in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, it says;
“One should not speak of ‘emptiness’
Nor should one say ‘non-emptiness’
Nor should one speak of ‘both’ or ‘neither’.
Also from the same text,
The four extremes are refuted
With regards to the Blessed One’s
abiding and the parinirvāṇa.
Likewise Kulika Puṇḍarika
And Āryadeva declared as follows,
“Neither existence; nor non-existence;
Nor both;
nor the nature of either.
[The ones] liberated from the four extremes are the Madhyamakas.
This is the reality of the wise one.”
These again will turn out to be without
differences from the Chinese view. {3.14}

In this regard, [the opponent] explains
the meaning of non-existence and nor non-existence as
intended for convention [and] ultimate,
[and says] therefore [the scriptures] do not undermine him.
In that case, all appearing phenomena will
exist on the ultimate level and will not exist on the conventional level
because it is not neither [i.e., not existence nor non-existence].
Recall the three-fold acceptance. {3.15}

Someone ⁶⁸ explains the meanings of the four: existence, non-

⁶⁸ According to oral tradition, this defense of Tsong kha pa is attributed to dGe legs dpal bzang, one of his principal disciples. For a further critique of this defense by Go rams pa, see his *dBu-ma-spyi ston* (fols.88b3-89a2). Indeed, Klu sgrub rgya mtsho attributes this clarification to the followers

existence,
 And so forth, as not having the inherent [nature].
 Taking these four as the subject [of investigation]
 and 'negating inherent [nature]' as a predicate
 is not taught in the treatises of the father and heirs.
 Instead, with regards to [the subject], the going and abiding of the
 Bhagavan
 And [on] the non-dual gnosis and so on,
 the four [extremes] are negated. {3.16}

Grasping at the non-implicative negation,
 Having negated inherent existence, as the view of Madhyamaka
 is undermined by the reliable scriptures explained earlier.
 It is said to be a root downfall in the Tantras. {3.17}

If there are no differences in the views of the three vehicles,
 It contradicts Ajitanātha,⁶⁹
 Who taught the three hierarchies of realization of non-essentialities for
 the three vehicles
 , and that the [the paths of] application, seeing, and meditation of
 Māhāyāna
 as surpassing [the paths of] application, seeing, and the meditation
 of the lower vehicles on account of the view.⁷⁰ {3.18}

Venerable Nāgārjuna taught about the
 differences in realizing the characterlessness in all aspects,
 and not realizing all of it [by the Māhāyānist and Hinayanist,

of dGe legs dpal bzang's *sKal bzang mig 'byed*. See Klu sgrub rgya mtsho, *Nor bu'i phreng ba* (p.373): *gnyis pa ni mkhas grub rje'i skal bzang mig 'byed kyi rjes 'brang kha cig na re//*. For a translation of this work, see Cabezón 1992.

⁶⁹ Ajitanātha serves as an epithet of Maitreya. This interpretation is derived from the second chapter of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, wherein the author establishes a distinctive classification between the ultimate realizations attained by practitioners of the three vehicles.

⁷⁰ Regarding the various sources concerning the non-essentialities realized by practitioners of the three vehicles, see Go rams pa, *sBas don zab gter* (fols.140b2-150a3). Here, he examines the two principal strands of Māhāyāna, attributed respectively to the seminal figure of Maitreya and to Nāgārjuna, as preserved in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and *Mūlamadhyamaka*. For Go rams pa, these two authorities offer equally authoritative commentaries on the Māhāyāna system, making it inconceivable to consider one correct and the other erroneous.

respectively].

Furthermore, Candra[kīrti]'s teaching on the difference of views, through discriminating cognition, not conceptualizing the three spheres,

inconceivable nature, and so on, contradict [with your assertion].

It is also refuted by reasoning,

Because Sugatagarbha will be realized from

The path of seeing of the lower [vehicles].

[If you] accept this, [then Śrāvaka will] transcend birth, and others,

Which originated from action [and] afflictions.

It [also] contradicts Venerable Asaṅga,

who declared that the Śrāvaka [and] Pratyekā[buddha] are

not endowed with an eye to see the [Sugata]garbha. {3.19}

If all [the scholars of] Svātantrika [tradition] refute

The existence of an object from its own mode without depending on cognition,

This will contradict [your position], which asserts that Bhavya, accepts external phenomena as existing from its own side.⁷¹ {3.20}

Is it on the conventional or the ultimate level, the acceptance of not finding nominally designated objects when searched?

If it is on the conventional level, then the designating name,

too, will be non-existent on the conventional level

because these, [the designating name and designated object], exist through mutual dependence.

Thus, in the *Mūlamadhyamaka*, it is said,

“Agent depends upon the action and action too, apart from arising

Depending on the agent,

There is no cause for its existence.

By the [example of] agent and the action,

know [this fact] for the rest of the entities too,”

this is taught [and] rest of the entities [referred] are

the one signified, signifier, and so on.

This is said to apply to all that exists through dependence. {3.21}

⁷¹ For Go rams pa's own understanding of the differences between these two sub-schools of Madhyamaka, see Go rams pa, *dBu ma spyi ston, lTa ba'i shan 'byed*, and *lTa ba ngan sel*. For a translation of the last work, see Tshering et al 2005. See also Santina 1995. For a comprehensive collection of essays examining the differences between the two traditions, see Dreyfus & McClintock 2003.

If it means not finding
 On the ultimate level,
 all phenomena are not findable on the ultimate level,
 which is commonly accepted by both Prāsaṅgika [and] Svātantrika,
 therefore, how can it be a unique attribute of only one [tradition]?
 {3.22}

If the reduction of the object grasped by the mind
 Through logical analysis is a misconception,
 Then from the Buddha onwards,
 all the scholars [and] realized beings of India [and] Tibet
 will turn out to embody this misconception.
 This is because they all refuted the grasped objects of dualistic
 concepts,
 like emptiness and not emptiness, and so on. {3.23}

Your assertion will be undermined,
 If the inherently existing object, grasped by the conceptual cognition,
 is refuted,
 through the arguments of being neither one nor many.
 If, on the other hand, it is not refuted,
 how can the misconception of grasping at true [existence] be refuted?
⁷² {3.24}

If [I] accept that the preceding [and] following [cognitions] as
 underminable and infinite [respectively], when the conceptual mind
 investigates the mode of existence of a phenomenon,
 what will afflict my [position]? ⁷³
 Whatever refutation is made against this [position],
 how will it not harm these [following statements of Nāgārjuna]?
 In the *Mūlamadhyamaka*, he says,

⁷² This appears to be a problematic interpretation of Tsong kha pa's perspective, since for him, it is precisely the hypostatized or 'inherent existence' that must be negated through Madhyamaka's reasoning. Here, Go rams pa suggests that negating inherent existence would contradict Tsong kha pa's tradition—a mistaken attribution. Furthermore, Go rams pa seems to contradict his own presentation of Tsong kha pa's view in his *dBu ma spyi ston*, where he explicitly states that for Tsong kha pa, the negandum of Madhyamaka reasoning is restricted to 'inherent existence.' See Go rams pa, *dBu ma spyi ston* (fol.86a6): *dbu ma'i dgag bya ni bden pa kho na yin la*. Similarly, in another work, Go rams pa presents Tsong kha pa's system as one in which the negandum is specifically defined as inherent existence; see Go rams pa, *lTa ba ngan sel* (fol.309b5-310a1).

⁷³ For a detailed analysis of these issues, see Go rams pa, *dBu ma spyi ston* (fols.87b1-88b3).

“Self is nominally designated.
 Non-Self, also, is taught by the Buddhas.
 It is also taught that neither self nor nonself [exist],”
 Likewise, again from it [following is stated],
 “All are real, or unreal,
 All is both real and unreal,
 All is neither real nor not real.
 This is the Buddha’s precepts.” {3.25}

Although within the meditative equipoise of the exalted one,
 When all proliferations are totally pacified,
 the two-fold faults do not exist
 since the preceding [cognition] does not grasp. {3.26}

Accepting the understanding of the true meaning
 through the double negations,⁷⁴
 When analyzing the mode of existence through reasoning,
 How does it not go against
 Lord Nāgārjuna,[who said],
 “By fully [and] accordingly realizing reality,
 [one] will not assert non-existence [and] existence.
 Therefore, if it becomes non-existent,
 Why will it not turn out to be an existence?
 If, by refuting the existence,
 becomes implicitly non-existent,
 Similarly, why by refuting non-existence,
 Will it again, not turn out to be existence?” {3.27}

The designation ‘Middle’ will turn out to be not inappropriate
 because when refuting either one of the extremes,
 it necessarily becomes the other, [for example],
 turning out to be the extreme of annihilationism when refuting the
 extreme of eternalism, and so on. {3.28}

Someone,⁷⁵ even on the conventional level,
 espouses the view of freedom from the four extremes,
 like non-existence or non-existence, and so forth. {3.29}

This contradicts the statement of the Teacher [who] in the Sūtra said,⁷⁶

⁷⁴ For parallel arguments, see Go rams pa, *dBu ma spyi ston* (fol.89).

⁷⁵ This someone is the translator sKyabs mchog dpal.

⁷⁶ Go rams pa extensively critiqued this position, providing a detailed analysis of both the logical foundations and scriptural citations that its

“Worldly beings will disagree with me;
 I do not contest with them.
 Whatever worldly beings say, either existence or non-existence,
 I, too, advocate that.”
 Considering this, even Candra[kīrti] exhorts to accept,
 existence [and] non-existence distinctively [on the conventional level],
 Since refuting existence, non-existence, while establishing the
 convention,
 will be impaired by the ways of worldly beings. {3.30}

This is also harmed by logical reasoning
 since all conventions are
 not beyond the four extremes;
 Therefore, the system of the convention will become untenable. {3.31}

[I will] explain how this [assertion], also contradicts experiences.
 Regarding food, clothing, fire, water, and other [phenomena],
 When asked about their existence or non-existence, if the
 Madhyamika
 Asserts as neither existence nor non-existence,
 this is not only inconducive to the immediate purpose
 but will lead to quarrels with others. {3.32}

Even on the conventional [level],
 Neither existence nor non-existence is required for [the explanation
 of] remote entities,
 and the [existence of] effect on the occasion of its causes, etc.⁷⁷
 For the rest of the phenomena that are suitable to appear,
 Distinctly articulating either as
 existence, nonexistence, is, is not, etc., is the tradition of the
 Madhyamaka. {3.33}

[I] heard someone maintaining ⁷⁸ that the person exists on the
 conventional [level]

proponent maintains as the basis for these theories. For a comprehensive account, see Go rams pa's *dBu ma spyi ston* (fol.36a).

⁷⁷ One of the distinctive philosophical positions of Madhyamaka that Go rams pa maintains is causal indeterminism, a theoretical stance that maintains deliberate ambiguity regarding both the existence and non-existence of an effect during its cause, and conversely.

⁷⁸ The primary proponent of this theoretical framework is Shākya mchog ldan, a contemporary of Go rams pa .

and the self does not exist [on the conventional level].

This is because it is in the systems of non-Buddhists that holds self and person to be a synonym.

As for the proof [he says],

the cognition realizing selflessness as realizing the mode of existence of phenomena, and grasping at self as not engaged with reality. {3.34}

In this case, the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras* and treatises of Nāgārjuna, the father [and] the heirs, will turn out to be the treatises of non-Buddhist since they teach these [i.e., self and person] to be synonymous. {3.35}

The [following] twelve agents are proclaimed

In the sūtras, namely,

Self, sentient beings, life force,

person, nourisher, being,

lord, mind-born, doer,

experiencer, perceiver, and seer. {3.36}

Ārya Nāgārjuna states that

The object of observation of self-grasping in [the statement],

“Until there is grasping at the aggregates,

There is self-grasping,” as mere I.

The twelve agents

are designated as synonymous with it [i.e., the mere I]. {3.37}

This [i.e., the mere I] cannot be found

when searched by five or seven-fold [reasoning]

about the aggregates.

Yet, illustrious Candra[kīrti] teaches that,

through the association with the illustration of the wooden chariot,

Concerning the unanalyzed worldly consensus,

depending upon the ones that which is appropriated,

parts, and members,

These are posited as an appropriator,

part possessor, and as whole [respectively].

Do not deny this when debating [and]

Do not deceive disciples when teaching.⁷⁹ {3.38}

⁷⁹ For a detailed exposition of the implications and his analysis of the relationship between the self and the psycho-physical aggregates, see Go rams pa, *lTa ba ngan sel*, (fol.339b2): *gang zag rdzas yod rigs pas dpyad nas dgag / brten nas btags pa'i gang zag rnam par gzhaḡ rigs pa'i tshul de dngos po kun la bsgre ba'o//*.

The proof is also superficial.
 It will be similar to the cognitions, realizing
 the unborn, characterlessness, non-elaborateness, and others.
 Because an origination etc., exists on the conventional level. {3.39}

When criticizing others [he] refutes by saying that,
 If one gets liberated by seeing
 The ultimate non-existence of self,
 Then seeing the non-existence of the son of a barren woman will also
 liberate.
 This refutation seems to be
 directed at Nāgārjuna, who said,
 "The existence of self [and] what belongs to self
 is reversed in the ultimate.
 Because fully knowing
 the ultimate as it is, duality will not appear."
 If one is confused even concerning a coarse system like this,
 what will happen to the subtle ones?
 This consequence will be similar to your own system,
 of the non-existence of self on the conventional [level] and
 the non-existence of aggregates, etc., on the ultimate level.
 Investigate if one knows the system of reasoning.
 Establishing philosophical positions by
 relying on popular speech and
 abandoning the system of treatises
 will become a laughing stock if seen by the learned ones. {3.40}

The [word] self and all the factors appended with
 The terms 'phenomena' and 'person,'
 and the meaning of self in [the phrase] 'no-self,'
 is explained as being established from one's own nature,
 [and] is considered even to be non-existent on the conventional level,
 by Buddhapālita and Chandra[kīrti].
 Distinguished separately
 when calling these and the agent as a self. ⁸⁰ {3.41}

⁸⁰ A principal commentator on the present text notes that although the author attributes this position and the subsequent one to Shākyamchog ldan, this attribution is questionable, particularly concerning one of Śākya-mchog-ldan's major works on Madhyamaka. See Klu sgrub rgya mtsho, *Nor bu'i phreng ba* (p.404).

Someone⁸¹ asserts that the primary reasoning
 Negating the self of a person is its unfindability
 when searched through seven aspects [of analysis],⁸²
 In relation to the five aggregates.
 Therefore, the person and the self of a person are not different.
 Both are said to exist conventionally
 But are non-existent ultimately—
 This is the Madhyamaka system's position. {3.42}

The position asserting that these two have no difference is
 The system of non-Buddhists and Saṃnitiya [and] it does not exist in
 other [systems].⁸³ {3.43}

Otherwise, phenomena too will turn out to be
 essential phenomena since the search is the same.
 If [you] accept this, then when the post-meditative equipoise of the
 exalted one
 realizes the non-essentiality of phenomena,
 realize the non-existent of mere phenomena. {3.44}

The reason [given] should be known as the reason of the effect,
 of gross intelligence.
 This is because the meaning of this [analysis] is
 when searching for a person in seven manners,
 and if it is found [under analysis],
 it will become the self of the person. {3.45}

Someone⁸⁴ maintains that when guiding the
 mind-stream of the trainee by the view of Madhyamaka,
 First, getting habituated to the
 strings of conceptual thought that follow
 Verbalization 'I' is a sign of getting acquainted with

⁸¹ This is a position attributed to Shākya mchog ldan, Go rams pa's contemporary.

⁸² For Go rams pa's detailed exposition of the seven-fold analysis, which serves as a deconstructive critique employed in the Madhyamaka system to demonstrate the philosophical unsustainability of conventional notions of identity, see *lTa ba ngan sel*.

⁸³ See Go rams pa, *lTa ba ngan sel* (fol.342b-3) for his concise presentation of how self or personal identity is conceptualized according to the hierarchical classification of philosophical schools.

⁸⁴ The primary teacher and practitioner of this methodology is dGe ldan pa, who follows the doctrinal tradition of an abbot of lCang ra.

The conceived object of innate self-grasping
 And multiple signs will appear then.
 Afterward [he] declares, the appearance of
 non-implicative negative to cognition,
 through familiarization with the conceptual thoughts
 that follow the verbalization of 'no-self.'
 This is [proclaimed] as the penetrative insight
 that realizes the ultimate mode of existence. {3.46}

The familiarization with the conceived object of view of self
 Through familiarization is the system of non-Buddhists.
 This does not exist in the [tenet] systems from
 Kashmiri Vaibhāṣika up to the Madhyamaka. {3.47}

This is already refuted
 by Maitreyañātha, who said,
 "There is no need to generate the view of self
 [since] it is habituated from the beginning-less time." {3.48}

If merely familiarizing with conceptual thoughts
 which follows verbalizations of no-self
 realizes the view of Madhyamaka,
 then the hearing [and] reflecting on the
 reasoning system taught in the
 Ocean-like treatises of Madhyamaka will become redundant.
 [Because] there is no difference in the mode of meditation
 of the two, the wise and the fool. {3.49}

If something like this is a special insight,
 then the conjoined meditation of it with calm abiding
 will become impossible
 because this follows the verbalizations. {3.50}

Alas! Strange indeed is the degenerative time.
 Though fools possibly could hold this [view],
 what is that trust [in this system] by the
 one learned in the treatises of Madhyamaka? {3.51}

In brief, for those wishing to practice the view ⁸⁵

⁸⁵ For a concise exposition of Go rams pa's establishment of the Madhyamaka philosophical view and its subsequent development into meditative insight, see Go rams pa's *lDan ma tshe rgya skyabs kyi dris lan* vol.10 (fols.72b3-74a5) and *Rin byang dri lan* vol.10 (fol. 71a1-71b3). For a

[and] conduct of Mahāyāna without error,
 It is the [cultivation of] emptiness, free from the four extremes,
 whose essence is [imbued with] compassion.
 The Third Chapter On the Vows of Bodhisattva. {3.52}

6. Critical edition

A Critical Edition of the Third Chapter of the *sDom gsum kha skong*

6.1. Sigla

A= *sDom gsum kha skong*, an independent block print located among the books at 'Bras spung monastery, with the serial number 06625. The printing colophon indicates preparation by Shākya seng ge and confirms that the print was carved within a few decades following Go rams pa's death. The third chapter of the *sDom gsum kha skong* is found between fols.8b7-13a3.

B= *sDom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba'i kha skong gzhi lam 'bras gsum gsal bar byed pa'i legs bshad 'od kyi snang ba*. In *Kun mkhyen go bo rams pa bsod nams seng gye bka' 'bum*. 13 vols. sDe dge Xylographic edition, vol.9. The third chapter of the *sDom gsum kha skong* is found between pp.664-675. The pagination is affixed on the reprint, with traditional foliation indicated on the page's right side. I have opted to follow the pagination. This is a reprint from 1979 by Sakya College in Dehradun, based on a woodblock print reportedly edited by mkhan chen 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan, the third abbot of rDzong sar khams bye bshad grwa, at the beginning of the last century.

6.2. Editorial Policies and Signs

The parenthetical numbers appended to the side represent the chapter and passage numbers. I have adhered to the author's outline, with each passage corresponding to the specific content of the respective outline.

Go rams pa's work is replete with quotations from various Indic and Tibetan sources. To trace the historical context, sources, categories, and terminology employed by Go rams pa, I have identified and provided the sources of his citations in the endnotes. For canonical sources within the *bKa' 'gyur*, I relied on the sTog and Peking editions,

translation of the first work, see <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/gorampa-sonam-senge/response-to-denma-tsegyal-kyab>.

while for *bsTan 'gyur* sources, I used the sDe-dge and Peking editions. I used modern editions of canonical works when available. Sanskrit references were also provided whenever these became available.

When identifying Go rams pa's quotations within the canonical transmission, I have included individual work ID from various catalogs and—when possible—the folio number (distinguishing between recto [a] and verso [b]), along with line numbers to facilitate easy reference.

The following abbreviations are used for sources in the endnotes, with corresponding numbers representing the respective canon IDs:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | <i>sTog bka' 'gyur</i> | T |
| 2 | <i>Pe cin bKa' 'gyur and bsTan 'gyur</i> | P |
| 3 | <i>sDe dge bka' 'gyur and bsTan 'gyur</i> | D |

The following editorial signs are employed:

<i>em.</i>	emendation
]	Preferred reading
<x>	Folio/page change.

6.3. A Critical Edition.

byang chub sems dpa'i sdom pa ni || pha rol phyin pa'i dbu <A9a>
 sems kyi ||
 srol chen gnyis las thob pa'm || gsang sngags rgyud sde las gsungs
 pa'i ||
 cho ga dag las thob kyang rung || smon 'jug sems bskyed thob nas ni
 ||
 tshul khriims bslab pa rnam pa gsum || bsrung ba nyams len dngos
 gzhi yin || {3.1}

de yi gtso bo spyod pa'i cha || bdag gzhan <B665> brje ba'i byang
 sems dang ||
 lta ba mtha' bzhi'i spros⁸⁶ bral gnyis || zung jug nyams su len pa yin
 || {3.2}

de la kha cig brje ba'i don || gces 'dzin brje⁸⁷ ba nyid yin gyi ||

⁸⁶ spros] B, sbros A

⁸⁷ brje] B, rje A

dge sdig bde sdug brje min te || brje bar mi nus phyir zhes zer ||
{3.3}

'o na gces 'dzin brje ba yang || brje ba'i don nyid min 'gyur te ||
brje bar mi nus mtshung phyir ro || dngos su brje bar mi nus kyang
||
blo yi steng du sbyor zhes na || de ni cig shos la mtshungs te ||
rang gzhan bde dang sdug bsngal gnyis || dngos su brje bar su yis
nus || {3.4}

blo la⁸⁸ bde sdug mi brje na || gces 'dzin brje ba 'gal ba ste ||
kha zas gzhan la ma byin par || rang gis zos pa ji bzhin no || {3.5}

dge sdig brje ba bkag pa ni || sang rgyas gnyis pa klu sgrub kyis ||
bdag la de dag sdig smin cing || bdag dge ma lus der smin shog |¹
ces gsungs pa dang cis mi 'gal || bde sdug brje ba bkag pa ni ||
byang chub sems dpa'i spyod 'jug las || bdag bde gzhan gyi sdug
bsngal dag |
yang dag brje bar ma byas na || sangs rgyas nyid du mi 'grub cing ||
'khor ba na yang bde ba med ||² ces gsungs pa dang cis mi 'gal || c
spyod 'jug lung don de nyid la || khyod kyī grub mtha' chos can du
||
bzung nas thal ba 'phen na ni || chos mthun lan nyid gang la 'debs ||
{3.6}

mdor na blo la 'dod mi 'dod || gnyis su phye ba'i 'dod pa kun ||
gzhan la ster zhing mi 'dod kun || rang la len par goms pa ni ||
mdo sde⁸⁹ dbyug gsum phreng ba dang || bstan bcos <A9b> bsrlab
btus spyod 'jug <B666> sogs ||
dgongs pa dpal ldan a ti shas || zab don nyams khrid sgo nas ni ||
bshes gnyen ston pa nyid la gnang || phyi nas gangs ri'i
khrod 'dir 'phel ||
sangs rgyas bsgom⁹⁰ pa la sogs⁹¹ kyis || bsgom tshul zhib tu shad
pa'ang mthong || {3.7}

sa skya'i rje btsun mchog rnams la || rnal 'byor dbang phyug bir wa
pa'i ||
man ngag gnyis⁹² las 'di nyid kyī || nyams len gsal ba'i bka' babs

⁸⁸ The words *blo la* are effaced in A.

⁸⁹ mdo sde] B, mdo snga A

⁹⁰ sangs rgyas bsgom pa] B, sangs rgyas bsgoms pa A

⁹¹ sogs] B, swo A

⁹² gnyis] B, gnyes A

bzhugs || {3.8}

de dang⁹³ sngar gyi bka' srol gnyis || khyad par med pa sangs rgyas
kyi ||

bstan pa'i snying po yin pa'i phyir || mos pa tsam la'ang byin
rlabs⁹⁴ 'byung || {3.9}

kha cig mtha' bzhi'i spros bral ni || rgya nag dge slong lta ba dang
||

khyad par med par nor ba yin || rigs pas bden pa bkag rjes su ||

bden med nyid la zhen pa ni || dbu ma'i lta ba mthar thug ste ||

theg pa gsum char 'di nyid ni || rtogs phyir lta ba khyad par med ||

bden⁹⁵ tshad de yang rang rgyud pas || blo la ma ltos yul ngos nas
||

grub pa nyid la 'dod gyur kyang || de ni dgag bya thun⁹⁶ mong ste
||

ming gis btags don btsal ba'i tshe || rnyed pa bden tshad du byas nas
||

de nyid 'gog pa thal 'gyur ba'i || thun mong⁹⁷ ma yin khyad chos yin
||

dgag bya'i khyad par 'di rtogs na || blo yis gang du zhen pa'i yul ||

rigs pas dpyad nas 'gog pa yi || log rtog thams cad khegs par 'gyur
||

gzhan du bden pa bkag rjes su || bden med zhen pa'ang 'gog dgos
na ||

blo ni snga ma gnod bcas dang || phyi ma thug med nyid du 'gyur
||

bden <B667> par med pa 'gog na ni || bden par yod⁹⁸ pa nyid 'gyur
te ||

dgag pa gnyis kyis⁹⁹ rnal ma ni || go ba'i phyir zhes 'dzer bar byed
|| {3.10}

lta ba'i snyigs ma 'di dag ni || lung dang rigs pas dgag par bya ||
{3.11}

rgya nag dge slong ma dpyad par || rang dgar rtog pa bkag pa la ||

⁹³ The words *de dang* are effaced in A.

⁹⁴ byin rlabs] B, byin brlab A

⁹⁵ bden] B, illegible in A.

⁹⁶ thun] B, ngun A

⁹⁷ thun mong] B, thun mongs A

⁹⁸ yod] B, yong A

⁹⁹ kyis] A, kyi B

sgom gyi mchog tu smra ba dang || 'di ni rigs pas dpyad pa'i tshe ||
 mtha' bzhi'i spros pa <A10a> ma rnyed pa'i || 'dzin med lta bar smra
 ba gnyis ||
 mtshungs zhes smra ba stong pa nyid || zab mo spong ba'i bdud
 tshig yin || {3.12}

gzhan yang dkon mchog brtsegs pa las || yod med gnyis po mtha' re
 re ||
 byas nas dbus ni dbu ma ste || de yang bstan med brjod¹⁰⁰ med par
 ||³
 gsungs pa de yang rgya nag gi || lta ba nyid dang khyad med 'gyur
 ||
 de bzhin ting 'dzin rgyal po las || yod med gtsang dang mi gtsang
 sogs ||
 mtha' gnyis yin phyir de spangs nas || dbus la'ang mi gnas gsungs
 pa dang ||⁴
 yum las stong dang mi stong sogs || gnyis la spyod pa thams cad ni
 ||
 mtshan mar spyod pa gsung⁵ pa dang || yang dag sbyor ba'i rgyud
 las kyang ||
 stong pa bsgom par mi bya ste || stong min bsgom par mi bya 'o ||
 stong pa mi spong rnal¹⁰¹ 'byor pas || stong min yongs su mi spong
 ngo ||
 stong dang mi stong gzung ba la || rtog pa nyung min skye bar 'gyur
 ||⁶
 zhes gsung pa yang rgya nag gi || lta ba nyid dang khyad med 'gyur
 || {3.13}

mgon po byams pas rgyud bla mar || 'gog bden yod dang med pa
 dang ||
 gnyis dang gnyis min rnam <B668> pa bzhir || brtag par mi nus
 gsung pa dang ||⁷
 dbu ma rtsa ba'i bstan bcos las¹⁰² || stong ngo zhes kyang mi brjod de
 ||
 mi stong zhes kyang mi bya zhing || gnyis dang gnyis min mi bya
 ste ||⁸
 zhes gsung gzhan yang de nyid las || bcom ldan bzhugs dang mya
 ngan las ||
 'das pa gnyis la mtha' bzhi yi || spros pa bkag par mdzad pa dang
 ||⁹

¹⁰⁰ brjod] B, rjod A

¹⁰¹ rnal] B, rnel B

¹⁰² The word *las* is effaced in A.

rigs ldan pad ma dkar po dang || 'phags pa lha yis 'di skad du ||
 yod min med min yod med min || gnyis ka'i bdag nyid kyang min
 pa ||
 mtha' bzhi las grol dbu ma pa || mkhas pa rnams kyis de kho na ||¹⁰
 zhes gsungs pa yang rgya nag¹⁰³ gi || lta ba nyid dang khyad
 med 'gyur || {3.14}

de la yod min med min don || kun rdzob don dam la dgongs pas ||
 nged la gnod pa med ces zer || 'o na snang ba'i dngos <A10b> po
 kun ||
 don dam¹⁰⁴ yod dang kun rdzob tu || med pa¹⁰⁵ gnyis kar thal 'gyur
 te ||
 gnyis ka min pa min pa'i phyir || rnam gsum khas blangs dran par
 gyis || {3.15}

kha cig yod med la sogs bzhi || bden par med pa'i don yin zer ||
 bzhi po chos can du bzung nas || bden pa bkag pa bsgrub chos¹⁰⁶ su
 ||
 yab sras gzhung las ma gsung te || thams cad bcom ldan gshegs
 bzhugs dang ||
 gnyis med ye shes la sogs la || bzhi po bkag par gsungs¹¹ phyir ro ||
 {3.16}

bden pa bkag pa'i med dgag la || dbu ma'i lta bar zhen pa ni ||
 sngar bshad yid¹⁰⁷ ches lung gis gnod || rgyud las rtsa ba'i ltung bar
 gsungs¹² || {3.17}

theg gsum lta ba khyad med na || mi pham mgon pos theg gsum la
 ||
 <B669> bdag med rtogs pa rim gsum dang || theg chen sbyor mthong
 bsgom pa gsum ||
 dman pa'i sbyor mthong bsgom gsum las || lta bas 'phags tshul
 gsungs dang¹³ 'gal || {3.18}

klu sgrub zhabs kyis mtshan med ni || tshang¹⁰⁸ bar rtogs dang ma
 rtogs pa'i ||
 khyad par gsungs¹⁴ shing zla bas kyang || 'khor gsum mi dmigs she

¹⁰³ rgya nag] B, rgyan A

¹⁰⁴ don dam] B, bden par A

¹⁰⁵ med pa] B, bden pa A

¹⁰⁶ bsgrub chos] *em.*, sgrub chos AB

¹⁰⁷ yid] B, ying A

¹⁰⁸ tshang] B, tshangs A

rab dang ||
 bsam gyis mi khyab chos nyid sogs¹⁰⁹ || lta ba'i khyad par gsungs
 dang 'gal ||¹⁵
 rigs pas kyang ni gnod pa ste || dman pa'i mthong ba'i lam nyid nas
 ||
 bde gshegs snying po mthong bar 'gyur || 'dod na las nyon las byung
 ba'i ||
 skye sogs rnams las 'das 'gyur zhing¹⁶ || nyan rang snying po lta ba
 la ||
 mig dang mi ldan gang zag tu || thogs med zhabs kyis¹¹⁰ gsungs
 dang¹⁷ 'gal || {3.19}

blo la ma ltos yul ngos nas || grub par rang rgyud kun 'gog na ||
 bha byas phyi don rang ngos nas || grub par khas blangs smras
 dang 'gal || {3.20}

btags don btsal tshe ma rnyad don || tha snyad don dam gang
 du 'dod ||
 tha snyad yin na 'dogs byed kyi || ming yang tha snyad med 'gyur
 te ||
 de dag phan tshun ltos grub phyir || de skad du yang dbu ma las ||
 byed po las la brten byas shing || las <A11a> kyang byed po de nyid
 la ||
 brten nas¹¹¹ 'byung bar ma gtogs¹¹² par || 'grub pa'i rgyu ni ma
 mthong ngo ||
 byed pa po dang las dbang gis || dngos po lhag ma shes par bya ||¹⁸
 zhes gsungs dngos po lhag ma ni || brjod bya rjod byed la sogs pa ||
 ltos grub kun la 'jug par gsungs || {3.21}

dam pa'i don du ma rnyed pa || de don yin na chos thams cad ||
 dam pa'i don du mi rnyed <B670> par || thal rang gnyis ka mthun¹¹³
 pa'i phyir ||
 gcig¹¹⁴ gi khyad chos ji ltar 'gyur || {3.22}

blo yis gang du zhen pa'i yul || rigs pas dpyad nas 'gog pa ni ||
 log rtog yin na sangs rgyas nas || bzung ste rgya bod mkhas grub
 kun ||

¹⁰⁹ sogs] B, so B

¹¹⁰ kyis] B, kyi A

¹¹¹ brten nas] B, rten nas A

¹¹² gtogs] A, rtogs A

¹¹³ mthun] B, 'thun A

¹¹⁴ gcig] B, cig A

log rtog de dang ldan gyur te || de dag stong dang mi stong sogs ||
gnyis 'dzin zhen yul bkag phyir ro || {3.23}

gcig dang du bral gtan tshigs kyis || rtog blos zhen yul bden grub pa
||
'gog na khyod kyid dam bca' nyams || mi 'gog na ni bden 'dzin gyi ||
log rtog gang gis khegs par 'gyur || {3.24}

ci srid rtog blos yul gyi ni || gnas lugs dpyod par byed pa'i tshe ||
snga phyi gnod bcas thug med gnyis || 'dod thog yin na gang gis
gnod ||
'di la gnod byed gang brjod pa || dbu ma rtsa ba'i bstan bcos las ||
bdag go zhes kyang btags 'gyur zhing || bdag med ces kyang bstan
par 'gyur ||
sangs rgyas rnams kyis bdag dang ni || bdag med 'ga'¹¹⁵ med ces
kyang bstan ||¹⁹
ces gsungs gzhan yang de nyid las || thams cad yang dag yang dag
min ||
yang dag yang dag ma yin nyid || yang dag min min yang dag min
||
'di ni sangs rgyas rjes bstan pa'o ||²⁰ zhes gsungs pa la cis mi gnod
|| {3.25}

'on kyang 'phags pa'i mnyam gzhas ngor || spros pa thams cad
nyer¹¹⁶ zhi'i tshe ||
gnyis po'i skyon yod ma yin te || snga mas zhen pa med phyir ro ||
{3.26}

rigs pas gnas lugs dpyad pa'i tshe || dgag pa gnyis kyis¹¹⁷ rnal ma ni
||
go ba mgon po klu sgrub kyis || yang dag ji bzhin yongs shes <B671>
pas ||
med dang yod par mi 'dod pa || <A11b> de phyir med pa par 'gyur
na ||
ci phyir yod pa par mi 'gyur || gal te yod pa sun phyung bas ||
don gyis 'di ni med par bslan || de bzhin med pa sun phyung bas ||
yod par ci yi phyir mi bslan¹¹⁸ ||²¹ zhes gsungs pa dang cis mi 'gal ||
{3.27}

¹¹⁵ 'ga'] B, 'gag A

¹¹⁶ nyer] B, nye A

¹¹⁷ kyis] *em.*, kyid AB

¹¹⁸ bslan] B, slan A

dbu ma'i tha snyad mi rung ste || rtag mtha' bkag tshe chad mtha'
sogs ||
mtha' gnyis gang rung bkag pa'i tshe || cig shos der ni 'gyur phyir ro
|| {3.28}

kha cig tha snyad tshe na yang || yod min med min la sogs pa ||
mtha' bzhi'i spros bral smra bar byed || {3.29}

'di ni mdo las ston pa yis || 'jig rten nga dang rtsod byed kyi ||
nga ni 'jig rten mi rtsod de || 'jig rten yod med gang smra ba ||
nga yang smra zhes gsungs²² dang 'gal || 'di la dgongs nas zla bas
kyang ||
tha snyad 'jog tshe yod med sogs || 'gog na 'jig rten gyis gnod pas ||
yod med so sor smros zhes¹¹⁹ gsung || {3.30}

rigs pas kyang ni gnod pa ste || kun rdzob thams cad mtha' bzhi yi
||
spros pa nyid las ma 'das phyir || kun rdzob rnam gzhang mi
rung 'gyur || {3.31}

myong ba dang 'gal bshad par bya || zas gos me chu la sogs pa ||
yod med dris¹²⁰ tshe dbu ma pas || yod min med min smra byed na
||
skabs kyi don yang mi 'grub cing || gzhan la klan kar 'gyur ba
mthong || {3.32}

kun rdzob la yang bskal don¹²¹ dang || rgyu yis dus na 'bras bu sogs
||
yod min med¹²² min dgos pa'ang yod || lhag ma snang rung chos
rnams la ||
yod med yin min la sogs <B672> pa || so sor smra ba dbu ma'i lugs
|| {3.33}

la la bdag dang gang zag gnyis || rnam grang yin smra mu stegs
gzhang ||
yin phyir tha snyad du yang bdag | med phyir gang zag yod par 'dod
||
sgrub byed bdag med rtogs pa'i blo || yul gyi gnas tshul rtogs phyir
dang ||

¹¹⁹ zhes] B, shes A

¹²⁰ dris] A, des B

¹²¹ bskal don] *em.*, skal don AB

¹²² med] B, mad A

bdag 'dzin yul gyi gnas tshul la || ma zhugs phyir zhes smra ba thos
|| {3.34}

'o na yum gyi mdo rnam dang || klu sgrub yab sras gzhung¹²³ lugs
rnam ||
mu stegs gzhung lugs <A12a> su 'gyur te || de dag rnam grang
gsungs phyir ro¹²⁴ || {3.35}

de yang mdo las bdag dang¹²⁵ ni || sems can srog dang gang zag dang
||
gso ba skyes bu shed bdag dang || shes skyes¹²⁶ byed po tshor po
dang ||
shes pa po dang mthong po ste || byed pa'i skyes bu bcu gnyis
gsungs || {3.36}

de don 'phags pa klu sgrub kyis || ji srid phung por 'dzin yod pa ||
de srid ngar 'dzin yod²³ ces pa'i || ngar 'dzin dmigs yul nga tsam la
||
byed pa'i skyes bu bcu gnyis kyi || ming gi rnam grangs btags par
bzhed || {3.37}

de nyid phung po rnam la ni || rnam pa lnga'am rnam bdun gyis
||
btsal ba'i tshe na mi rnyed kyang || ma dpyad 'jig rten grags pa'i ngor
||
rang gi nye bar blang bya dang || cha shas dang ni yan lag la ||
brten nas len pa po dang ni || cha shas can dang yan lag can ||
'jog pa shing rta'i dpe dang ni || sbyar bar dpal ldan zla bas gsung
||²⁴
rtsod tshe 'di la ma snyon¹²⁷ cig | 'chad tshe slob ma ma slu¹²⁸ zhig |
{3.38}

sgrub byed kyang ni ltar snang ste¹²⁹ || skye med mtshan med spros
med rnam ||
rtogs <B673> pa'i blo la mtshung pa ste || skye sogs tha snyad du
yod phyir || {3.39}

¹²³ gzhung] A, gzhud B

¹²⁴ ro] B, ra A

¹²⁵ dang] B, dad A

¹²⁶ shes skyes] em., shed skyes AB

¹²⁷ snyon] em., bsnyon B, smyon A

¹²⁸ slu] A, bslu B

¹²⁹ ste] B, sta A

gzhan la skyon brjod tshe na bdag | don dam med mthong grol 'gyur
 na ||
 mo gsham bu med mthong bas kyang || grol bar 'gyur zhes sun 'byin
 smra ||
 sun 'byin 'di ni klu sgrub kyis || bdag yod bdag gi yod ces pa ||
 'di ni dam pa'i don du log | gang phyir yang dag ji lta ba ||
 yongs su shes pas gnyis mi 'byung ||²⁵ zhes gsung pa la brjod par
 snang ||
 rags pa'i rnam gzha¹³⁰g 'di 'dra la'ang || 'khrul na phra mo ji
 ltar 'gyur ||
 rang lugs tha snyad bdag med dang || phung sogs don dam med pa
 la'ang ||
 tha ba 'di ni mtshungs 'gyur te || rigs pa'i rnam gzha¹³⁰g shes na dpyod
 ||
 gzhung lugs rnam gzha¹³⁰g dor nas ni || phal pa'i ngag tsam la brten
 nas ||
 grub mtha'i rnam gzha¹³⁰g 'jog byed pa || mkhas pas mthong na bzhad
 gad¹³¹ gnas || {3.40}

chos dang gang zag tshig zur la || sbyar ba'i bdag dang chos thams
 cad ||
 <B12b> bdag med ces pa'i bdag gi don || sangs rgyas bskyang¹³²
 dang zla ba yis ||
 ngo bos grub pa la bshad nas || tha snyad du yang med par bzhed
 ||
 de dang byed pa'i skyes bu la || bdag ces brjod pa so sor smros ||
 {3.41}

la la gang zag bdag 'gog pa'i || rigs pa'i gtso bo gang zag nyid ||
 phung po lnga la rnam bdun gyis || btsal tshe ma rnyed pa yin pas
 ||
 gang zag dang ni gang zag bdag | khyad par med phyir gnyis ka yang
 ||
 tha snyad du yod don dam du || med pa dbu ma'i lugs zhes <B674>
 smra || {3.42}

gnis po khyad med mu stegs dang || mang bkur lugs yin gzhan la
 med || {3.43}

¹³⁰ rnam gzha¹³⁰g] B, rnam bzha¹³⁰g A

¹³¹ bzhad gad] B, gzha¹³¹g gad A

¹³² bskyangs] B, skyangs A

ghzan du chos kyang chos bdag tu || 'gyur te btsal tshul mtshungs
 phyir ro ||
 'dod na 'phags pa'i rjes thob kyis || cho kyis bdag med rtogs pa'i tshe
 ||
 chos tsam med par¹³³ rtogs par 'gyur || {3.44}

sgrub byed blo gros rtsing ba yi || 'bras rtags nyid du shes bya ste ||
 de don gang zag rnam bdun gyis || btsal tshe rnyed na gang zag gi ||
 bdag tu 'gyur ba'i don yin phyir || {3.45}

kha cig dbu ma'i lta ba yis¹³⁴ || gdul bya'i sems rgyud 'khrid pa'i tshe
 ||
 thog mar nga zhes brjod pa yi || rjes 'brang rtog pa'i phreng ba nyid
 ||
 goms pas ngar 'dzin lhan skyes kyis || zhen yul nga nyid rnyed pa'i
 rtags ||
 mtshan ma ci rigs 'byung bar 'dod || der¹³⁵ rjes nga med ces brjod pa'i
 ||
 rjes 'brang rtog pa goms pa las || med dgag blo la shar ba nyid ||
 gnas lugs mthar thug rtogs pa yi || lhag mthong yin zhes sgrog¹³⁶ par
 byed || {3.46}

bdag lta'i zhen yul goms pa yi || sgom pa mu stegs lugs yin gyi ||
 kha che bye brag smra ba nas || dbu ma'i bar la lugs 'di med || {3.47}

'di nyid mgon po byams pa yis || bdag tu lta ba bskyed mi dgos ||
 goms pa thog ma med dus can || ²⁶ zhes gsung pa yis 'di bkag zin ||
 {3.48}

nga med ces ni brjod pa yi || rjes 'brang rtog pa goms tsam gyis ||
 dbu ma'i lta ba rtogs na ni || dbu ma'i gzhung lugs rgya mtsho las
 ||
 gsungs pa'i rigs pa'i rnam gzhas la || thos bsam don <B13a> med
 nyid 'gyur <B675> te ||
 sgom pa'i tshul 'di blun po dang || mkhas pa gnyis la khyad med
 phyir || {3.49}

'di 'dra lhag mthong yin na ni || 'di dang gzhi gnas zung 'brel du ||

¹³³ par] em., pa Ab

¹³⁴ yis] B, yi A

¹³⁵ der] B, de A

¹³⁶ sgrog] B, sgrogs A

sgom pa mi srid nyid 'gyur te || brjod pa'i rjes 'brang nyid yin¹³⁷
 phyir || {3.50}

kye ma snyigs ma'i dus 'di mtshar || 'di 'dra blun pos 'dzin srid
 na'ang ||
 dbu ma'i gzhung la sbyang pas kyang || 'di la yid ches ci zhig yin
 || {3.51}

mdor na theg chen lta spyod gnyis || ma 'khrul nyams su len 'dod na
 ||
 mtha' bzhis dben pa'i stong pa nyid || snying rje'i snying po can yin
 no ||
 byang chub sems dpa'i sdom pa'i skabs te gsum pa'o || {3.52}

7. Conclusion

The third chapter of the *sDom gsum kha skong* represents a nuanced scholarly exposition and critical analysis of the Madhyamaka philosophical tradition as it was articulated and contested in the Tibetan intellectual landscape during the fifteenth century. This chapter offers a sophisticated methodological approach to examining the intricate doctrinal variations and contemplative methodologies prevalent among different Madhyamaka schools of thought during this pivotal period. A further study is required to trace the ideas critiqued in this chapter within their proper contexts and in the works, where they are advocated, to see whether the criticizer presented the ideas accurately or not, and whether the judgments passed are warranted or not. This, unfortunately, falls beyond the scope of the current article.

8. Bibliography

Works from the Tibetan Buddhist canons referred to in the endnotes are not listed here. Instead, their respective standard IDs are provided within the endnotes and the catalogs in which these numbers are given are listed in the bibliography.

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¹³⁷ yin] A, min B

65.

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- ¹ *Rājaparikhāratnāvali* (p.161): *bdag la de dag sdig smin cing// bdag dge ma lus
 der smin shog / /*, see Hahn 1982, p.160 for parallel Sanskrit text.
- ² *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* (D3871, fol.28b4-4: P5272, fol.33b1-1): *bdag bde gzhan
 gyi sdug bsngal dag / yang dag brje bar ma byas na// sangs rgyas nyid du
 mi 'grub cing // 'khor ba na yang bde ba med//*, see Bhattacharya 1960, p.170
 for parallel in Sanskrit.
- ³ *Kāśyapaparivata* (P760, fol.114b2-4; T11.43, fol.220b3-5): *'od srungs yod ces
 bya ba de ni mtha' cig go / med ces bya ba de ni mtha' gnyis sol// de gnyis kyi dbus
 gang yin pa de ni / dpyad du med pa/ bstan du med pa/ rten ma yin pa/ snang ba
 med pa / rnam par rig pa med pa/ gnas med pa ste/ 'od srungs 'di ni dbu ma'i lam
 chos rnam la yang dag par so sor rtog pa zhes bya'o //*.
- ⁴ *Samādhiraśasūtra* (P0795, fol.29a5-5): *yod dang med ces bya ba gnyi ga mtha'//
 gtsang dang mi gtsang 'di yang mtha' yin te// de phyir gnyi ga'i mtha' ni rnam
 spangs nas // mkhas pa dbus la'ang gnas par yong mi byed //*.
- ⁵ *Aṣṭāsāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* (T15, fol.9a4-9a7; P743, fol.7a3-5): *gal te gzugs
 la spyod na mtshan ma la spyod do// gal te gzugs kyi mtshan ma la spyod na
 mtshan ma la spyod do// gal te gzugs kyi mtshan ma'o snyam du spyod na mtshan
 ma la spyod do// gal te gzugs kyi skye ba la spyod na mtshan ma la spyod do// gal
 te gzugs kyi 'gag pa la spyod na mtshan ma la spyod do// gal te gzugs kyi 'jig pa
 la spyod na mtshan ma la spyod do// gal te gzugs kyi stong pa'o snyam du spyod
 na mtshan ma la spyod do//*.
- ⁶ *Saṃpūṭitantra* (P26, fol.257a7-8; T344, fol.317b7-318a1): *stong pa bsgom par
 mi bya ste// stong min bsgom par mi bya'o// stong pa mi spang rnal 'byor pas//
 stong min yongs su mi spang ngo// stong dang stong min gzung⁶ ba las// rtog pa
 nyung min skye bar 'gyur//*.
- ⁷ *Mahāyanauttarantraśāstra* (D4024, fol.55a3-4; P5525, fol.55a7-55b1): *gang
 zhig med yod min yod med ma yin yod med las gzhan du'ang // brtag par mi nus
 nges tshig dang bral so so rang gis rig zhi ba// dri med ye shes 'od zer snang ldan
 dmigs pa kun la chags pa dang // sdang dang rab rib rnam par 'joms mdzad dam
 chos nyi ma de la 'dud//*, see Johnston 1950, pp.20-21 for Sanskrit.

- ⁸ *Mūlamadhyamakārika* (p.376): *stong ngo zhes ni mi brjod de// mi stong zhes kyang mi bya zhing // gnyis dang gnyis min mi bya ste// gdags pa'i don du brjod par bya//*. See the same page for Sanskrit.
- ⁹ *Mūlamadhyamakārika* (p.458): *bcom ldan mya ngan 'das gyur nas// yod par mi mngon de bzhin du// med do zhe'am gnyis ga dang // gnyis min zhes kyang mi mngon no // bcom ldan bzhugs par gyur na yang // yod par mi mngon de bzhin du// med do zhe'am gnyis ga dang // gnyis min zhes kayng mi mngon no//*. See the same page for Sanskrit.
- ¹⁰ *Vimalaprabhā* (D1347, fol.270b6-6; P2064, fol.186a2-3): *yod min med min yod med min// gnyis ka'i bdag nyid min pa'ang min//, Jñānasāmuccaya* (D3852, fol.27b3-4; P5252, fol.30b2-2): *yod min med min yod med min// gnyis ka'i bdag nyid kyang min pas// mtha' bzhi las grol dbu ma pa// mkhas pa rnams kyi de kho na'o//*.
- ¹¹ *Mūlamadhyamakārika* (p.458): *bcom ldan mya ngan 'das gyur nas // yod par mi mngon de bzhin du // med do zhe'am gnyis ka dang // gnyis min zhes kyang mi mngon no // bcom ldan bzhugs par gyur na yang // yod par mi mngon de bzhin du // med do zhe'am gnyis ga dang // gnyis min zhes kyang mi mngon no //*. See the same page for Sanskrit.
- ¹² *rDo rje theg pa'i rtsa ba'i ltung ba* (P3308, fol.222a6-7): *ming sogs bral ba'i chos rnams la //der rtog pa ni bcu gcig pa //*.
- ¹³ *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* (D3786, fol.3a2-3, fol.7b4-4, fol.8b7-7; P5184, fol.3b1-2, fol.9a2-2, fol.10a8-8): *dmigs pa mi rtag la sogs pa // bden pa'i rten can de yi ni // rnam pa mngon zhen la sogs 'gog //, bsam mi khyab sogs kyad par gyis // khyad zhugs bden pa'i spyod yul can //, sgom pa'i lam ni zab pa ste // zab mo stong pa nyid la sogs //*.
- ¹⁴ *Lokāṭīṭastava* (D1120, fol.69b3-3; P2012, fol.80a8-80b1); *mtshan ma med la ma zhugs par // thar pa med ces gsungs pa'i phyir // de phyir khyod kyis theg chen rnams // ma lus par ni de nyid bstan //*.
- ¹⁵ *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya* (D3862, fol.227b6-7; P5263, fol.273b4-5): *theg pa chen po bstan pas ni chos la bdag med pa tsam 'ba' zhis ston par byed pa ma yin gyi // 'o na ci zhe na/ byang chub sems dpa' rnams kyi sa dang pha rol tu phyin pa dang // smon lam dang snying rje chen po la sogs pa dang yongs su bsngo ba dang tshogs gnyis dang bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i chos byid kyang yin no //*.
- ¹⁶ *Mahāyanauttāratāntrasāstra* (D4024, fol.57b4-4; P5525, fol.57b8-8): *ji bzhin yang dag mthong ba'i phyir // skye sogs rnams las 'das gyur kyang //*, see Johnston 1950, p.47 for parallel Sanskrit text.
- ¹⁷ *Mahāyānottāratāntrasātravyākḥā* (D4025, fol.112b2-3; P5526, fol.117a1-2): *mdor bsdu na/ gang zag bzhi po 'di ni de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po mthong ba la mig dang mi ldan par rnam par gzhas pa yin te/ bzhi gang zhe na/ 'di lta stel so so'i skye bo dang / nyan thos dang / rang sangs rgyas dang / theg pa la gsar du zhugs pa'i byang chub sems dpa' ste /*, see Johnston 1950, p.74 for parallel Sanskrit text.
- ¹⁸ *Mūlamadhyamakārika* (p.142): *byed po las la brten byas shing// las kyang byed po de nyid la// brten nas 'byung bar ma gtogs par/ 'grub pa'i rgyu ni ma mthong ngo//*. See the same page for Sanskrit.
- ¹⁹ *Mūlamadhyamakārika* (p.302): *bdag go zhes kyang btags gyur cing // bdag med ces kyang bstan par gyur// sangs rgyas rnams kyis bdag dang ni// bdag med 'ga' med ces kyang bstan//*. See the same page for Sanskrit.

- ²⁰ *Mūlamadhyamakārika* (p.304): *thams cad yang dag yang dag min// yang dag yang dag ma yin nyid// yang dag min min yang dag min// de ni sangs rgyas bstan pa'o//*. See the same page for Sanskrit.
- ²¹ *Rājaparīkathāratnāvalī* (p.25): *yang dag ji bzhin yongs shes pas // med dang yod par mi 'dod pa // de phyir med pa par 'gyur na //ci phyir yod pa par mi 'gyur // gal te yod pa sun phyung bas //don gyis 'di ni med par bslan // de bzhin med pa sun phyung bas // yod par ci yi phyir mi bslan //*, see Hahn 1982, p.24 for parallel Sanskrit text.
- ²² Quoted in *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* (D3862, fol.276a2-3; P5263, fol.328b5-6): *bcom ldan 'das kyis 'jig rten nga dagn lhan cig rtsod kyi/ nga ni 'jig rten dang mi rtsod de/ gang 'jig rten na yod par 'dod pa de ni ngas kyang yod par bzhed do// gang 'jig rten na med par 'dod pa de ni nga yang med par bzhed do//*.
- ²³ *Rājaparīkathāratnāvalī* (p.15): *ji srid phung por 'dzin yod par// de srid de la ngar 'dzin yod //*, see Hahn 1982, p.14 for parallel Sanskrit text.
- ²⁴ *Madhyamakāvatāra* (D3861, fol.212a6-212b2; P5281, fol.257a3-6): *bum pa snam bu re lde dmag dang nags tshal phreng ba ljon shing dang // khang khyim shing rta phran dang 'gron gnas la sogs dngos rnam gang dag dang // de bzhin gang dag sgo nas skye 'dis bsnyad pa de rnam rtoḡs bya ste// gang phyir thub dbang de ni 'jig rten lhan cig rtsod mi mdzad phyir ro// yan lag yon tan 'dod chags mtshan nyid dang ni bud shing la sogs dang // yon tan can yan lag can chags dang tshan gzhi me la sogs don dag / de rnam shing rta'i rnam dpyad byas pas rnam bdun yod pa ma yin zhing // de las gzhan du gyur pa 'jig rten grags pa'i sgo nas yod pa yin //*.
- ²⁵ *Rājaparīkathāratnāvalī* (p.13): *bdag yod bdag gir yod ces pa// 'di ni dam pa'i don du log / gang phyir yang dag ji lta ba// yongs su shes pas gnyis mi 'byung //*, see Hahn 1982, p.12 for parallel Sanskrit texts.
- ²⁶ *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* (D4020, fol.32b2-2; P5521, fol.36b1-2): *bdag tu lta ba bskyed mi dgos // goms pa thog ma med dus can //*, see Lévi 1983, p.155 for parallel Sanskrit text.



Smallpox against Itself: Exploring the History of Inoculation in Tibet

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The principle ideas of inoculation

Before discussing inoculation or variolation in Tibet, we need to clarify some facts about smallpox as an infectious disease. In this way, we will understand the development of theories, practices, and methods of inoculation in Tibet. In their long history of writing on medical practices, Tibetans have produced various medical works and used various names and terminologies. Thus, understanding the larger context of the history of smallpox, the principal ideas of disease prevention and inoculation are important and necessary tasks for all scholars who might engage with smallpox and inoculation in Tibet.

In the past, smallpox was the most dangerous and destructive disease. It destroyed families and wiped out entire communities. When it struck, it killed up to fifty percent of its victims.² Those who did not die from this disease would have been left with devastating pockmarks on their faces and bodies. As destructive and dangerous as it was, there were no effective treatments for this disease. The fourth Tsenpo Nomönhen or Jampel Chökyi Tendzin Trinlé, 1789–1839 (1789–1839), a Tibetan polymath at the Qing Imperial Court in Beijing, even named smallpox as “the king of all disease” (*nad kyī rgyal po*).³ Once a

¹ Acknowledgement: I have been working on this paper for several years now alongside my other research obligations. While studying the history of smallpox in Tibet, I was invited to give talks on the subject on several different occasions: in 2020 (through Zoom) at Harvard University and at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science; and in 2019 at the University of Bonn. I greatly benefited from these talks and appreciate comments and suggestions offered by participants. Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, Tibetan social media and online groups have become filled with discussions and debates about Tibetan medicine and its role in treating Covid-19. I have participated in many of these discussions and debates. Indeed, these discussions have contributed to my understanding of additional aspects of infectious diseases. I would like to thank my colleague, Dr. Rachel Griffiths, for reading this paper. Last but not least, I would like to thank Cynthia Col for editing this paper and improving the English. If any mistakes remain, I am solely to blame.

² Williams 2010, 14.

³ Tsenpo Nomönhen 2007, 210.

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person contracted smallpox, he or she had to go through the full incubation period and onwards to the final stage of the disease. Survivors developed an immunity against contracting the disease in the future. Specialists took infected smallpox from a person who had or was experiencing smallpox and then deliberately introduced these materials into the skin of people who had not yet contracted the disease. In doing so, the treated person would develop a form of the smallpox infection that was less severe than naturally acquired smallpox. This would cause the infected person to have immunity to smallpox for life. Because this method used smallpox itself to prevent the very disease that had killed millions of people, it was considered unusual. Obviously, whoever first thought of this method was not only unconventional and revolutionary in their thinking. They were also seemingly proposing the original idea of immunology. Thus, as Gareth Williams states:

The significance of variolation as a medical discovery in its own right must not be underestimated. The people who first thought of this and tried it out were as visionary and bold as Jenner himself, and it was a leap in the dark for them. When Jenner came to experiment with vaccination, he at least had the framework of variation on which to hang his ideas (2010: 58–59).

The person who originally came up with the idea must have made several clinical observations. First, smallpox was a transmissible disease; it spreads between humans, and one person could spread the disease to several others. Second, in every case of smallpox, survivors would develop an immunity preventing them from ever contracting smallpox again. Third, preventive methods such as isolation and quarantine were effective in halting the spread of smallpox. Finally, based on these observations, if physicians deliberately introduced smallpox—either in the form of dry scabs or pus—to patients who had not yet contracted the disease, the treated patients not only would then develop a form of the infection that was less severe than naturally acquired smallpox but also would have immunity to smallpox for life.

From the eighteenth century onwards, when European scholars started to study the origin of inoculation, they soon realized that it was not just limited to Turkey, from which Lady Montague had brought it to Europe. Rather, they noticed that it was practiced in many parts of the world. Because of these common features and similarities, scholars became curious about where the idea of inoculation had mostly likely emerged.⁴ China and India were often considered as the original place

⁴ Boylston 2012.

of inoculation. Also, for a long time, some people thought that the idea of inoculation originated from Tibet. After arriving in China as an missionary doctor, Daniel Jerome MacGowan (1815–93) extensively engaged with the eradication of smallpox in China. When discussing vaccinations in the Wenzhou area in a report based on what he heard during his many years in China, MacGowan indicates Tibet as the source of inoculation.⁵ In the 1930s, two medical historians, G. Seiffert and Du Dscheng-Hsing, also attributed China's original inoculation to Tibetans.⁶ In referencing the story of the Chinese legend of Mount Emei, Donald Hopkins states, "She may have been taught inoculation by a Tibetan monk who had learned it in India."⁷ As recently as in 2014, Alex Mercer asserts that Tibetans practiced inoculation as early as the eleventh century.⁸ However, the study of its origin is problematic. Because inoculation was practiced in many countries and societies, tracing its origins involves both historical and medical contexts as well as understanding transnational medical practices and movements. It could have originated from anywhere, and the person who discovered it might not necessarily have been the first person to document it. Thus, I shall not engage with asserting the origin of inoculation here.

Although how it was practiced varied, the principle idea of inoculation was the same everywhere in the world. In Turkey, for example, the method of inoculation was known as "the ingrafting method." This method involved making a small cut in a patient's arm and then putting smallpox-infected lymphatic tissue into the cut. In Europe, there was a method known as "buying smallpox." This referred to deliberately infecting a child either through having the child directly touch an infected person or by having the child carry infected smallpox materials or wear the clothing of an infected person.⁹ In Africa, there was a tradition that entailed women going to the home of a person who was infected by smallpox. A woman would wrap infectious materials within a fillet of cotton and then go home and place the fillet onto her child's arm.¹⁰ In China, there was a method called "planting of smallpox"¹¹ that involved blowing dry smallpox powder into a child's nose. Sometimes, after hearing someone had a mild type of smallpox, parents would take their child to the infected person and let the child touch the smallpox.

⁵ Gordon 1884, 78.

⁶ Seiffert and Du 1937, 28.

⁷ Hopkins 2002, 110.

⁸ Mercer 2014, 60.

⁹ Woodville 1796, 41–42. Boylston 2012, 310, Williams 2010, 53.

¹⁰ Hopkins 2002, 178.

¹¹ Needham 2000, 141.

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In Tibet, as I shall show later, smallpox was associated with a goddess. Therefore, in talking about inoculation, it was often associated with how the goddess entered or touched the bodies of patients. Thus, terms such as “protecting smallpox” (*'brum bsrung*),¹² “anointing by the smallpox goddess” (*'brum lha bgos pa*),¹³ “planting the smallpox goddess” (*'brum lha btsugs*),¹⁴ or “infecting smallpox” (*brum bgo*)¹⁵ were used to describe various methods of inoculation. In vernacular languages, people sometimes also used terms such as “drinking the smallpox goddess” (*lha blud*) or “taking the smallpox goddess” (*lha 'brum bzhes*) to describe inoculation.

In spite of different terms and methods, the principle idea was the same. It involved deliberately introducing smallpox into the body of a person needing protection. In doing so, the person would contract a mild version of smallpox. This would prevent naturally occurring, dangerous forms of smallpox; moreover, the treated person would

¹² Sangye Lingpa 1971, 716.

¹³ Sumpa Khenpo 2015, 1:784.

¹⁴ Tsenpo Nomönhen 2007, 212. In mentioning two Tibetan terms, *'brum 'debs* and *'brum 'dzugs*, Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp and Ning Tien seem to suggest that Tibetan had only two terms for inoculation. Since these terms seem to be calques of the Chinese term *zhongdou* 种痘, they suggest that the Tibetan practices of inoculation might have come from China (Van der Kuijp and Tien 2022, 15). In the eighteenth century, when inoculation became well-known, some speculated on its origins. At that time, a myth emerged in China that a “divine doctor” (*shen yi*) from E-Mei Mountain taught the method of inoculation to a Chinese nun. Subsequently, she spread the method to China during Song Dynasty. Based on this legend many claimed that China had practiced inoculation as early as the eleventh century. In referring to this legend, scholars like Joseph Needham claimed that China had discovered inoculation and that it then spread outwards from China by diffusion (Needham 2000: 114). But all these claims about how the Chinese invented inoculation are not only inconclusive; they are also not supported by any historical facts and sources. First of all, this legend only emerged in the eighteenth century, and there are many problems concerning claims that could be not be substantiated (Chang 1996: 125–130). Secondly, until the early Ming dynasty the Chinese did not have a clear understanding of smallpox or etiology within Chinese medicine. Indeed, there is no consensus on the history of smallpox or on associated terminology (Hanson 2006: 133). Thus, when studying the origins of inoculation, as Chia-feng Chang has said, “the problem of who exactly invented variolation and when is important, but almost impossible to solve at present (1996: 130). Importantly, until the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), no Chinese texts mention inoculation. After examining these legends and claims, Angela Ki Che Leung, a medical historian in Hong Kong, identified the earliest Chinese medical text to mention inoculation as Zhang Lu’s (1617–?) medical work *Zhangshi yitong* 张氏医通 (Comprehensive Book of Medicine) in 1695 (Leung 2010: 5). If this is true, as I will show later, Tibetan understanding of smallpox and records of inoculation were much earlier than Chinese awareness.

¹⁵ Pel Wangchen Gargyi Wangchuk Gyérap Dorjé 2007, 135.

develop an immunity from smallpox for life. Having said that, inoculation was not as safe as the Jennerian vaccine. The death rate from inoculation was high. It may have been as high as seven percent. For example, during an inoculation procedure at a Tibetan monastery in the Kham region of Tibet, seven monks died out of the total of one hundred seventeen monks who were inoculated.¹⁶ Thus, unless it was absolutely necessary, people would not undergo the procedure.

If we understand these principle ideas of inoculation, practice, and methods, then our tasks of studying inoculation in Tibet is straightforward. First, we need to find when Tibetan started to include the term *sung* (*bsrung*) to describe the prevention of smallpox. It was an important idea and meant that the disease could be protected or prevented if some measures were taken. Of course, all these methods for “protecting against smallpox” should not be identified as the same as an inoculation. This is because not all materials that were used to protect against smallpox actually had an effect that could prevent smallpox. Nevertheless, the idea presented can be considered to be the first to incorporate the principle idea of inoculation. Secondly, in order to qualify as a principle idea of inoculation, the materials used in the procedure must include smallpox itself—the smallpox virus. This means that we need to find out when Tibetans used smallpox materials to prevent smallpox. Smallpox materials could be matter taken from body parts in the form of dry powders or pustules, even bones and bodily flesh themselves. Finally, the most important aspect of inoculation was understanding how immunity worked. This entails realizing that if someone had survived smallpox, the person would be immunized from contracting smallpox again. It is only because people understood this, that many people turned to these dreadful and highly risky methods of prevention. After establishing these principle ideas of inoculation, we may begin to explore how smallpox was understood as an infectious diseases, treatments and preventive methods, and also how ideas about inoculation developed. In exploring the history of inoculation in Tibet, this research does not focus on one particular period or specific works. Rather, it utilizes religious, medical, and historical works that mention methods and practices of inoculation. These works were produced over a long period and address various aspects of smallpox.

Inoculation in the *Four Tantras*?

To address this question, we must briefly detour and engage with the

¹⁶ Chökyi Jungné 2015, 189.

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Four Tantras (*rgyud bzhi*).¹⁷ Not only is this text the most important and authoritative medical work in Tibet. It is also one of the earliest Tibetan medical texts containing detailed chapters on smallpox, and it offers some hints about immunizations and inoculations. Although the *Four Tantras* does not explicitly mention the terms later associated with immunity and inoculation, later scholars who commented on the *Four Tantras* linked the ideas of immunity with this work. This warrants further exploration. The first issue concerns the terms used to identify smallpox in Tibetan medical works. As mentioned above, Tibetan medical literature is vast. As such, it is impossible to survey all of these texts and to examine how each medical work records the names of smallpox. Yet, we can say that we frequently encounter several names for smallpox such as: *drum bu* ('brum bu),¹⁸ *drum bu rim* (smallpox infectious, 'brum bu'i rims), and *lha drum* (the god's pox, *lha 'brum*).¹⁹ Sometimes smallpox is simply referred to as *drum né* (small pox, pox disease, *drum né*), or it is identified as *drum pa* (pox, 'brum pa),²⁰ etc. However, the undisputed and widely recognized term for smallpox is *drum bu*, and the use of this term comes directly from the *Four Tantras* themselves.

In the *Four Tantras*, *drum bu* is specifically used to describe not only the definition, etiology, and classification of smallpox but also symptoms and treatments for it. No other disease is known as *drum bu*

¹⁷ The history of the *Four Tantras* is disputed among medical historians. While some Tibetan scholars have attributed it to the eighth-century physician Elder Yutok Yönten Gönpö (708–833 CE) (Rechung Rinpoche 1973, 207), modern scholars have claimed that it was Junior Yutok Yönten Gönpö (1126–1202) who revised and expanded the *Four Tantras* that we know today as a composition from the twelfth and thirteenth century (Fenner 1996; Ga 2010).

¹⁸ This term appears in several historical and medical works that are said to be earlier than the *Four Tantras*. For example, *drum bu* occurs in two Dunhuang documents: *The Old Tibetan Chronicle* in Dunhuang SO750,0003 and Pelliot tibétain 960 (P.t. 960) (*Li yul chos kyi lo rgyus* [*Religious Annals of the Li Country* (Khotan)]). P.t. 960 describes the disease as contagious and mentions that the Tibetan government decided to evict infected people to Tibet. However, whether this *drum bu*, which was an infectious disease, is the same as smallpox is not clear. Because no available records describe the disease itself in detail, it could also refer to other pox infections disease.

¹⁹ The meaning of this term closely resembles the Chinese name for smallpox, Tianhua 天花 (heavenly flowers). As mentioned above, the *Four Tantras* associates smallpox with a deity, specifically a Mamo goddess. However, it does not provide a specific term for this association. The earliest known use of the term “god’s pox” (*lha 'brum*) that I have been able to find appears in the autobiography of Tāranātha (1575–1634) (Jonang Taranatha 2018, 125).

²⁰ This is a generic term for “pox disease.” Since smallpox also produces pox, it was sometimes referred to as a *drum pa*. However, when *drum pa* is mentioned, it does not necessarily refer to smallpox; it could be another pox-related disease. Thus, mentions must be contextualized.

other than smallpox. The term *drum bu* consists of two distinct Tibetan words: *drum* ('brum) and *bu* (bu). Each word conveys a different sense. *Drum* refers to something that is small, solid and round. *Bu* means "son"; however, it is also used figuratively used to describe something small or tiny. Combining these two words as *drum bu* refers to something solid and small in a rounded shape. As a medical term, *drum* is also used to describe a lump, or pox that has formed on different body parts through infections disease, bodily injury, or other swollen entities. For example, *zhang drum* (gzhang 'brum) means "annual lump"; this term is used to identify hemorrhoids. If we combine both words as *drum bu*, we get "smallpox" or "a pox that is small." In the sixteenth century, Europeans used the term "smallpox" to distinguish the disease from syphilis, then known as the "great pox." Similarly, the author of the *Four Tantras* used *drum bu* to differentiate this disease from others—particularly infectious diseases or pox-producing illnesses, such as leprosy and certain bodily injuries. Therefore, when discussing *drum bu* as a disease, it must be remembered as an infectious disease, with symptoms, a disease progression, treatments, and preventive measures specific to smallpox—not to other diseases.

As the title suggests, the *Four Tantras* has four treatises: *Root Treatise*, *Explanatory Treatise*, *Instructional Treatise*, and *Subsequent Treatise*. Among these, chapters twenty-three and twenty-four of the *Instructional Treatise* (*Man ngag rgyud*) are related to smallpox or *drum bu* ('brum bu). The concluding chapter of the *Subsequent Treatise* (*Phyi ma'i rgyud*) engages with preventive medicine. All these chapters are related to each other. The term *drum bu* first occurs during the explanation of divisions or classifications of disease in the *Explanatory Treatise*. When discussing the thirty-eight diseases that affect the whole body, smallpox is listed as an infectious disease.²¹ Then, in the *Instructional Treatise*, it appears once in chapter twenty-three and four times in chapter twenty-four, which concerns smallpox. All these are precursors to the smallpox chapter of the *Instructional Treatise*. There is no ambiguity about what *drum bu* means. Yet, this term also appears at least three times in different chapters of the *Instructional Treatise*. Specifically, the term appears as part of descriptive or adjectival phrases, or in what Tibetan physicians call symptoms of disease (*nad*

²¹ Yuthok Yonten Gonpo, *The Root Tantra and The Explanatory Tantra from the Secret Quintessential Instructions on the Eight Branches of the Ambrosia Essence Tantra* (Mentsee-Khang) (Mentseekhang Documentation & Publication, 2018), 128.

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rtags).²² These are not categories of disease; rather, they are symptoms of disease.²³

After briefly introducing the term smallpox and establishing it as a distinguished infectious disease, we will now provide a brief description of its etiology, classifications, symptoms, and treatments as presented in the *Four Tantras*. Chapter twenty-three in the *Instructional Treatise* is titled “The Treatment of Hot Infectious Disease Bel Né” (*rims kyi tsha ba bal nad bcos pa*). It deals with infectious disease in general and specifically focuses on *bel né*. In talking of the cause of infectious disease, it reads:

de dus ma mo mkha' 'gro kun 'khrugs te/ /
nad kyi kha rlangs sprin du chags pa las/ /
bal nad rgyu gzer gag lhog 'brum nag 'byung /

At that time, the spirit of a Mamo Khandro²⁴ would fight each other.

²² I have consulted with several Tibetan traditional physicians, including Men Kyi Tso Mo, who were trained in both traditional Tibetan medicine as doctors (*men pa*) and also hold PhDs in Germany. They all agreed that *drum bu* is understood as a distinct disease, while other terms are considered symptoms of disease. An analogy can be drawn to the word “cold” in English: While it can refer to low temperature, it sometimes also refers to the disease, common cold.

²³ Overall, the term of *drum bu* appears nine times in *Four Tantras*. Chapter thirty-two of the *Instructional Treatise* concerns mouth disease (*kha nad gso ba'i le'u ste so gnyis pa'o*); in this chapter, *drum bu* appears twice. One instance is *drum bu chu ser* (*'brum bu chu ser*), referring to tiny clots from pus; the other instance is *gang sem drum bu* (*gang sem 'brum bu*), or gang sem pox. In both cases, *drum bu* is part of a word or phrase, not a standalone term for a disease. The term *drum bu* also appears in chapter eighty-one of, which concerns Nāga-demon diseases (*klu'i gdon nad*). It occurs in a discussion of eighteen different types of leprosy. Among these, there is a type of leprosy known as *drum bu*. It is called *drum bu* (*tiny pox*) because of its symptoms and characteristics; it features tiny white and red pox. The question, then, is how to interpret the usage of *drum bu* in chapters twenty-three and twenty-four, as compared to its usage elsewhere, like in chapters thirty-two and eighty-one. Anyone familiar with the *Four Tantras* would recognize the fundamental differences and distinctions that can be made. First, the term of *drum bu* in the *Explanatory Tantra* as an infectious disease and use of the term *drum bu* in the *Instructional Treatise* are precursors for smallpox chapter. Throughout, *drum bu* refers specifically to smallpox. Second, the use of *drum bu* in chapters thirty-two and eighty-one are not used to identify the disease itself; rather, *drum bu* is used as part of discussions of symptoms of disease.

²⁴ Here we must wonder about the similarity between miasma theory and ideas about Mamo Khandro. Miasma theory originated in ancient Greece as early as the fourth or fifth century BCE. The idea is that infectious disease was caused by “pollution” or a noxious form of “bad air.” The belief that bad air was the cause of pestilence is attributed to the Greek physician Hippocrates (c. 460–377 BCE). The Greco-Roman physician Galen (c. 130–201 CE) expanded the theory and claimed that bad air caused *miasma*, an imbalance of humors in the body. Importantly, the

Then, they would release infectious air composed as clouds. These [clouds] would produce *bel né*, intestinal colic, measles, and black smallpox.²⁵

This states that disease originated from the goddess Mamo Khandro (*mamo sky goer*). She would release infectious air composed as clouds; these would have an effect on the humors and cause infectious diseases. Next, this chapter discusses the category of infectious diseases. The chapter also gives several primary causes of infectious diseases including unbalanced seasons, unhealthy food, and pollution. These would have an effect on the humors and then cause infections. After citing the origin and category of infectious diseases, it goes on to describe infectious disease in general and its divisions. It reads:

dbye ba bal nad 'brum bu rgyu gzer dang / /
gag lhog cham pa'i rims dang rnam pa lnga / /
de la phyi ma bzhi po 'og tu ston / /

The exhaustive division of infectious diseases is five; the Nepalese disease (unidentified), smallpox (*drum bu*), and dysentery, as well as diphtheria and colds. The last four will be described in the later chapters.

This chapter focuses on a general description of five infectious diseases and specifically Nepalese diseases. Discussion of four infectious diseases are the focus of the following chapters: chapter twenty-four is on smallpox, chapter twenty-five is on dysentery, chapter twenty-six is on diphtheria, and chapter twenty-seven focuses on the common cold.

As described, chapter twenty-four is specifically focused on smallpox. Like all the other chapters in the *Instructional Treatise*, it provides the definition of the disease, its causes, symptoms, and divisions and also its development, treatment, and outcomes. In discussing why this disease is named *drum bu*, the text states:

'brum bu'i rims ni spyi dang 'dra ba la / _/
ngo bo tsha ba chu ser la babs nas / _/
rus rkang lha ba'i gting nas skye bar byed / _/

sound of the word *miasma* and the name Mamo are quite similar. If the *s*-sound in *miasma* is blurred, it becomes "miama." As such, it seems possible that it could have been read as Mamo in Tibetan in the eighth century. Christopher Beckwith has clearly demonstrated that the "Greek school" of medicine had an influence on the development of Tibetan medical science (1979, 306). In particular, such knowledge was translated and transmitted by Greek and Roman-inspired physicians that were brought to the Tibetan royal court.

²⁵ Yutok Yönten Gönpö 2015, 239–44.

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thor pa'am 'brum bu 'ong phyir ming du brjod//

Like all infectious diseases, the nature of smallpox is hot. Its hot nature comes out as pus (*chu ser*) and grows as bloody liquid [and/which] comes out when the bone is crushed. Since it scatters in this way, *drum bu* comes up. Thus, it is called *drum bu*.

There are two major types of smallpox: one is black; the other is white. Each of these is divided into three sub-divisions.²⁶ Then, the chapter proceeds to describe two types of treatments: a general treatment and a specific treatment. The general treatment itself is divided into three stages. The first stage is described in terms of how to open a “hire-hole,” a metaphoric word for “ripening” to describe the progression of the disease. After describing these prodromal signs and symptoms, the chapter continues: *bar du 'brum pa phyir thon bde snyam byed/* “At that time, when the smallpox comes out, the patient temporarily feels better.”²⁷

This appears to be an important observation. In modern scientific studies, it also shows that patients initially experience pain and suffering, but then they would temporarily feel better.²⁸ If the patient is cold, the wind could internalize the disease, and this would damage organs. Therefore, the patient must be kept warm.²⁹

In talking about a specific treatment, by following this general description of treatment, the chapter again states that the illness could not be naturally contracted a second time. After the lesions dry up and fall off the skin, patients will have passed through all the stages of smallpox. These survivors would not contract smallpox again. As it says: *'brum pa rdzogs nas shi ba phal du med//* “No one dies after the completion of pox.”³⁰ Moreover, if someone died from a second infection, it would have had nothing to do with smallpox or disease; rather, the *Four Tantras* indicates that a person’s individual karma is the cause.³¹

The concluding treatise of the *Four Tantras* deals with smallpox and other infectious diseases. The summary chapter of the *Subsequent Treatise* outlines how diseases could be deterred. Thus, it provides an overview of preventive medicine in the Tibetan medical tradition.

²⁶ Yutok Yönten Gönpo 2015, 255.

²⁷ Yutok Yönten Gönpo 2015, 255.

²⁸ Hopkins 2002, 4.

²⁹ This heat-therapy was well known in Europe in the past. It might have originated from Rhazes, because he also talked about how patients needed to be wrapped in warm clothing and kept in a warm room to “provoke sweats” (Rhazes 1848, 47).

³⁰ Yutok Yönten Gönpo 2015, 25.

³¹ Yutok Yönten Gönpo 2015, 257.

Emphasizing the importance of preventing disease, it reads:

lan cig lnga brgya'i tha mar bab dus na/ /
'byung po rnam kyis glo bur ye 'drog gtong / /
ma mo mkha' 'gros nad ngan yams su 'bebs/ /
mu stegs gdug pas rdzas kyi sbyor ba byed/ /
de dus bdag gzhan srung ba shin tu gces/ /

Over the period of the last five hundred days, evil forces suddenly create obstacles. Mamo Khandro spreads infectious disease. Heretical forces develop harmful materials. At that time, it is important to protect oneself and others.³²

This chapter also describes how Mamo Khandro spreads all kinds of infectious diseases and how other evil forces create a lot of problems during the degenerated time. The chapter emphasizes how important it is for people to protect themselves from all these infectious diseases. It provides several preventive methods, including describing how reciting mantras and performing meditations could prevent infectious disease. Among the methods it outlines, the most relevant idea concerns how some medicinal properties could be used to prevent infectious diseases including smallpox. It reads: *khyad par tsha rims srung dang 'brum pa srung /* "this is especially helpful for protecting against hot disease and smallpox."³³

The idea is that if these prescribed materials are carried on the body, their presence could prevent all hot diseases including smallpox. No historical or medical records suggest that ingredients like musk and white frankincense could effectively prevent the occurrence of smallpox. Nevertheless, the principle idea of preventive medicine is presented here. That is, if someone uses the right kind of medicine, many diseases—including smallpox—could be prevented. Future ideas about inoculation and preventive medicine would be based on this principle. However, as we have already noticed, the *Four Tantras* mentions the principle idea of inoculation—that is, the understanding that a disease could be prevented by using some medical substances and the idea of immunization. However, it does not explicitly mention inoculation; nor does it describe using *drum tar* (*'brum thar*, or being freed from smallpox) as a way to immunize someone by giving them a mild version of smallpox.

Although providing lots of remedies for treating smallpox, the *Four Tantras* does not explicitly mention smallpox-infected body parts. However, from the sixteenth century onwards, there were several

³² Ibid., 648.

³³ Ibid., 649–47.

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medical texts that discuss employing smallpox—in the form of dry smallpox powder or scabs, or the body parts of these people who had died from smallpox—to treat patients who were having or experiencing smallpox.³⁴ Strictly speaking, this method may not be the same as inoculation as we understand it today. This is because it talks about treating patients who were already experiencing smallpox or cases where there is evidence the disease has already progressed in the body. In contrast, inoculation is a preventive method. It is administrated before a person became sick and contracted the disease.

However, in the following century, Desi Sangye Gyatso (1653–1705), the regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama, associated this treatment with the *Four Tantras*. In interpreting the term *né dré* (*nad 'bras*), meaning the “byproduct of disease” in the *Four Tantras*, Desi Sangye Gyatso identifies it as the drying scabs of smallpox itself.³⁵ In his famous medical paintings, he does not mention how it needed to be used, or whether it could be for inoculation or as a medical substance for the treatment of smallpox. However, he lists dry smallpox scabs as one of the medical substances for smallpox. As mentioned above, these dry smallpox scabs could be used for both inoculation and treatment.³⁶

The ideas of immunity

As mentioned above, the *Four Tantras* does not explicitly mention inoculation and immunization. There could be two explanations for this. First, it is possible that when the *Four Tantras* was written, the authors were unaware of the method of inoculation. The second reason might have to do with how some medical knowledge was transmitted among physicians. Many forms of medical knowledge were shared openly. Therefore, they were written down and published in books. Other forms of medical knowledge were hidden. This kind of medical knowledge is known as “secret medicine” (*gsang sman*). Such knowledge was only taught orally to students by physicians when they thought that particular students or relatives could be trusted with the information. We may never know why inoculation and

³⁴ Gongmen Konchok Pendar (gong sman dkon mchog phan dar, 1511–1577), an important physician and a nephew of the great physician Konchok Delek (1447–1506), was one of the earliest scholars to mention this treatment. When discussing the treatment of smallpox in his medical text, *The Mini Collection of a Variety of Treatments* (*man ngag yig chung sna tshogs*), he lists “dry smallpox scabs” (*brum skogs*) as one of the ingredients. He attributes this method to a mythical figure known as Daka Nyima Ozer (the Daka’s Sun Ray).

³⁵ Desi Sangye Gyatso 2005, 1: 853.

³⁶ Parfionovitch et al. 1992, 72.

immunizations were not included in the *Four Tantras*. However, later on, when explaining sections about smallpox in the *Four Tantras*, some commentators explicitly connect how the *Four Tantras* describes immunity and also mentions how smallpox could treat smallpox patients by using infected smallpox body parts.

For inoculation, the concept of immunity was an important medical concept because it meant that someone could be free from the recurrence of a particular disease after having the disease once or having been vaccinated against it. Among all infectious diseases, Tibetans had the term “immunity” for smallpox; it was known as *drum tar* (*'brum thar*),” which became synonymous with being freed from smallpox. As mentioned above, this term was not included in the *Four Tantras*. However, later scholars explicitly linked this term with it. Kyempa Tséwang was one of the earliest scholars to connect the idea of *drum tar* with the *Four Tantras*. The author of the biography of Kyempa Tséwang is not certain. According to a colophon of one of his writings, he mentions that he composed the treatises in 1479, suggesting that he might have lived in the fifteenth century.³⁷ However, Janet Gyatso states that Kyempa Tséwang and Zurkharwa Lodrö Gyalpo (1509–79) were contemporaries and that both were part of the Sur medical lineage.³⁸ In his famous commentary on the *Four Tantras*, Kyempa Tséwang uses the term of “immunization” (*thar rgyu 'on*) to describe smallpox. In discussing the definition from the *Four Tantras*, he states:

khyab par rdzogs pas thar rgyu 'ong ba yin zhing thor ba'am 'brum bu 'ong bas de'i phyir 'brum bu zhes ming du brjod cing btags so/

After completion [of the course of the disease], [the infected person] would be freed (*thar rgyu 'ong*). [The disease] would be scattered, and then the scabs would fall off. It is known as *Drum bu*.³⁹

This means that anyone who survived smallpox would be free from or immunized from smallpox. This is an extraordinary reinterpretation of the term. The term *tar* (*thar*) is used to describe someone who was “free” or “liberated” or “exempt” from a particular disease. Applying the medical meaning of this term here, this statement conveys that if someone has had the disease, such a person would be freed or exempted from this disease and would not get this disease again. In other words they would be immunized. In medical terms, the idea of immunization would be an important concept; it was the primary idea

³⁷ See his brief biography, Jampa Trinlé 1990, 212–13.

³⁸ Gyatso 2015, 164, 437–38.

³⁹ Kyempa Tséwang 2005, 2: 882–83.

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of how inoculation worked. Once someone had a particular disease, they would not get it again.

In the seventeenth century, another famous physician, Lobzang Chodrak (1638–1710, widely known Darmo Menrampa) echoed similar views about smallpox. When commenting on the definition of smallpox he states, “after completing, it will have liberation” (*rdzogs pas thar rgyu 'ongs*).⁴⁰ He further engages with the debate about the identification of *si bu kop tse*, one of classification of smallpox in the *Four Tantras*. This debate focuses on whether *si bu kop tse* was the same as *sip bu* (measles). At that time, there were scholars who identified *si bu kop tse* as *sip bu* (measles); this would mean that having an immunity to smallpox would also give protection or immunity against measles. However, Darmo Menrampa argues that these two diseases are not same. He writes:

'ga' zhis gis 'di da lta yongs grags kyi sib bu yin zer pa mi mthad de/ thor sib cig thar yang gcig thar go mi chod pas mngon sum du 'gal lo/

According to some, this [*si bu kop tse*] is the same as *sip bu* [measles], as this disease is known currently. However, I disagree with this view because it contradicts the fact that if someone is immunized from smallpox, this does not mean [that person] is immunized from measles.⁴¹

The concept of *drum tar* not only became an important aspect of Tibetan medical practice but was also a significant part of human life itself. Often, Tibetans used this term to describe whether they had immunity to smallpox. If they lacked immunity, they would avoid traveling to places like China, which was considered a cradle of smallpox. For instance, when the Kangxi Emperor invited the Fifth Panchen, Lobsang Yeshe (1663–1737), to Beijing, he explained that, since he was not immunized against smallpox (*drum tar*), he could not undertake the journey to China.⁴²

The earliest mentions of inoculation

What, then, was the earliest Tibetan work to mention inoculation? It is not easy to answer this question. First, when the principles of inoculation first emerged, it might have been only a rudimentary idea that was limited to some basic principle and not fully formulated as were later understandings. Second, the person who documented the

⁴⁰ Lobzang Chodrak 2005, 288.

⁴¹ Ibid., 2: 289.

⁴² Lobsang Yeshe 2014: 250, 254

practice might not have been the first person to have developed the idea and practiced it. Still, the development of inoculation emerged in the framework of preventive medicine. That is, there was an awareness that certain diseases could be prevented or stopped before they caused an infection, if people used proper methods of prevention. These methods might include reciting a mantra with meditations or specifically following some medicinal practices. As the *Four Tantras* points out in *The Subsequent Tantra*, smallpox could be prevented if proper behavioral changes were followed and medications were taken.

With these issues in mind, if we indulge in answering questions about origins, the earliest text that I am able to find that refers to a practice that we might call inoculation does not come from the *Four Tantras*. Rather, it could be found in a fourteenth-century text that Tibetans would call a treasure text, or *terma* (*gter ma*). This kind of text is believed to have been hidden somewhere by past saints and Buddhist masters. In later years, such texts were re-discovered or revealed by treasure revealers or *tertöns* (*gter ston*). Such treasure revealers were often regarded as exoteric, unusual, and sometimes deemed as “crazy.” Many medical texts—including the *Four Tantras*—are often considered to be treasure texts.⁴³ Thus, it is no surprise that the earliest mentions of inoculation might have occurred in this type of text. This text is known as *The Hundred Thousand Protections of Dorje's Beads* (*srung 'bum rdo rje phreng ba*), which is part of the *Summary of the Lama's Intentions* (*bla ma dgongs 'dus*).⁴⁴

The author, or *tertön*, of this text is Tertön Sangye Lingpa (1340–96), who is regarded as one of the most important *tertöns* in Tibet. During his lifetime, he revealed many important texts. Among them are several Dzogchen texts and an extensive biography of Padmasambhava known as *The Golden Garland Chronicles* (*bka' thang gser phreng*). He also became the teacher of many important lamas—including the Fifth Karmapa Deshin Shekpa (1384–1415). When he was invited by Ming Emperor Yongle (1402–24) to come to China, he took this *Summary of the Lama's Intentions* to China as a gift for the emperor.⁴⁵

Like the preventive medicine in the *Four Tantras*, this text describes how a specific *tsakra* (a secret Sanskrit mantra) along with particular medical remedies could prevent specific illnesses. Altogether, there are one hundred and nine different *tsakras* accompanying medical remedies listed in the text. Among these, the seventy-fourth is a *tsakra* for the prevention of smallpox. Its description is only a few sentences,

⁴³ Janet Gyatso 2015, 107–108.

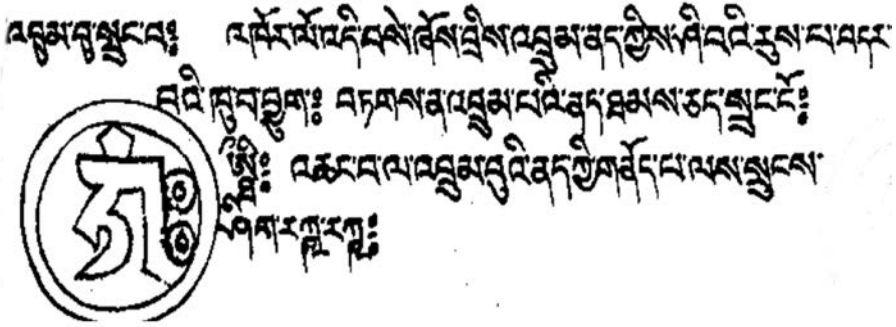
⁴⁴ Sangye Lingpa 1972.

⁴⁵ For a detailed biography of this lama see, Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, 784–87. Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye 2011, 153–58.

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but it describes how smallpox-affected body parts could be used to prevent smallpox by employing this smallpox *tsakra*.

Before translating this paragraph into English, we have to deal with some philological issues. Some words and phrases have different meanings depending on how they are translated, even if the overall



principle applies. Here is the paragraph with the *tsakra*:⁴⁶

The title of this section is '*brum bu srung ba*, which means "protecting from smallpox." To show that this is a treasure term, it is marked with a *ter tsek* (*gter tshegs*), the symbols of a treasure break §. It goes on to describe the method of inoculation. The first sentence is easy to understand. '*khör lo 'di* means this the wheel; *bse zhos bris* means that it needs to be written with the sap of the *bse* tree; *brum nad* refers to smallpox. The next word *kyis* is used to indicate the genitive or a connecting word. Next, we have *shi ba*, which means dead. If we translate these words literally into English, it means "smallpox's death." This would imply the substance must have come from someone who had been killed by smallpox. The word *rus pa* means bone, and *brdar* means to sharpen or invoke something. Finally, we have *khu bas byugs*, which means anointed with fluid or liquid; *btags na* means to carry it. Thus, '*brum pa'i nad thams cad srung ngo* means that it would protect against all smallpox diseases. Next, is the word *i thi*, which means authentic; then, the term is marked by the treasure break.

⁴⁶ I have consulted two different versions of this work. In each version, there are slightly different words in the phrase discussed here. The version I have quoted above has: '*brum nad kyi shi ba'i rus pa brdar*'; the other version has: '*brum nad kyi shi ba'i bum pa brdar*'. The word *rus pa* in the version I have used means bone; the word *bum pa* in the other version refers to a ritual vase, and sometimes it also refers to a woman's breast. Thus, there are slightly different contexts determining which body parts need to be used. In either case, the principle ideas of inoculation are not changed.

The second phrase starts with the words '*chang na*, which means to hold, and *rak+Sha*, which means to protect or guard in Sanskrit. Again, it is marked with the treasure break.

After considering various meanings of the words in these sentences, this is how I would translate this passage into English:

For the prevention of smallpox [marked with the treasure break] This wheel will be written with the sap of the *bse* tree and will be anointed with smallpox fluid [pus or blood] that has been taken from the crushed bone of a person who died from smallpox. If [a person] carries it, it will protect against all smallpox diseases. It is authentic [marked with the treasure break]. If [a person] held it, this would protect from smallpox. *rak+Sha*, [marked with the treasure break].⁴⁷

Sanggye Lingpa did not include any explanation about how it would provide immunity to someone or how it was administered. Thus, we do not know his rationale for how material that came from smallpox victims would prevent smallpox. Still, what he describes is the principle idea of inoculation.

After Sanggye Lingpa, the other Tibetan who is mentioned in relation to inoculation appears to have been Gongmen Konchok Delek (1477–1506), an important Sakya physician. He writes:

*'brum bu bsrung na/ go phye'i nang gi khrag smin mtshams su dum gcig
byugs sngags 'di sum brgya bzlas/ badz+ra ha ra badz+ra na hi badz+ra/ zhes
smin mtshams su btab pas 'brum bu shar 'ongs/ de'i rigs 'brum nag thub nges
so*

In order to prevent smallpox, after ripped blood(matured juice) comes from the *bse* tree, it is applied between the eyes, and this mantra is repeated three hundred times, *badzra ha ra badzra na hi badzra*, (*badz+ra ha ra badz+ra na hi badz+ra*). After applying it, smallpox appears, and this type of [pox] will destroy the black smallpox."⁴⁸

Like Sanggye Lingpa, Gongmen Konchok Delek also did not provide a detailed rationale. However, the principle remains the same: after getting smallpox, a substance from the *bse* tree is applied between the eyes . Then if someone applies it, it could prevent the serious and dangerous form of black smallpox. In short, both methods may seem rudimentary, as they do neither explain how this method could prevent or protect against smallpox nor do they detail its practical application. Nevertheless, they convey the principal ideas of smallpox

⁴⁷ Sangye Lingpa 1971, 716.

⁴⁸ Gongmen Konchok Delek 2013, 2: 1666.

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inoculation. First, this method is clearly referred to as *drum sung*, meaning a preventive method for smallpox. It is not a treatment for those experiencing smallpox symptoms; rather, it is purposefully used to prevent the disease. Therefore, it aligns with the definition of smallpox inoculation. Second, the material used for this preventive method must come from someone who had died from smallpox, implying that the substance must have been affected by smallpox. It was a well-known fact that some corpses of smallpox victims contained the smallpox virus and that smallpox materials could be preserved for a long time for the purpose of inoculation.⁴⁹ Third, after undergoing this preventive method, a person would not contract any form of smallpox. This description aligns with historical practices and developments, and it essentially mirrors the inoculation methods practiced in other parts of the world.

The methods of inoculations

From the seventeenth century onwards, we not only have medical works that talk about methods and practices of inoculation; we also have historical records to show how it was practiced and by whom. There were many records of outbreaks of smallpox, medical works, monastic chronicles, biographies, and government records were filled with many of these occurrences. Although the principle is the same, different methods of inoculation emerged in Tibet by using various body parts of smallpox victims. One of the earliest seventeenth-century scholars to talk about inoculation was the famous physician Lobzang Chodrak, who is mentioned briefly above. He authored several important medical and historical works including the famous medical work *Darmo's Secret Instructional Work* (*dar mo sman rams pa'i gdams ngag bka' rgya ma bzhugs so*). In this medical text, he describes using smallpox scabs and fluid to treat and prevent smallpox. He writes:

*'brum nag bsrungs na de'i rkang dmar//
tshad ma smos rnams thur 'go re//
'di rnams rtsi bzhin legs par btags//
dngul chu zho gang btsun mo phyed//
drod ldan btags la dri chus sbyar//
gong gi sman btab 'dag pa de//*

⁴⁹ For a recent study of the well-preserved tissue material that might contain smallpox virus, see Andrea M. McCollum, Yu Li, Kimberly Wilkins, Kevin L. Karem, Whitney B. Davidson, Christopher D. Paddock, Mary G. Reynolds, and Inger K. Damon, "Poxvirus viability and signatures in historical relics," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 20, no. 2 (2014): 177.

nyin gcig 'dam btags zhib par byas//
de nas ril bu sran 'phos tsam//
legs par dril la mi yal cing //

For the prevention of black smallpox, its marrow [referring to the white fluid from a smallpox blister], which would be measured using the size of a head-stick [an instrument for measuring medicine], will be crushed just like painting powder. One *zho* [a measurement] of mercury and a half [*zho*] of sulfur would be used with a warming quality. Then it would be mixed with the above medicine [white fluid from a smallpox blister]. It is mixed with urine. After one day, it is mixed with mud and made into pills the size of a green bean. Then it is carefully wrapped up so the power could not be lost.⁵⁰

Here, he is talking about making pills that are made of white fluid from a smallpox blister that is mixed with other medicinal substances. Then, he talks about how the patient takes the pill. Before consuming it, the recipient should abstain from food for a day. In the evening, the recipient should drink a soup that is made of pepper. This would open the patient's channels so their body would receive the medicine effectively. The patient takes the pill the next day at noon. The following morning, the patient would drink melted butter, which helps stimulate the flow of bile. If the patient falls asleep during the day, this indicates that the pill did not have an effect on the body. Thus, the person needs to consume a second pill.⁵¹

One of the earliest Tibetan physicians to have used "planting smallpox"⁵² in discussing inoculation appears to have been Tenzin Püntso (commonly known as Deumar Geshe, 1665–?). Tenzin Püntso traveled extensively—including to Mount Emei in Sichuan, China and to India. In his later years, however, he could not get along with a local ruler. The ruler not only threatened his life but also destroyed around forty-two volumes of his works.⁵³ After his death sometime in the 1720s, his disciples started to collect some of his writings and were able to compile over a hundred distinct works.

In another work, *Excerpt from the Original Source known as the*

⁵⁰ Lobzang Chodrak 2001, 244a.

⁵¹ Ibid., 244a.

⁵² The term "planting smallpox" (*'drum tsuk*) became more popular. This term also uses words that are very similar to the Chinese term used to describe inoculation: *zhongdou* 种痘 ("to implant the sprouts" or "planting smallpox"). Whether Tibetans adopted the Chinese term or the other way around needs to be further studied.

⁵³ Tenzin Püntso wrote on many topics from medicine to crafts. His collected works were published in Tibet in the 1990s. Many of his works were lost. Because this text does not have a colophon, some do not consider this section on smallpox to have been his work. This is why this piece is not included in the Beijing edition. However, I think it is his work, and there is no reason to doubt it.

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Quintessential Secret Treatment of Smallpox ('brum bcos gsang ba yang tig las ma yig gab pa mngon phyung), Tenzin Püntsoḱ uses the term "planting smallpox" (*drum dzuk*) for inoculation. While mentioning that he would provide detailed instructions for inoculation elsewhere, he says that the patient should not have eaten meat or garlic and should not have drunk alcohol; in addition, the patient should not have conducted any ritual prayers until the inoculation had been administered, because it would have negative effects on the patient.⁵⁴ He also warns: "If smallpox does not appear on the predicted day, the patient needs to be inoculated again with extreme caution."⁵⁵

During the eighteenth century, there were writings about practices of inoculation. There were also mentions about new methods of inoculation imported from China as well as references to a Tibetan style method of inoculation in China. Chökyi Jungné (commonly known as the eighth Situ Panchen, 1700–1774) was a polymath known for his studies on Sanskrit, thangka paintings, and Tibetan grammar. Chökyi Jungné uses the term "planting smallpox" to describe inoculation in his medical text, *The Source of Happiness for the Tibetan and Chinese Treatment of Smallpox and a Variety of Other Diseases* ('brum bcos sogs rgya bod kyi sman bcos sna tshogs phan 'de'i 'byung gnas).⁵⁶ In referencing an unnamed Chinese medical work, he says it is not easy to inoculate people who drink alcohol often, who have dark and brown skin that has lots of scabs, and have foreheads with lots of wrinkles; such people would suffer terribly when inoculating them. Following this observation, he gives instructions on how to inoculate Tibetans whom he considered "oily": ten dry smallpox scabs mixed with other substances like a small amount of smelling musk can be put up a man's left nostril and a women's right nostril for one night, after all other necessary procedures have been completed.⁵⁷

The Tibetan Buddhist scholar Lozang Tsültrim (1740–1810, also known as Chahar Geshe because he was from the Chahar region of Mongolia) wrote a booklet about smallpox inoculation and published it in Tibetan.⁵⁸ Chahar Geshe used the Tibetan term *lhadrüm karmo* (the

⁵⁴ Tenzin Püntsoḱ 1995, 277.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁵⁶ The method he mentions here is similar to the methods for nasal inoculation that were recorded in 1739 in the *Yuzuan yizong jinjian* 《御纂医宗金鉴》 (Imperially Commissioned Golden Mirror of the Orthodox Lineage of Medicine).

⁵⁷ Chökyi Jungné 1990, 212.

⁵⁸ Lozang Tsültrim 2007. Recently, this work was translated into English as "An Eighteenth-Century Mongolian Treatise on Smallpox Inoculation: Lobsang Tsültrim's 'The Practice of Preparing Medicine for the Planting of Heaven's White Flower'" in Norov, Wallace, and Usukhbayar 2019, 33–37. They mistranslate

god's white smallpox) when he described the procedure, preparation, and methods of inoculation: "The boys need to inhale (it) through their right nostril and the girls should inhale (it) through their right nostril. [This is] the practical knowledge of Guru Lama."⁵⁹ The final statement indicates that he learned this practical knowledge from his own teacher.

In the early nineteenth century, the fourth Tsenpo Nomönhen also introduced Edward Jenner's smallpox vaccination to Tibet.⁶⁰ He wrote detailed instructions on inoculation and encouraged Tibetans to get an inoculation. He writes:

*'brum dkar shun skogs nus ldan phon chen dang //
cu gang chu rtsa gnyis po de dang mnyam/ //
sa skya nas tsam 'di kun zhib par btags/ //
'debs yul snga dro zas la ma zhugs gong //
skyes ba yin na sna bu ga g.yas pha dang //
bud med yin na sna bug g.yon par 'then/ //*

Plenty of the healthy dry white smallpox powder, bamboo manna, and ginger the size of barely are ground into power. In the morning, before having any food, this powder will be put inside of right nostril for men and the left nostril for women.⁶¹

Like Tsenpo Nomönhen, his contemporary, Wangchen Gargyi Wangchuk Gyérap Dorjé (or Lap Kyapgön, 1832–88), the holiness from the Lap region of Kham, also describes a totally different method of inoculation: eating drying smallpox scabs as medicine. He writes:

*'brum dkar thar phyir bgo ba 'di ltar bya//
khams mthun bdun zur min pa'i mi zhig gis //
'brum skogs blangs la nyer gcig 'o mar spang//
gla rtsi gi wang rgya tsha shing mngar btab//
zhag gcig lto sbyang tho rangs g.yer ma dang//
shing mngar lcam pa 'u su thang btab ba'i//
nyi shar dus su 'brum skogs sman bcas 'thung //
gnyid nyid mi log rul skyur rwa mi za//
spyod lam drag shul spang ba'i lnga bdun nam//
zhag dgu'i mtshams nas ldang bar lag blang yin//
zas dang spyod lam tsha ba spyi dang 'dra //*

lhadrüm karmo as "Heaven's White Flower," the Mongolian term for smallpox. Importantly, the translators omitted the phrase that indicates the sources of this method, "the practical knowledge of Guru Lama" (*bla ma dam pa'i phyag len no*).

⁵⁹ Lozang Tsültrim 2007, 109.

⁶⁰ See, Yongdan 2016.

⁶¹ Tsenpo Nomönhen 2007, 212.

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In order to be freed from white smallpox, this is how to infect [the person]. For the person, who has similar Kham (*kham*) and is not infected by seven angles (*bdun zur*), take the dry smallpox scabs and mix them with milk for twenty-eight days; then, mix this with musk, bezoar, al ammoniac as well as liquorice. [The people who received remedies], cannot eat for one night. In the morning as the sun rise, (the person) needs to consume this dry smallpox scab with a decoction. This [decoction] must be made from liquorice, *cham pa* (*lcam pa*), and coriander seeds. The person should not sleep during the daytime, and neither [should they] consume foods that are rotten or made of something sour or salty; moreover, the person should not engage in ferocious behaviors. After five or seven or nine days, the marks of smallpox appear and it is [evidence of] the actual experience of the practice. Then food and behavior should be consumed and conducted according to [what is advised for] the general hot diseases.⁶²

Later in the nineteenth century, another physician, Gangba Chödze Köchok Tsokpel from the Ngawa region of Amdo, wrote a booklet, *Practical Manual for the Prevention of God's Smallpox through Experience* (*lha 'brum 'gog thabs lag len myong grub*).⁶³ As the title indicates, he describes the technique of nasal inoculation and adds that it was written from his personal experience. According to Gangba, drying scabs should be “collected from a child who had smallpox” and the collected scabs must be protected from wind and wetness.⁶⁴

Practices of inoculation

In general, people did not want to get smallpox. When hearing that smallpox had broken out in a particular region or village, people would quarantine themselves at home or run away to the mountains and other isolated places to avoid the epidemic. They also would prevent all outsiders from entering their area. Even after taking these preventive measures, inoculation was still considered. If they could, they would avoid it. However, when people heard about an outbreak of white smallpox, a mild version of smallpox, many would get an inoculation. During my research for this paper, I came across a lot of works that mention how a particular person was inoculated and what their experience was like. Sumpa Khenpo Yéshé Paljor (1704–88), an important Gelugpa polymath in the Amdo region, described how he inoculated Tibetans. Then, he mentions how its practices spread to China and Mongolia. According to his autobiography, after hearing

⁶² Pel Wangchen Gargyi Wangchuk Gyérap Dorjé 2007, 135.

⁶³ Gangba Chödze Köchok Tsokpel 1993.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.

that white smallpox had infected people in the Tsongön region in 1760, he sent one of his trusted agents to collect the pus. He writes:

*lcags 'brug lor mtsho sngon du 'brum pa dkar po lha thor du grags pa
byung tshe de rgyun kho bos mi mngags nas blangs te rang gi gsol dpon
zhi dar on po la bgos pa las spel rgyun hor bod rgya sog yul du khyab
nas khri lhag srog byin dang mtshungs ba'i dge ba'ang bgyis shing da
dung de ltar byed bzhin pa yin/*

In the Iron Dragon year (1760), the existence of white smallpox, known as *lha tor* (*lha thor*), was reported in Tsongön (Chi., Qinghai; Blue Lake). After sending people to collect its material (smallpox scabs), I anointed (*bgos pa*) it on my master chief, Zhidar. Subsequently, this lineage spread to Tibet, Hor, and China, as well as Mongolia. Saving tens of thousands of lives, I have been continuously practicing this to the present day.⁶⁵

Sumpa Khenpo did not write or reveal what kinds of methods he used or what he would mention in public.⁶⁶ Since he used the word anointed (*bgos pa*), the method appears to have been this anointing method.

Lobzang Gyeltsen Sengge (1757–1848), a leading scholar from Tsö (*gtsos*) in Amdo, described how he was inoculated in his autobiography. He writes:

*rang lo bcu gsum pa la 'brum bu'i nad kyis ma thar ba la brten/nye 'khor pa
rnams sems las che zhing mo rtsis byed mkhan rnams nas kyang re zhig 'brum
pa bgos na mi 'gab tshul mang po smras kyang /nub gcig kho bo'i rmi lam du
shar lho mtshams nas mi dkar gos dkar gyon zhing /rta dkar zhon pa zhig
mgyogs par rgyug byung ste da lo 'brum pa bzhes na legs zer ba zhig byung
/sang nyin rmi lam byung tshul mol ba la brten dpon rgan de yang snying
stobs che ba'i dbang gis cis kyang 'brum pa 'debs dgos zhes tshe ring rdo rje
zer pa'i bu tsha zhig la thor ba byung ba las bgos te cung zad lci tsam byung
yang rim dwangs bcas 'brum rjes tsam yang mi mngon par byung /*

When I was thirteen years old (1770), I was still not freed from smallpox. My manager worried about the situation; so he consulted with the people who specialized in divinations. According to them, it might be good idea to undertake inoculation at this moment. One night, I had a dream about a white person who was riding a white horse from the southeast side and telling me that I should be inoculated. After telling this dream to my manager, with encouragement, he agreed to my undergoing the preceding. I was inoculated, and the material came from a nephew—someone named Dorjé Tsering. Initially, the

⁶⁵ Sumpa Khenpo 2015, 1: 784.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 19: 401.

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symptoms were serious, but soon there was nothing that I needed to fear.⁶⁷

The most informative case involving mass inoculation occurred during the Sixth Panchen Lama's (1738–80) visit to China in 1778. For fear of contracting smallpox in China, a team of Tibetan physicians including the high-ranking lama, the second Jamyang Zhépa Künkhyen Jikmé Wangpo (1728–91) from Labrang Monastery, inoculated three hundred of the Panchen Lama's entourage in Alasha (today's Inner Mongolia). They even asked to inoculate the Panchen Lama himself. However, the Panchen Lama did not listen to his advisers. This resulted in his tragic death from smallpox in Beijing in 1780.⁶⁸ In the early twentieth century, in some parts of Tibet, the same people still practiced this type of inoculation. According to the biography of Kelzang Lodrö Künga Lungtok Gyatso (1905–20), an important reincarnation lama from the Ngawa region of Amdo, in 1909, a monastic official asked the physician named Chöjor Gyatso to inoculate the young tulku. After this doctor inoculated the tulku, he suffered terribly, but he survived. At the same time, the doctor inoculated several thousand children in the region. Among these children, one died from the procedure.⁶⁹ All of these reports suggest that the theories and methods of inoculation did not just stay inside the medical works; rather, they were widely practiced throughout Tibet over the course of its history.

Conclusion

In spite of the availability of many materials on smallpox in Tibet, until recently, scholars have not been interested in studying the history of smallpox in Tibet. Thus, many scholars formed an unsubstantiated history of smallpox in Tibet. Indeed, some have even claimed that Tibetans had not practiced inoculations at all. In the early twentieth century, a few scholars, including MacGowan, Seiffert, and Du Dscheng-Hsing have asserted Tibet as the origin of Chinese

⁶⁷ Lobzang Gyeltsen Sengge 2024, 14 b, 15a.

⁶⁸ For detailed information, refer to Yongdan 2021. Recently, after reading the collective works of Tatsak Yéshé Lozang Tenpé Gönpö (1760–1810, also known as the Kundeling Regent Tulku), I noticed the existence of an inoculation manual titled *“lha 'brum dkar po 'dzug pa'i thabs shin tu zab pa dang 'brum srung nyer mkho bcas”* (The Manual of How to Protect Against Smallpox: The Goddess of Plants White Smallpox, Deep and Necessary for Protection). According to this manual, it was transcribed by the Kundeling after learning methods from the chief Tenpa Dargyé, who inoculated three hundred attendants of the Panchen Lama. The method employed by Tenpa Dargyé was nasal inoculation, which he learned from a Chinese source (Tatsak Yéshé Lozang Tenpé Gönpö, 4b-7a).

⁶⁹ Mipam Yangchen Gyépé Dorjé 2007, 521.

knowledge about smallpox inoculation. More recently Mercer and Hopkins have agreed with this assertion. Still, the fact that that inoculation was an integral part of Tibetan medical history is not well known. This paper does not systematically survey Tibetan medical, historical, and religious works that mention inoculation. Nevertheless, from the selected examples drawn from these works, it is evident that inoculation was not only discussed in Tibetan medical texts; it was also practiced throughout Tibet. At least since the fourteenth century onwards, Tibetans had written records that state that samples from body parts infected by smallpox could provide protection from smallpox. Importantly, Tibetans had the concept of *drum tar* or the idea of immunity. That is, they understood that if someone had survived smallpox, such a person would be freed or liberated from smallpox. This understanding can be found in many medical works and became common knowledge about smallpox.

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Note on Drokmi's view on the teachings of Ratnākaraśānti and Vīravajra

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Drokmi Lotsāwa Śākya Yéshé (993-1077)¹ was one of the most significant figures in the later diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet (Tib. *bstan pa phyi dar*). He played a crucial role in introducing the Yoginītantra tradition to Tibet, particularly the *Hevajra* cycle and the *Lam 'Bras* (Path with the Result) teachings of the Sakya school.

Drokmi traveled to India to receive tantric teachings and returned to Tibet around 1025, where he spent the remainder of his life primarily in Mang mkhar mu gu lung², a village near Lha tse in Gzhis ka rtse. There, he continued to receive, transmit and practice the teachings he had acquired. Among the several Indian and Nepalese masters he studied under, Ratnākaraśānti (ca. 970–1045)³ and Vīravajra (ca. 985–1050)⁴ were undoubtedly the most important. Drokmi studied with

¹ 'Brog mi lo tsā ba shā kya ye shes, hereafter Drokmi.

² Also, Mang mkhar myu gu lung.

³ I follow Seton 2015 for the dating.

⁴ According to the *Blue Annals* and other biographies of Mar pa, Mar pa lo tsā ba chos kyi blo gros (1012-1097) visited and studied under Drokmi at the age of fifteen, which would have been in 1026 (1012+14), shortly after Drokmi's return to Tibet. This suggests that Drokmi returned to Tibet in approximately 1025. Both Grags pa rgyal mtshan and Dmar ston confirm that Drokmi spent thirteen years in Nepal and India, including four years studying under Vīravajra, before returning to Tibet. Thus, Drokmi likely left Tibet around 1012, at the age of twenty, and met Vīravajra around 1021. The *Blue Annals* further corroborates this departure date, stating that Drokmi was sent to India when Lo chen rin chen bzang po (958-1055) was approximately fifty years old. This would place the date at approximately 1007 (958+49), a five-year discrepancy from 1012, which may stem from the *Blue Annals*' use of 'approximately' for the date. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Drokmi departed for India in 1012, the same year Mar pa was born. Later, Vīravajra visited Drokmi's residence at *Mu gu lung*, where one of the thirteen caves bears his name. It was there that he taught and collaborated with Drokmi in translating several texts. The cave complex, constructed by Drokmi, served as the site where Drokmi and Gayādhara translated the triple texts of Hevajra cycle there in 1043, as recorded in the pilgrimage guide (*Gnas bshad*) to *Mu gu lung* written by Mus srab pa in 1479 (Davidson 2005: 164, 177, also footnote no.5). Vīravajra's visit must occurred after Gayādhara's three-year stay (1041-1043/44). When Adhīśa was invited to *Mu gu lung* in 1045/6, Gayādhara had departed at least a year earlier and Vīravajra had seemingly not yet arrived. Since Vīravajra reportedly spent three years in Tibet, he must have lived until at least

Ratnākaraśānti for eight years and with Vīravajra for four years while in India. He later received additional teachings from Vīravajra during the latter's visit to his residence. Drokmi's hagiography, recorded in *Bod kyi bla ma dam pa'i rnam thar* by Dmar ston chos kyi rgyal po (ca. 1198-1259) — a student of Sa skya paṇḍita (1182-1251) — contains an intriguing account of his studies under these two masters:

སྒོ་བ་དཔོན་ཤན་ཏི་བཟ་དགེ་སྒྲོང་དཔལ་བོ་རྩོམ་གསལ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་བཤད་སྟེལ་ལེགས་

ཤིང་གདམ་དག་ཀྱང་ཆེ་བར་དགོངས་གསུངས་ཏི་ཤན་ཏི་བའི་ཟེ་སྒྲོང་ལྷི་དང་བསྐྱུན་པའི་རྒྱ་ཆེ་བར་

བྱུང་། དཔལ་བོ་རྩོམ་གསལ་ལྷགས་སུ་ལྷང་བདེ་བ་མན་དག་དུ་བྲིལ་ནས་བྱུང་།⁵

Stearns (2001: 88) translated this passage as follows: “The teacher Śāntipa thought that Bhikṣu Vīravajra’s system for the explication of secret mantra was excellent, and that the oral instructions were also great. So it has been stated. Śāntipa’s vast [teachings] corresponded to the piṭakas in general. Vīravajra’s were encapsulated in esoteric instructions to facilitate practice.”

However, the first part of this translation contains a significant error resulting from a misreading of the Tibetan particle *bas*⁶. Stearns interpreted *bas* as part of the name (along with the agentive marker -s), thereby equating it to Sanskrit Śāntipāda, a seemingly plausible assumption. This led him to interpret Śāntipa as the agent of the sentence, hence rendering it as “the teacher Śāntipa thought”.

In fact, the correct Tibetan equivalent for *pāda* is *pa*, not *ba*, especially following a disyllabic name such as *Śānti*, despite variations in its Tibetan transliteration (*śānti*/ *śān ti*/ *śan ti*). In this context, *bas* functions not as a nominal component but as a comparative particle, equivalent to *las* (meaning “compared to” or “in contrast to”), a usage that is well-attested in classical Tibetan literature. For example, a verse from the *Sa skya legs bshad* illustrates this comparative use clearly:

1050. Given that Vīravajra was unlikely to be younger than Drokmi, he was likely born before 993. However, if his life extended far beyond the known historical markers, it would imply that he visited Tibet at a rather advanced age, which seems unlikely. Therefore, I tentatively conclude that Vīravajra was active between 985-1050, a rather conservative range. Though this dating increases the discrepancy with his teacher Durjayacandra’s alleged tenure between 940-952 at Vikramaśīla monastery, it is more reliable because of calculating backward using firmer chronological references. See Sanderson 2009, pp159-161. for Durjayacandra’s tenure.

⁵ Stearns 2001, p88; see also BDRC: bdr, I1KG80347, p6.

⁶ This example is not intended to suggest that Stearns’ translation of the text is untruthful; On the contrary, it is generally a smooth and reliable rendering.

“མཁས་པ་རང་གིས་ཡུལ་བས་ཀྱང་། ཡུལ་ཁམས་གཞན་ན་མཚོད་པ་ཐོབ། །” (“Rather than {བས} in his own country, a wise one obtains honours in a foreign country.”)⁷

A slight textual corruption in the sentence — namely, the omission of *pa* before *bas*— led to Stearns' misreading. The sentence should correctly read: “slob dpon Śān ti [pa] bas...”⁸, which can be translated as:

“[Drokmi] said that [he] considered the monk Vīravajra's method of tantric interpretation superior, and that [his] pith instructions were also more effective than [those of] master Śāntipāda. [Although] Śāntipāda's [teachings] are extensive, corresponding to the overall [teachings of] the *piṭakas*, Vīravajra's are more readily applicable in practice, being encapsulated in pith instructions. (note: the phrase following “although” appears to be a later complement from a second hand in smaller script).

A similar textual error occurs in the Tibetan hagiographical text *Lam 'bras bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar ngo mtshar snang ba*, composed by Bla ma dam pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan (1312-1375). I have examined three manuscripts of the text:

Manuscript 1. BDRC. bdr: WA0XLF3C52BE85406. p17. L1.

Manuscript 2. BDRC. bdr: WA0XL8F311F2F8B1A. p130. L7.

Manuscript 3. BDRC. bdr: WA11860. p14. L4

⁷ Bialek's translation (2022:186) is based on the Eimer's edition (2014, 23a-b) of *Sa skya legs bshad*; Another example from the biography of Mi la ras pa reads: *o na khyed kyi cha lugs sprang po bas ngan pa 'di dra'i chos pa sngar ma mthong*/. Bialek (2022: 186), based on the de Jong's edition (1959, D 67b), translates as follows: “Now, as for your appearance worse than (*bas*) that of a beggar, I have never seen such a follower of Dharma.”

⁸ Here the nominative *pa*, based on the structure and content of the sentence, functions similarly to the genitive *pa'i*.

It is interesting to notice that the scribe of the first manuscript initially wrote (*Śān ti*) *pas*, likely because it felt more natural and intuitive to him/her. Upon recognizing the comparative *bas* in the source text, the scribe attempted to correct the mistake by altering *pas* to *bas*, simply by adding a stroke. However, the scribe failed to notice the prior omission of a *pa*, and the correction was not thorough—rendering the distinction between *pas* and *bas* was ambiguous⁹. In an effort to further underscore the comparative meaning, the scribe added an extra *kyang*, meaning “even more than (*Śānti* [*pa*]’s teachings).” Unfortunately, later scribes misread the equivocal *bas/pas*, and the subsequent two manuscripts mistakenly recorded “(*Śānti*) *pas*”.

This case is a typical example of the principle of *lectio difficilior potior* (“the more difficult reading is preferable”)¹⁰, as (*Śān ti*) *pas* sounds more natural to Tibetan readers than the correct *bas*, and is more convenient than recognizing that the *pa* before *bas* is actually missing, i.e., the intended correct reading is *Śān ti pa bas*.

There are several additional reasons, beyond those already stated, to support the correction of the passage. First and foremost, the passage represents Dmar ston’s restatement of Drokmi’s own words, which lends stronger credibility to the claim that it reflects Drokmi’s personal assessment — rather than a statement by Śāntipāda, as implied by Stearns’ reading (“the teacher Śānti pa thought...”). Secondly, it is doubtful whether Ratnākaraśānti was ever acquainted with Vīravajra¹¹. The Nepalese master Śāntibhadra introduced Ratnākaraśānti to Drokmi. Drokmi then studied with Ratnākaraśānti for eight years before having planned to return to Tibet. However, he unexpectedly encountered Vīravajra in a forest on his way to worship a statue of Avalokiteśvara in eastern India¹². Deeply impressed, he stayed for an additional four years to receive teachings from him¹³. This sequence of events suggests that the two Indian masters were likely unfamiliar with each other. Furthermore, the corrected reading better fits the

⁹ Notably, other *pa* and *ba* are very distinguishable in this manuscript.

¹⁰ I extend my gratitude to Dr. Szántó for introducing this editorial principle in the reading of Sanskrit texts.

¹¹ Ratnavajra also visited Tibet and appears to have met Vīravajra, who refers to him four times in his work (D1199.34b3; D1412, 394b1, 409a4, 421a5). However, no such reference exists regarding to Ratnākaraśānti.

¹² A mes zhas claimed that Drokmi received a prophecy from the statue after worshipping it, foretelling his future meeting with Vīravajra. This narrative is likely a later alternation. Szántó believes the location to be Bengal, see Szántó 2012, p119.

¹³ A mes zhas also reports that, after receiving an empowerment of Hevajra from Vīravajra, Drokmi was instructed to raise funds for the future teachings. Accordingly, he returned to Tibet, later revisiting Vīravajra two years afterward at the court of king *Canaka after securing financial supports from patrons, where he stayed for four more years.

context: the passage occurs immediately after Drokmi's completion of his studies in India and just prior to his return to Tibet. It thus reads more plausibly as Drokmi's own concluding evaluation of his two principal masters, rather than as an observation attributed to Śāntipāda.

Further support for this correction can be drawn from other sources. The *Blue Annals* contains a similar narrative regarding the life of Drokmi, and paraphrases the concerned passage as follows:

ལྷོ་རྒྱུ་པའི་གསང་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་ཚེས་རྣམས་ལྷན་གྲང་དེའི་ཚེས་ལ་ངེས་པ་ཆེར་སྐྱེས་དེར་ལོ་

བཞི་བཟུགས།¹⁴

Here, the name Śānti is correctly followed by *pa*, and the comparative *las* is used, functioning analogously to *bas* as previously discussed. I shall quote Roerich's (1949) translation here: "In contrast to the *Vajrayāna* doctrine of Śānti-pa, he felt great certainly in this doctrine, and spent there three years."¹⁵

Drokmi's preference for Vīravajra's teachings over those of Ratnākaraśānti may reflect his personal experience and inclination. Szántó has suggested that Drokmi may have regarded Vīravajra as his *paramaguru*,¹⁶ making it more likely that he was more aligned with his teachings. It is also important to note that another early text, *Bla ma brgyud pa bod kyi lo rgyus*¹⁷ by Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147-1216), predates Dmar ston's work but does not contain the passage in question. Dmar ston is the first to record it. Since he claims that his work is based on what he received from Sa skya paṇḍita (1182-1251), these "words of Drokmi" must have reached Dmar ston through Sa skya paṇḍita. It is worth considering whether the absence or inclusion of this sentence equally reflects the differing attitudes of Grags pa rgyal mtshan and his nephew Sa skya paṇḍita (and dmar ston) toward Ratnākaraśānti and Vīravajra, or whether it represents later efforts by their successors to construct a particular narrative and tradition?

¹⁴ BDRC: bdr: UT1KG5762_I1KG5770_0000. p258.

¹⁵ Reorich 1949 p206; Note the word "de" in classical Tibetan can be used to denote a person rather than its usual function as an inanimate indicator. Therefore, "de'i chos la" should be translated as "his [Vīravajra's] teachings"; also, most sources agree that Drokmi studied with Vīravajra for four years. It is unclear whether Roerich's mention of "three years" is a translation error or reflects a variant source.

¹⁶ Szántó 2012, p119, footnote no.100.

¹⁷ The text has in general nearly identical title and parallel content to Dmar ston's account of Drokmi.

Although Drokmi studied with Ratnākaraśānti for a longer period — eight years compared to four years with Vīravajra¹⁸ — his legacy reflects a markedly stronger emphasis on the latter. Under Ratnākaraśānti, Drokmi received teachings on *Vinaya*, *Pāramitā* and *Vajrayāna*¹⁹, including the *Hevajratantra*, *Ḍākinīvajrapaṇjaratantra* and *Samputatantra*²⁰. Ratnākaraśānti must have had a crucial impact on Drokmi's education and understanding of these teachings. Nevertheless, his influence is notably absent in the tradition Drokmi left behind²¹, while Vīravajra's teachings—especially his lineage tracing back to Virūpa—are emphasized.

In Ngor chen's *thob yig*, over ten lineages of teachings are mentioned to have been passed down from Vīravajra to Drokmi and then to the Sa skya school, None, however, are attributed to Ratnākaraśānti. Even the lineages of three aforementioned tantric texts are also recorded as having been transmitted through Vīravajra. This prioritization is also evident in a 15th century commentary on the *Ḍākinīvajrapaṇjaratantra* (mkha' 'gro ma rdo the rdo rje gur gyi rgyud) entitled *Rnam bshad rnam par rol pa*²², written by Ldong ston smon lam (commonly known as lu phu chos rje nam mkha' smon lam, 15th CE) on February 6, 1465. There, only the interpretations of Vīravajra and Gayādhara are given, with no reference to Ratnākaraśānti.

The absence of Ratnākaraśānti in Drokmi's legacy, in part, reflect the priority of his successors, who chose to emphasize the lineages associated with Vīravajra. Although Grags pa rgyal mtshan's text does not include the passage under discussion, it already refers to Vīravajra as “སློབ་དཔོན་བེམ་པའི་སློབ་མ་ནི་རྩོམ་པའི་པུ་ཀླ་པ་འཛིན་པའི་སློབ་དཔོན་མེ་ལུང་ལྷ་པོ་དང་ཀྱེ་སློབ་མ་མཆོག་དགེ་སློང་དཔའ་བོ་དོན་རྩེ་ (Vīravajra, the direct

¹⁸ Grags pa rgyal mtshan and Dmar ston agree on Drokmi's four-years stay in India with Vīravajra. According to Bla ma bsod nams rgyal mtshan and A mes zhabs, they spent together further three years in Tibet, but this is after the statement in question.

¹⁹ BDRC: bdr: WA0XLC557E9939EE2. p727. L4.

²⁰ Stearns 2001, pp86-87; bdr, I1KG80347, p5. L3. Also, *Ngo mtshar snang ba* by Bla ma dam pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan: bdr: WA11860. p13. L7

²¹ Seton discussed the downplaying of Ratnākaraśānti's role in the hagiographies of Adhīśa (982–1054) and observed a similar pattern in the transmission reports of Drokmi. He argued that this marginalization was due to Ratnākaraśānti's philosophical position—specifically, his opposition to Candrakīrti's view—which some of Adhīśa's hagiographical sources emphasize. However, this explanation does not seem to account for Ratnākaraśānti's diminished presence in Drokmi's legacy. Furthermore, although Seton suggests that it would have been impossible for Drokmi to undergo a significant shift in his attitude toward Ratnākaraśānti, a broader examination of Drokmi's intellectual trajectory indicates that such a change is not entirely implausible. See Seton 2015, pp. 46–54.

²² A detailed examination of this commentary will be published in another article.

and foremost disciple of master Durjayacandra, who is the lineage holder of Dombiheruka, the disciple of Virūpa)"²³. This highlights the prominence of the lineage. In later texts, such as A mes zhab's work, the original statement expressing Drokmi's preference for Vīravajra's teachings over those of Śāntipāda, i.e., "སྒོ་བ་དཔོན་ཤན་ཏི་[པ་]བས་དགེ་སྒོར་དཔའ་བོ་རྡོ་རྗེའི་གསང་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་བཤད་སྒྲོལ་ལེགས་ཤིང་གདམས་ངག་ཀྱང་ཆེ་བར་དགོངས་", is replaced by a more direct affirmation of superiority of Virūpa's lineage: "བེམ་པའི་ཆོས་བརྒྱད་དགུ་པ་པཎ་ཏི་ཏ་ཆེན་པོ་མི་ཐུབ་སྒྲོལ་བའི་བཀའ་སྒྲོལ་དེ་ཉིད་ཁྱད་པར་དུ་འཕགས་པར་དགོངས་"²⁴ ([Drokmi thought that] the doctrinal tradition of the great paṇḍita Durjayacandra, the ninth successor in Virūpa's teaching lineage, was superior). This shift clearly illustrates a growing emphasis on the lineage itself over individual teachers.

In conclusion, while Drokmi's preference for Vīravajra's teachings may reflect his personal experience and inclination, the subsequent erasure of Ratnākaraśānti's role in his legacy likely stems from his successors' increasing prioritization of the Virūpa lineage. Both factors—Drokmi's own disposition and the evolving concerns of his tradition—contributed to the marginalization of Ratnākaraśānti in the transmitted legacy of Drokmi.

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²³ BDRC: bdr: WA0XLC557E9939EE2: p726. L6; also, in *Ngo mtshar snang ba* by Bla ma dam pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan: bdr: WA0XLF3C52BE85406. p16. L5: bdr: WA0XL8F311F2F8B1A. p130. L7; bdr: WA11860. p14. L3;

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Classifying Funerary Commissions: Portraits of the Great Abbots of Ngor

This paper is dedicated to the memory of David P. Jackson, whose guidance and scholarship remain a source of lasting inspiration

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he large number of surviving works of sacred art identified as originating from the monastery of Ngor Ewam Chöden (see figs. 1–2)—the main seat of the Ngor branch of the Sakya school in Tsang province of central Tibet—bears witness to the erstwhile richness of its monastic collection. However, as of yet, no systematic study has been undertaken to clarify how that collection came about, how it was successively expanded, and what the underlying principles were that structured it.

One of the main obstacles to this attempt lies in the simple fact that the destruction of Ngor in the early 1960s resulted in the forcible dismantling of its original collection. Sacred images were either taken out of Tibet, hidden away, or even destroyed.¹ As a result, most of Ngor's

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¹ Individual paintings and parts of sets (or perhaps even entire sets) from Ngor appear to have been acquired abroad (e.g., in the USA) since the early 1960s, although very little is known about how they were removed from Ngor and through what channels they were transported overseas. Jackson (2010: 217, n. 60), for instance, remarks on their early availability: "I have heard from a Ngorpa monk in Nepal that many paintings were stolen from Ngor in the early 1960s and smuggled to Kathmandu by men from the eastern-Nepal Himalayan border district of Walung, who repeatedly visited the monastery when it stood unprotected. This might account for the fact that some major and minor icons from Ngor were taken abroad and some sold even before the monastery was completely destroyed [...]." Similarly, a modern history of Ngor states that the destruction of the monastery began in 1961 and continued until ca. 1965, a period during which it was besieged day

surviving artwork is now scattered around the world in museums and private collections, with only a small number actually preserved at Ngor itself. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, there is no detailed catalogue or register (*dkar chag*) available listing the individual objects that were once housed in Ngor's numerous temples, chapels, and lama palaces (*bla brang*).

There is, however, another type of source, the careful reading of which allows one to make a first preliminary assessment of the content of the monastic collection and the circumstances in which part of it was created and expanded over time. Besides studying the works of art themselves, especially those bearing inscriptions, this important source is the biographies of the successive abbots of Ngor. These biographies constitute a very rich literary corpus for the study of the monastery's art-historical heritage, containing numerous references to the commissioning of thangkas, statues, stūpas, scriptures, etc. As this corpus shows, part of Ngor's collection consisted of works commissioned after the death of incumbent and retired abbots as part of their funerary ceremonies or observances (*dgongs rdzogs*). A text-based study of these funerary commissions reveals, for example, the types of posthumous abbot portraits made at Ngor, both in painting and statue.

The phrase commonly used in biographies to specify the purpose of making funerary commissions can be translated as "to fulfil the intentions" of the deceased master (e.g., ... *thugs kyi dgongs pa rdzogs pa'i phyir du*, ... *thugs kyi dgongs pa rdzogs pa'i thabs su*, ... *thugs dgongs rdzogs pa'i ched du*, ... *dgongs pa rdzogs thabs la*, etc.). The same phrase is also used in inscriptions on paintings and statues and allows them to be identified as a funerary commission. However, contrary to what has sometimes been understood, this standard phrase does not refer to any kind of ordinary wish-fulfilling but is used specifically in the context of funerary ceremonies to clarify the purpose of the objects made as a funerary commission. Occasionally, one can even find Tibetan terms for these objects, which can roughly be translated as "funerary commission": *gongdzok ten* (*dgongs rdzogs rten*) or *tukgong dzoktab kyi ten*

and night by thieves and looters, but also adds that most of the sacred objects (*rten gsum phal cher*) were taken away by the government; see Thub bstan snying po, *Ngor e wam chos ldan gyi lo rgyus* (p. 125). Ngor paintings in the Newari-influenced Beri style (*bal ris*) might also have been acquired and brought to Nepal by traders from the Nepalese community in Lhasa during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976); see Khétsun 2008: 174–175. It is also possible that some artworks, or even entire sets, were deliberately preserved by Ngor lamas in a concerted effort to safeguard their religious heritage. For instance, Sönam Gyatso (1933–1987; alias Hiroshi Sonami), the seventy-fourth abbot, took with him to Sikkim in 1958 one of the *Gyüde Küntü* sets of 139 maṇḍalas commissioned in the nineteenth century; see Chandra, Tachikawa, and Wantanabe 2006: Foreword, 1–11; bSod nams rgya mtsho and Tachikawa 1989: vii, x.

(*thugs dgongs rdzogs thabs kyi rten*).

In this paper, therefore, I shall first introduce and present a general classification of funerary commissions traditionally made at Ngor, before discussing the different types of statues made as funerary commissions to portray an abbot of Ngor. The general classification was first presented under the title “Tibetan Buddhist Funerary Commissions: A First Attempt to Classify the Sacred Art of Ngor” at the Eighth International Conference on Tibetan Archaeology & Art (10–13 November 2023), Zhejiang University Center for Buddhist Art, Hangzhou, China. The different types of statues were first discussed at the panel “Tibetan and Himalayan Statuary across Time and Space” organised by Yannick Laurent and David Pritzker at the IATS Prague (3–9 July 2022) in memory and honour of Yury Khokhlov.

1. Funerary Commissions

Descriptions of funerary commissions found in Ngor abbot biographies usually appear as part of the section narrating the death and subsequent funerary ceremonies for an abbot and/or within the account of an incumbent abbot’s tenure, when he himself oversaw these ceremonies for an abbatial predecessor (or predecessors). To give a better impression of those descriptions, some examples shall be given in translation.

The first two examples describe the funerary commissions for Sanggyé Senggé (1504–1569), the eleventh abbot, and the first passage is taken from his biography, which was written by Drangtī Penchen Namkha Pelzang (1535–1602), the thirteenth abbot:²

In order to fulfil the intentions of the Lord, there were commissioned as inner sacred objects a life-size gilded chamber statue of himself; one supplementary statue of himself for the Lamzap lineage measuring the distance between the extended thumb and the base of the little finger of a hand made into a fist; an inner reliquary of a Victory Stūpa, namely a silver reliquary stūpa equal in size to the inner reliquaries of the previous lamas with magnificent features of craftsmanship and embellished with all sorts of precious substances; a painted image equal in height to one storey of Ngor’s main temple to be displayed on the occasion of the monthly offering ceremony on his death anniversary; and numerous magnificent painted images including his Lamdré lineage supplement and Vajramahākāla [i.e., Pañjaranātha Mahākāla].³

² For the terms of office of all Ngor abbots mentioned in this paper, see Heimbel 2017: 513–546.

³ Nam mkha’ dpal bzang, *Sangs rgyas seng ge’i rnam thar* (fol. 344a1–3): *nang rten du rje nyid kyi thugs kyi dgongs pa rdzogs pa’i thabs su | de nyid kyi gzims mal gser sku tshad ma dang | lam zab kha skong mkhyid gang ba gcig | nang rten rnam rgyal mchod*

This funerary commission is also described in the biography of Könchok Penden (1526–1590), the twelfth abbot, who was Sanggyé Senggé's successor on the throne of Ngor and commissioning patron of his predecessor's funerary ceremonies. Whereas the passage from the biography of Sanggyé Senggé refers at its end to "numerous magnificent painted images," of which only two examples are given, the biography of Könchok Penden also details the subject of those images:

In order to fulfil the intentions of the one whose name Sanggyé Senggé is well-known everywhere, who is the lord of the families of all maṇḍalas, and who is identical with the great Vajradhara, [Könchok Penden] commissioned the chamber statue of the Lord, a gilded image of about an arrow's length; a clay statue of him about a cubit in height; a supplement for the Lamzap lineage in the form of his gilded statue with a back measuring about the distance between the extended thumb and the tip of the middle finger; an inner reliquary in the inner sanctum [of Ngor's assembly hall, the Wangkhang Chenmo], namely a silver reliquary of equal size to the reliquary stūpas of the previous lamas, a Victory Stūpa with very fine features of craftsmanship and outstanding ornamental decorations; an image of the Lord himself, a very beautiful thanangka with the height of one storey to be displayed on the occasion of his memorial tea of the twenty-seventh;⁴ and a supplementary thanangka of him for the Lamdré lineage. Moreover, Könchok Penden commissioned thanngkas of the [permission-granting] vision [for teaching the Lamdré] of the Victorious One, the great Vajradhara [i.e., Ngorchon Künga Zangpo], including depictions of the five Supreme Masters [of Sakya, such as] Lord Sachen;⁵ as well as of Lord Könchok Lhündrup and of Lord Sanggyé Senggé; and thanngkas of Hevajra, Saṃvara, Bhairava, Eight-deity [Pañjara]nātha [Mahākāla], [the four-faced Mahākāla form of] Nyengön Chenpo, Śmaśānādhipati, [Śrīdevī] Rematī, Putra, Drendü [Shinjé Nakpo?], Thirteen-deity Karmayama, Vaiśravaṇa with his Eight Horsemen, and the Triad of Red Ones [i.e., Kurukullā, Gaṇapati, and Ṭakkirāja].⁶

rten | bla ma gong ma rnams kyi nang rten dang tshad mnyam pa'i dngul gdung bzo'i bye brag khyad par du 'phags pa rin po che sna tshogs kyi spras pa | zla dus kyi mchod pa'i steng du 'grems pa'i bris sku gtsug lag khang gi thog dang mnyam pa | lam 'bras kha skong dang | rdo rje nag po chen po la sogs pa'i bris sku khyad par du 'phags pa du ma bzhangs |.
⁴ Sangs rgyas seng ge passed away on the twenty-seventh day of the fourth month of 1569; see Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *Sangs rgyas seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 342a4–6).

⁵ On this vision, see Heimbel 2017: 219–221.

⁶ Kun dga' bkra shis, *dKon mchog dpal ldan gyi rnam thar* (fols. 436b5–437a6): *dkyil 'khor thams cad kyi rigs bdag rdo rje 'chang chen po dang gnyis su med pa sangs rgyas seng ge pa zhes mtshan yongs su gsal ba de nyid kyi thugs kyi dgongs pa rdzogs pa'i phyir du | rje de nyid kyi gzims mal sku 'dra gser sku mda' tshad tsam dang | lder sku khru gang tsam yod pa dang | lam zab brgyud pa'i kha skong gser sku rgyab mtho gang tsam yod pa dang | gtsang khang du nang rten bla ma gong ma'i gdung rten rnams dang tshad mnyam pa'i dngul gdung rnam rgyal mchod rten bzo khyad shin tu legs shing 'phra phul du phyin pa dang bcas pa | nyer bdun gyi dus ja'i thog tu 'grem pa'i rje nyid kyi sku 'dra zhal thang*

The third example is taken from the biography of the aforementioned Drangti Penchen Namkha Pelzang, the thirteenth abbot, which was written by his attendant, Sönam Sherap:

Subsequently, the making of receptacles was begun on the seventeenth of the third lunar month of the female water-hare year [i.e., 1603]. As for receptacles of the body, there were statues of the Lord himself, namely a Lamdré lineage supplement of about an arrow's length and a Lamzap lineage supplement measuring about the distance from the tip of the index finger to its base at the third joint; and a painted image [of Namkha Pelzang], namely a *thangka* to be displayed at his memorial tea serving with the height of one storey of Ngor's assembly hall. As for receptacles of speech, three volumes of his collected writings were compiled. As for receptacles of mind, a Victory Stūpa with fine features of craftsmanship was made, which was produced out of a combination of gilded copper and silver, and which was rich in inlaid work of various kinds of precious substances. All these were filled with countless blessing receptacles including relics of the Buddha, the Lord's relics and *tsatsa* tablets made out of his remains, relics of previous lamas and their *tsatsa* tablets, and many *dhārāṇīmantras* taught in the Tantra classes, which were written with the bodily remains of the Lord, and furthermore, with countless collections of *dhārāṇīs* taught in the Tantra classes.⁷

The analysis of the literary corpus of Ngor abbot biographies, as exemplified by those three passages, suggests that, in their most extensive form, funerary commissions may have included the following objects:

Statues Portraying the Abbot

- a chamber statue (*gzims mal sku 'dra*), that is, a statue that was destined for the abbot's former chamber or living quarters

thog tshad ma shin tu mtshar ba | lam 'bras brgyud pa'i kha skong gi zhal thang | gzhan yang rje sa chen gong ma lnga dang bcas pa rgyal ba rdo rje 'chang chen po'i gzigs snang ma | rje dkon mchog lhuon grub | rje sangs rgyas seng ge pa rnam ki zhal thang | kye rdor | bde mchog | 'jigs byed | mgon po lha brgyad | gnyan mgon chen po | dur khrod bdag po | dmag zor ma | pu tra | bran bdud | las gshin bcu gsum ma | rnam sras rta bdag brgyad | dmar po skor gsum rnam ki thang sku | [...] bzhengs |.

⁷ bSod nams shes rab, *Nam mkha' dpal bzang gi rnam thar* (fol. 27a3–6): *de nas chu mo yos lo hor zla gsum pa'i tshes bcu bdun la rten bzhengs btsugs nas | sku'i rten rje de nyid kyi sku 'dra lam 'bras kha bskang mda' gang tsam dang | lam zab kha bskang mdzud gang tsam dang | bris sku dus ja thang sku 'du khang gi thog tshad ma | gsung gi rten bka' 'bum po ti gsum | thugs kyi rten gser zangs dang dngul ra ma lug las bsgrubs pa la rin po che sna tshogs kyi phras phyug pa rnam rgyal mchod rten bzo khyad legs pa rnam la sangs rgyas kyi ring bsrel | rje nyid kyi ring bsrel dang gdung tsha | bla ma gong ma'i ring bsrel gdung tsha sogs byin rlabs kyi rten dpag tu med pa dang | rje nyid kyi gdung rus kyi rgyud sde nas gsungs pa'i gzungs sngags mang po bris pa dang | gzhan yang rgyud sde nas bshad pa'i gzungs kyi tshogs dpag tu med pas phyur bur byas te |.*

- a statue as a supplement continuing an existing set or series of statues of masters representing the lineage of the Lamdré instructions
- a statue as a supplement continuing an existing set or series of statues of masters representing the lineage of the Profound Path Guruyoga (Lam zab bla ma'i rnal 'byor)
- a possible additional statue portraying the abbot (for which biographies do not indicate a specific function)

Paintings Portraying the Abbot

- a large-format memorial *thangka* (*dus thang*), that is, a painting to be displayed on the abbot's death anniversary (which I have discussed in detail elsewhere; see Heimbel 2021)
- a *thangka* as a supplement continuing an existing set or series of paintings of masters representing the lineage of the Lamdré instructions

Other Funerary Commissions

- *thangkas* depicting deities and/or other masters, including previous Ngor abbots
- a Victory Stūpa as the abbot's reliquary shrine
- *tsatsa* tablets made of the abbot's remains (*gdung tsha*)
- a compilation of the collected writings of the abbot

In addition, it appears to have also been a customary part of funeral ceremonies to institute a monthly and annual memorial service (*zla dus* and *lo dus*), or better to say an endowment fund (*thebs rtsa*) to pay for those services.

Although, as listed above, the commissioning of an abbot's statue in order to continue an existing set or series of the Profound Path Guruyoga lineage was part of funerary commissions, it appears that paintings of abbots were never commissioned for this purpose in this context. However, we do know that the masters of the Profound Path Guruyoga lineage were also commissioned as paintings. This is illustrated by two examples depicting Buddhaśrī (1339–1420) and Könchok Lhündrup (1497–1557), the tenth abbot, as single main figures. According to the rich inscriptions on the paintings, a first set was originally commissioned by Lhachok Senggé (1468–1535), the ninth abbot, for his own practice (*thugs dam*), and Buddhaśrī is painting number 11 of this first set (see fig. 3). The set was successively supplemented by the eleventh and thirteenth abbots, Sanggyé Senggé and Drangti Penchen Namkha Pelzang. The painting of Könchok Lhündrup is a supplement commissioned by Drangti Penchen Namkha Pelzang and is numbered painting 19. As one of the inscriptions indicates, these two paintings

later came into the possession of Amezhab (1597–1659), the twenty-seventh hierarch of Sakya, a great patron of religious art, although other paintings from the set and its supplements appear to have remained at Ngor, where they were documented by Rāhula Sāṅkrtyāyana (1893–1963).⁸

The present study relies primarily on textual and epigraphic evidence. It is therefore important to note that within the corpus of Ngor abbot biographies, the presentation of the commissioning of works of art can vary considerably, ranging from a brief mention of objects to detailed enumerations extending over several folios. For instance, none of the currently available and inscribed commissions by Lhachok Senggé, the ninth abbot, are recorded in his extant biography by Drangti Penchen Namkha Pelzang, the thirteenth abbot.⁹ Moreover, there are not full-length biographies for each and every abbot available, and those available do not always provide detailed records of all funerary commissions. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain whether all of the objects listed above were always part of funerary commissions, and this surely also depended on the economic situation of the deceased abbot or his lama palace (*bla brang*), his status, and his discipleship.¹⁰

It is also important to note that individual funerary commissions were the result of historical processes, and thus not all of those listed above were already commissioned for Ngor's first abbots. For instance, the earliest textual records of memorial *thangkas* are those of Gorampa Sönam Senggé (1429–1489), the sixth abbot (but this was made at his main seat at Tupten Namgyel and not at Ngor), and of Lhachok Senggé, the ninth abbot.¹¹ From this time onwards, there

⁸ For a discussion of this set with supplements, including transliterations of the inscriptions, see Heimbels 2024. For the lineage of the blessings and instructions of the Profound Path Guruyoga down to Ngorchen, see Kun dga' bzang po, *Thob yig rgya mtsho* (fol. 51a2–4).

⁹ However, a presently unavailable, more extensive biography of Lhachok Senggé was written by Künga Drölchok (1507–1566), which served as the basis for the one by Drangti Penchen that is accessible to us; see Heimbels 2017: 518. For images of paintings that were commissioned by Lhachok Senggé but that are not recorded in his biography, see HAR Set ID 5566.

¹⁰ There are also the four successive abbatial histories (*gdan rabs*) of Ngor. The capsule biographies of the successive abbots presented in the first two histories—the second concluding with the autobiographical sketch of Könchok Drakpa (b. 1715), the thirty-ninth abbot—are quite detailed and sometimes include information on funerary commissions, whereas the latter two histories are comparatively brief and do not include any relevant details on these commissions.

¹¹ See Yon tan 'byung gnas, *Go rams pa'i rnam thar* (p. 364.8–13), Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, *Go rams pa'i rnam thar* (p. 269.1–3), Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *lHa mchog seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 262b4), dKon mchog dpal ldan, *dKon mchog lhuṅ grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 273b4–5), Ngag dbang brtan pa'i rdo rje, *dKon mchog lhuṅ grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 294a3–4), Heimbels 2021: 310.

occur regular references to the creation of this type of *thangka*, and the earliest surviving memorial *thangkas* date from the 16th century. Moreover, the discussion below will show that statues of the first Ngor abbots, made as additions to sets or a series of masters representing a particular lineage, could also be part of a funerary commission for a later abbot, rather than for the abbot they actually depicted. In addition, as shall also be discussed below, some chamber statues were installed in Ngor's Lamdré Chapel, the Lamdré Lhakhang, apparently to function there as a supplement of the Lamdré lineage.

2. *Funerary Commissions: Thematic Sets of Thangka Paintings with Supplements*

Occasionally, funerary commissions also included thematic sets of lineage master paintings or statues. These were supplemented or updated by the individual Lamdré and Lamzap supplements mentioned above. However, even though numerous such items—for instance, Ngor-related Lamdré lineage sets—have survived, textual references and available epigraphic evidence for the production of sets of paintings or statues as part of funerary commissions are comparatively rare.¹²

The first and most famous sets of Ngor's paintings were commissioned by Ngorchen Künga Zangpo (1382–1456), the founder of Ngor, as funerary commissions. To fulfil the last wishes of two of his late masters, Ngorchen commissioned two exceptionally well-crafted sets of scroll paintings that were directly related to the teachings he had received from his revered masters. The first was an eleven-painting set portraying the chief lineage masters of the Lamdré instructions in memory of Drupchen Buddhaśrī (1339–1420) and a fourteen-painting set depicting the forty-two maṇḍalas of the Vajrāvalī cycle (with three additional maṇḍalas from the Kriyāsamuccaya) in memory of Sapzang Pakpa Zhönnu Lodrö (1346–1412). Since the maṇḍalas of the Vajrāvalī cycle were not traditionally ordered by later Ngor abbots as part of funerary commissions, Ngorchen's well-documented set will not be discussed here.¹³

Some of the best sources on early sacred art at Ngor are the two extant biographies of Ngorchen. One was written by Mūchen Könchok

¹² For possible examples of Ngor-related sets of Lamdré lineage paintings, which are as of yet not traceable in sources, see HAR Set ID 385 (Single Figure Composition), HAR Set ID 1739 (Two Figure Composition), HAR Set ID 1732 (Three Figure Composition), HAR Set ID 1737, HAR Set ID 2314, HAR Set ID 3101, HAR Set ID 3102 (Four Figure Composition).

¹³ On the set depicting the maṇḍalas of the Vajrāvalī cycle, see Heimbel 2017: 193–205.

Gyeltsen (1388–1469), his direct disciple and successor as abbot of Ngor, and the other by Sanggyé Püntsoḳ (1649–1705), the twenty-fifth abbot, who compiled early Ngorchén biographies written by direct disciples into a single extensive account in 1688. Both biographies describe the major sets of paintings, statues, and murals that Ngorchén commissioned in memory of his teachers. They also mention his commissioning of numerous other scroll paintings (depicting maṇḍalas and pure realms) and present a fairly detailed description of the murals of Ngor's assembly hall, the Wangkhang Chenmo. Sanggyé Püntsoḳ, whose account is slightly more detailed than Mūchen's, describes the first Ngorpa sets representing the Lamdré lineage masters, both in painting and statue, as well as murals, all of which Ngorchén commissioned in honour of his late Lamdré master Buddhaśrī:

As a means to fulfil the intentions of Drupchen Buddhawa, Ngorchén commissioned eleven great paintings of the complete lineage masters of the Oral Instructions [i.e., the Lamdré]. Furthermore, for the upper inner sanctum, which is now known as the Lamdré Chapel, he commissioned a set of statues of the Lamdré lineage beginning with a magnificent gilded image of Vajradhara and large magnificent clay images of the subsequent lineage from Nairātmyā until Drupchen Buddhapa; small clay images of the entire lineage from Vajradhara until Drupchen Buddhapa, which are housed in the Lamzap Chapel; and as murals of the inner sanctum where the lamas reside, depictions of the lineage masters of Hevajra, Cakrasaṃvara, Guhyasamāja, as well as innumerable depictions of buddhas and bodhisattvas.¹⁴

As mentioned in this passage, the complete set of paintings consisted of eleven pieces (of which four still survive; figs. 4–7), and Ngorchén had the central masters portrayed in successive pairs facing each other, except for the three paintings of Vajradhara, Sachen Kūnga Nyingpo (1092–1158), and Buddhaśrī, which had single main figures. The set might possibly have already been made in the early 1420s, when Ngorchén was still based at his original home monastery of Sakya.

¹⁴ Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Ngor chen gyi rnam thar* (fols. 37b4–38a1): *grub chen buddha ba'i thugs dgongs rdzogs pa'i thabs su | gsung ngag gi bla ma brgyud pa yongs su rdzogs pa'i bris sku chen mo bcu gcig dang | gzhan yang gtsang khang steng ma da lta lam 'bras lha khang du grags par | rdo rje 'chang gi gser sku khyad par du 'phags pa dang | bdag med ma nas grub chen buddha pa'i bar lder sku khyad par du 'phags pa che ba rnams dang | rdo rje 'chang nas grub chen buddha pa'i bar du brgyud pa yongs su rdzogs pa'i lder sku chung ba rnams lam bzang [= zab] lha khang du bzhugs pa dang | bla ma rnams bzhugs pa'i gtsang khang gi logs bris la | kye rdo rje dang | 'khor lo bde mchog dang | gsang ba 'dus pa rnams kyi bla ma brgyud pa dang | sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' dpag tu med pa bzhengs |*. See also Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Ngor chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 38b4): *gzims chung deng sang lam zab lha khang du grags pa'i gsung ngag brgyud pa'i lder sku chung ba rnams bzhugs sa 'di yin no |*.

After Ngor was founded in 1429, he apparently took the set with him to his new monastic seat, where it was displayed during the annual bestowal of the Lamdré instructions.¹⁵

Ngorchen's biography also provides further information about other later Lamdré lineage paintings at Ngor:

The eleven Lamdré thangkas made as a means to fulfil the intentions of Drupchen Buddhawa, together with the supplement thangkas of subsequent lamas, are the thangkas that are displayed during the Hevajra path initiation of the Oral Instructions [i.e., the Lamdré], alternating each year with the set of golden thangkas commissioned by Lord Könchok Penden. The continuation of the golden thangkas has been commissioned by Jampa Künga Tashi. All these thangkas are kept in the erstwhile Zimchung Kanyima ["Two-pillared Residence Quarter"] that is nowadays known as the Lamzap Chapel. If they are forcibly taken from this place of storage to somewhere else, the adamant Dharma protectors will take action to stop such attempts.¹⁶

This passage mentions "supplement thangkas of subsequent lamas," that is, paintings of the last generation of abbots who transmitted the lineage that were commissioned to bring the old set by Ngorchen up to date. One such supplement or completion (*kha skong*) survives and was commissioned by Lhachok Senggé (1468–1535), the ninth abbot (see fig. 8). The painting portrays Künga Wangchuk (1424–1478) and Gorampa (1429–1489), abbots number four and six, as a pair of main figures,¹⁷ and its commissioning patron, Lhachok Senggé, is identifiable by inscription: "This Lamdré lineage supplement was commissioned by the realised Tantra practitioner Lhachok Senggé."¹⁸

¹⁵ For a detailed study of the whole set, see Heimbel and Jackson 2023.

¹⁶ Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Ngor chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 38a2–4): *grub chen buddha ba'i dgongs rdzogs thabs lam 'bras thang ka bcu gcig | bla ma phyi ma'i kha skong dang bcas | gsung ngag gi lam dbang skabs su | rje dkon mchog dpal ldan pas bzhengs pa'i gser thang rnam dang res mos su 'grem pa 'di yin | gser thang 'phros rnam byams pa kun dga' bkra shis kyi bzhengs par 'dug | bzhugs sa sngar gyi gzims chung ka gnyis ma da lta lam zab lha khang du grags par bzhugs | 'di las gzhan du 'khyer bcom byed na rdo rje chos skyong rnam kyi tshar gcod kyi las mdzad par 'gyur ro |*.

¹⁷ The fifth Ngor abbot, Penden Dorjé (1411–1482), was obviously not considered part of the Lamdré lineage and the sixth abbot, Gorampa, thus takes his place here; see Heimbel 2017: 513, n. 1.

¹⁸ Inscription: *lam' bras rgyud pa'i kha skong 'di rig pa 'dzin pa lha mchog seng ges bzhengs |* . Moreover, there are verses in praise of the two main figures, written in gold letters in the red bottom strip, allowing for their identification. Verse of Künga Wangchuk: *@ | | rgyud sde kun gyi de nyid gzigs | | smin grol dga' ston phyogs bcur 'gyed | | phrin las dbang phyug 'dul bya yi | | 'dren pa dam pa de la 'dud | |*; verse of Gorampa: *@ | | rgya chen bsod nams lus stobs rab rgyas te | | de gshegs gsung rab seng ge'i nga ro yi | | log smra'i ri dags mtha' dag krug? [= skrag?] mdzad cing | | thub stan gangs rir skyong ba de la 'dud | |*. For similar verses from a Lamdré guru-worship ritual, see Kun dga' chos 'phel, *Lam 'bras bla ma mchod pa'i cho ga* (fol. 6a4, 6a5–6):

Moreover, the ordinal number “fourteenth” (*bcu bzhi pa*) is written on the brocade mounting of the painting. This number clarifies the position of the painting within the series of Lamdré lineage master paintings, and allows for reconstructing the series down to the present painting number 14 as follows:

- Paintings 1–11: Ngorchén’s old set of eleven paintings showing a total of twenty lineage masters with Buddhaśrī as the last one on painting number 11
- Painting 12: First supplement portraying Ngorchén as a single main figure (non-existent)
- Painting 13: Second supplement portraying Mūchen Könchok Gyeltsen (1388–1469), the second abbot, and Jamyang Sherap Gyatso (1396–1474), the third abbot, as a pair facing each other (non-existent)
- Painting 14: Third supplement portraying Künga Wangchuk (1424–1478), the fourth abbot, and Gorampa (1429–1489), the sixth abbot, as a pair facing each other

A comparison of the size of painting number 14 in its unmounted state to the size of the four existing paintings of Ngorchén’s old set shows that they were made the same size, between 84–87,5 cm high and 78,2–80 cm wide. The carbon dating of the cloth of painting number 14 has shown that the cloth was made in 1400 ± 40 years. This means that it is possible that the cloth from Ngorchén’s original set of eleven paintings may have been used for the series of paintings continuing his set.¹⁹

It should be noted that painting number 14 was not made immediately after the death of the last abbot it depicts, Gormapa, who died in 1489, but several decades later, most likely during the tenure of its commissioning patron, Lhachok Senggé, who served as abbot from 1516–1534. Textual evidence of similar types of commissions is available for some early lineage statue supplements, which were made as part of the funerary commission for a later abbot, rather than for the abbot they actually depicted. However, this was not common practice. One possible reason for these exceptions may have been that the custom of making these supplements was not yet firmly established at the

|rgyud sde kun gyi de nyid gzigs| |smin grol dga’ ston phyogs bcur ’gyed| |mkhyen rab dbang phyug gdul bya yi| |’dren pa dam pa de la ’dud|; |rgya chen bsod nams lus stobs rab rgyas shing| |bde gshegs gsung rab seng ge’i nga ros yis| |log smra’i ri dwags mtha’ dag skrag mdzad pa’i| |thub bstan gangs ri skyong ba de la ’dud|. For a discussion of the painting, see Jackson 2003, Jackson 2016: 312–316, fig. 13.9. An image is also available at HAR 30518.

¹⁹ I would like to thank Tarun Kumar Jain for sharing photos of the painting with me.

time they were made.

The series could possibly be further reconstructed as follows:

- Painting 15: Fourth supplement portraying Könchok Pel (1445–1514), the seventh abbot, and Sanggyé Rinchen (1453–1524), the eighth abbot, as a pair facing each other (non-existent)
- Painting 16: Fifth supplement portraying Lhachok Senggé (1468–1535), the ninth abbot, and Könchok Lhündrup (1497–1557), the tenth abbot, as a pair facing each other

This reconstruction is based on a painting that could possibly be identified as number 16 (see fig. 9), based on the following observations.²⁰ Although the painting has no inscription identifying it as a continuation of the Lamdré lineage, the identities of the two main masters are revealed to be Lhachok Senggé and Könchok Lhündrup by an inscription written in gold letters in the red bottom strip. Interweaving the individual syllables that make up their names, the inscription consists of verses in praise of the two abbots, as they are likewise recorded in Lamdré liturgies, which suggests that they are representatives of the Lamdré lineage.²¹ Furthermore, not only is the layout of the painting similar to that of painting number 14, but the canvas is also similar in size to Ngorchén's old set and its third supplement, painting number 14, measuring 85.7 cm high and 76.3 cm wide. After the two verses of praise, the inscription continues as follows: "May the root and lineage lamas bless the realised Tantra practitioner Sanggyé Senggé."²² This request for blessings suggests that the painting was most likely commissioned by Sanggyé Senggé (1504–1569), the eleventh abbot,

²⁰ For an image of this painting, see HAR 41215. For previous discussions, see Bonhams 2015, HAR 41215, Heller 2018.

²¹ Verse of Lhachok Senggé: @ | | bla ma rnams dang lhag pa'i lha tshogs la | | mchog tu dad pas tshul bzhin mnyes byas nas | | rgyud dang man ngag du ma'i mdzod bzung ste | | ji bzhin smra ba'i seng ge de la 'dud | ; verse of Könchok Lhündrup: | dkon mchog gsum dngos yongs 'dzin mgon gyis bzung | | khrims ldan thos bsam bsgom pa'i nor gyis phyug | | lhun grub phrin las phyogs brgyar spel mkhas pa'i | | blo ldan dge ba'i bshes la gsol ba 'debs | | For the similar verses from the Lamdré guru-worship ritual, see Kun dga' chos 'phel, *Lam 'bras bla ma mchod pa'i cho ga* (fol. 6b1, 6b1–2): | bla ma rnams dang lhag pa'i lha tshogs la | | mchog tu dad pas tshul bzhin mnyes byas nas | | rgyud dang man ngag du ma'i mdzod 'dzin pa | | ji bzhin smra ba'i seng ge de la 'dud | ; | dkon mchog gsum dngos yongs 'dzin mgon gyis gzung | | khrims ldan thos bsam bsgom pa'i nor gyis phyug | | lhun grub phrin las phyogs brgyar spel mkhas pa'i | | blo ldan dge ba'i bshes la gsol ba 'debs | .

²² Inscription: rtsa brgyud kyi bla ma rnams kyi rig pa 'dzin pa sangs rgyas seng ge la byin gyis brlab tu gsol | | .

himself.²³ As we read in his biography, as abbot of Ngor he oversaw the funerary ceremonies for Könchog Lhundrüp, and among the many funerary commissions mentioned is a supplement for the Lamdré lineage.²⁴ Although his biography does not specify how many main figures were depicted in this supplement, it is possible that there were in fact two masters. In theory, supplements depicting two lineage masters as main figures could only have been commissioned after the death of every other abbot, and in Lhachok Senggé's biography, the only funerary commission of a *thangka* mentioned by subject is his memorial *thangka*, not a Lamdré supplement.²⁵ Future research will have to show whether these preliminary considerations are correct and whether the painting is indeed another Lamdré supplement.

The passage from Ngorchen's biography translated above next mentions a new set of "golden *thangkas*" (*gser thang*) commissioned by Könchok Penden (1526–1590), the twelfth abbot, and continued by Jampa Künga Tashi (1558–1615), the fourteenth abbot. In this context, the question arises as to whether these "golden *thangkas*" were really paintings with a layer of gold paint as background, or whether the term "golden *thangkas*" is used to refer to ordinary paintings in which gold was used extensively as paint. The first set commissioned by Könchok Penden is not recorded in his own biography, but the second set commissioned by Jampa Künga Tashi is mentioned in both their biographies, although it is not referred to as a supplement (*kha skong*). Moreover, in Jampa Künga Tashi's biography it is mentioned in a way that suggests the latter interpretation, stating that the set was "embellished with an abundance of gold outlining" (*gser ris kyi gya nom pas sbras pa*).²⁶

A possible candidate for these two successive commissions could be the well-known thirty-plus Lamdré set showing its masters as individual figures. This set was commissioned in the late sixteenth century

²³ On Ngorchen's commission of the *maṇḍalas* of the *Vajrāvalī* cycle, he had himself depicted as the patron of the set in the lower left corner of the last painting (number 14), and his inscription contains a similar request for blessings for himself; see Heimbels 2017: 201.

²⁴ See Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *Sangs rgyas seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 337b5): [...] *lam 'bras kha skong gi bris sku la sogs pa dang* l.

²⁵ See Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *lHa mchog seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 262b4): *gtsug lag khang du dus ja'i steng du 'grems pa'i bris sku la sogs pa rnam bzhangs te* l.

²⁶ See Kun dga' bkra shis, *dKon mchog dpal ldan gyi rnam thar* (fol. 451b3): *lam 'bras bla ma brgyud pa'i bris sku bcu bdun yang de skabs bzhangs shing* l; Ngag dbang brtan pa'i rdo rje, *Kun dga' bkra shis kyi rnam thar* (fol. 46b4): *de dang stabs bstun lam 'bras chos kyi brgyud pa'i bris sku bcu bdun l gser ris kyi gya nom pas sbras pa bzhangs te* l. In his abbatial history of Ngor, Sanggyé Püntok also records only the seventeen paintings by Künga Tashi, and identifies them as paintings in or painted with gold (*gser ris*); see Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fol. 20a4–6): [...] *lam 'bras brgyud pa'i gser ris bcu bdun* l.

in a late Newari-influenced Beri style and its last known painting number 34 portrays Drangti Penchen Namkha Pelzang, the thirteenth abbot and predecessor of Jampa Künga Tashi. At present, however, this cannot be confirmed by any available inscription on the paintings, and they also appear to lack the rich gold outline mentioned above.²⁷ There are several paintings from a Ngorpa set or series with single main figures from around the sixteenth century with “copious use of gold for the main figures” that are also possible candidates,²⁸ though they are painted in a very different style (e.g., parts or even the whole of the masters’ robes, as well as their skin, appear to be painted in gold). These were previously identified by David Jackson as Khyenri, but identified in discussions with two Tibetan scholar-painters, Tsejang Penpa Wangdü and Dorje Rinchen, as Menri.²⁹ As a final candidate, a single painting from a previously unknown Ngorpa set has recently surfaced, possibly depicting the successive lineage masters of the Lamdré in a blue-green Chinese-inspired landscape style (see fig. 10).³⁰ An inscription on the reverse of the painting identifies Jampa Künga Tashi as the commissioning patron of the painting, or most likely of the entire set of which it is part, and also clarifies that it was made as a funerary commission for Könchok Penden:

In order to fulfil more and more the extraordinary intentions of the Venerable Lord, the Great Master of Ngor Ewam Chöden, Könchok Penden, I, his vajra disciple, Śākyabhikṣu Sharpa Jampa Künga Tashi, have commissioned [this thangka] with devotion [expressed] through the three media of body, speech, and mind.³¹

²⁷ For descriptions of individual paintings from this set, see HAR Set ID 385, Jackson 2010: 206–208, fig. 8.19. With the exception of seven paintings, David Jackson was able to locate twenty-seven in private and museum collections; see Heimbrel 2025b.

²⁸ Jackson 2016: 147. See also Jackson 2016: 172–184 (4. Lamdre Set 4: With Main Figures in Gold).

²⁹ See HAR Set ID 2197, Jackson 2016: 140–141, fig. 6.2, 146–148, fig. 6.12, 174–178, figs. 7.10–7.15, 7.17–7.18, Minneapolis Institute of Art, “The Arhat Rob-abyor” (no. 1804). Among the available paintings, the most recent Lamdré master shown as a single main figure is Jamyang Sherap Gyatso (1396–1474), the third abbot, as identified by an inscription on the reverse, which also clarifies the position of the painting as number eleven on the left and allows it to be counted as the twenty-third painting in the set: *g.yon bcu gcig 'jam dbyangs shes rab rgya mtsho la na mo* | |; see Christie’s 2018: 34, lot 311, HAR Set ID 2197, HAR 73729. As a result, Jamyang Sherap Gyatso occupies the position of lineage master number 23, which is appropriate as Ngorchen is usually number 21.

³⁰ See Ryavec 2024, Heimbrel 2025b. See also DuMouchelles 2023: 13, lot 1277. For a possible second painting of the set, see Jackson 2016: 182, 184–185, fig. 7.36, Pal 1984: pl. 85.

³¹ See Heimbrel 2025b: [...] *rje btsun e wam pa chen po dkon mchog dpal ldan gyi thugs kyi dgongs pa khyad par can gong nas gong du rdzogs pa'i phyir du | rdo rje'i slob ma shakya'i*

However, there are reasons to doubt that this painting should be identified as part of the seventeen paintings that continued Könchok Penden's set mentioned by Sanggyé Püntsoḳ. Firstly, the three main figures in the painting—Drokmi Lotsāwa Shākya Yeshe (993–1060s/70s), Setön Künrik (ca. 1025/29–1116/22), and Zhangtön Chöbar (1053–1135)—occupy an early place in the lineage and would not be depicted as part of the supplements. In the standard Ngor transmission of the Lamdré, these three masters successively occupy positions number 8–10. If the first painting in the set were to depict Vajradhara, the original teacher of the Lamdré, as a single main figure, and if the other paintings had arranged the masters in groups of three, the present painting would be the fourth in the set. The two preceding paintings would then show Nairātmyā, Virūpa and Kāṇha on the second painting and Ḍāmarupa, Avadhūtīpa and Gayādhara (d. 1103) on the third. Secondly, the arrangement of three lineage masters on each painting, with the probable exception of the first depicting Vajradhara as a single main figure, would not allow for such a pairing of masters over seventeen paintings. With an arrangement of groups of three masters per painting, only about ten paintings would be needed to bring the lineage down to Könchok Penden. Thirdly, the painting does not include extensive outlining in gold. Thus, unless Sanggyé Püntsoḳ is mistaken in his biography of Ngorchen, Jampa Künga Tashi may have commissioned two different sets of Lamdré lineage master paintings as a funerary commission for Könchok Penden, the continuation of Könchok Penden's set and the set to which the present painting belongs. Moreover, if the continuation did indeed comprise seventeen paintings, it most likely depicted the lineage masters as single main figures, as the first part commissioned by Könchok Penden would have done.³²

3. Funerary Commissions: Thematic Sets (Statues)

As translated above, Ngorchen also commissioned two sets of statues of lineage masters representing the Lamdré. The first set consisted of larger statues beginning with a gilded image of Vajradhara and continuing with clay images of the subsequent lineage masters until Bud-dhaśrī. The second set consisted of smaller clay statues portraying the same lineage masters. The biography of Ngorchen does not specify the number of statues that made up the two sets, but each may have consisted of twenty statues, assuming that the same lineage holders were

dge slong shar pa byams pa kun dga' bkra shis kyis | sgo gsum gus pa'i sgo nas bzhangs [...].

³² See Heimbel 2025b.

depicted as in Ngorchen's set of paintings.³³ In this context, it is important to note that not all of Ngorchen's funerary commissions were made immediately after the death of the master whom they commemorated. This is evident in the two sets of Lamdré lineage master statues, as well as in the aforementioned set of maṇḍalas of the Vajrāvalī as a funerary commission for Sapzang Pakpa (who had passed away in 1412). These were painted by Newar artists at Ngor following its foundation in 1429. A similar observation can be made with regard to the large statue of Buddha Śākyamuni situated in the lower inner sanctum of the assembly hall, which Ngorchen had commissioned for his first main teacher, Sharchen Yeshé Gyeltsen (1359–1406).³⁴ This observation lends further support to my hypothesis that in the early days of Ngor, a more fixed and consistent system of funerary commissions had not yet been established. As my classification suggests, this system, especially in the case of abbot portraits in painting and statue, evolved over time. As for the tradition of making a supplement to a set or series of paintings or statues depicting the abbot as a Lamdré lineage master, the inspiration might have originated with Ngorchen's original funerary commissions for his own Lamdré master Buddhaśrī.

By the time Sanggyé Püntsok compiled his biography of Ngorchen in 1688, the set of larger statues had been installed in the Lamdré Chapel on the third floor (by Tibetan count) of Ngor's thirty-pillared assembly hall, the Wangkhang Chenmo. The set of smaller statues had been installed in the famous Lamzap Chapel, the Lamzap Lhakhang, where all those Lamdré lineage paintings were also kept. Located on the second floor of Ngor's first monastic building and second main temple, the Zimkhang Kadrugma, the "Six-pillared Residence," this chapel originally served as Ngorchen's "Two-pillared Residence Quarter," the Zimchung Kanyima, before becoming the repository for Ngor's most sacred objects and thus being known as Dzö Kagyama, the "Sealed Treasury."³⁵

³³ One question that arises about which lineage masters were portrayed is who was shown as the teacher of Penden Tsültrim (1333–1399). He had received the Lamdré from three different teachers: Ritropa Lodrö Tenpa (1316–1358), Karpo Drakpa Rinchen Senggé (fl. 14th century), and Lama Dampa Sönam Gyeltsen (1312–1375). When commissioning his set of paintings, Ngorchen had Lodrö Tenpa depicted together with Penden Tsültrim as the central figures of the tenth painting, while Rinchen Senggé and Lama Dampa were only depicted as minor figures above the two central figures. In contrast, in his supplication to the masters of the Lamdré, he petitioned only Lama Dampa and neither of the other two. See Heimbel 2017: 140–145, 173, 398–399, Heimbel and Jackson 2023: 61–62, 81–82.

³⁴ See Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Ngor chen gyi rnam thar* (fols. 37b3–4, 39b2–5), Heimbel 2017: 129, n. 327, 261, n. 210.

³⁵ See Thub bstan snying po, *Ngor e wam chos ldan gyi lo rgyus* (pp. 28–43), Heimbel 2017: 260–261. For an account related to the commissioning of the smaller set of statues, see Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Ngor chen gyi rnam thar* (fols. 39b6–40a1).

The practice of commissioning sets of statues as part of funerary commissions is also evident from surviving examples that bear inscriptions. Although they were made in Mustang (Lowö) rather than at Ngor, two statues from a larger set portraying Sakya Paṇḍita Kūnga Gyeltsen (1182–1251) and Ngorchen have survived, the inscriptions of which clarify that they were both made as part of a funerary commission for Kūnga Wangchuk (1424–1478), the fourth abbot (see figs. 11–12).³⁶

Kūnga Wangchuk passed away at the monastery of Jampa Ling during his second stay in Mustang (1477–1478), the kings of which had been important patrons of Ngor ever since Ngorchen had visited their newly established kingdom on three previous occasions (1427–1428, 1436–1437, and 1447–1449). A manuscript of the most extensive biography of Kūnga Wangchuk has recently surfaced. It was written by his disciple Ratön Yönten Pelzang (d. 1509) at Jampa Ling in the ninth month of 1478, just a few months after his master's death in the fourth month of that year.³⁷ According to this work, Kūnga Wangchuk was requested by Aseng Dorjé Tenpa (d. ca. 1496) to come to Mustang for a second time, after the family of Tashi Göṅ (d. 1489), his elder brother who had first invited Kūnga Wangchuk, had discussed the matter.³⁸ Aseng Dorjé Tenpa (aka Achok Senggé Dorjé Tenpa) is recorded by inscription on the pedestal of both statues as the commissioning patron Sakyong Āyi Senggé. The two inscriptions can be preliminarily translated as follows:

Statue of Sakya Paṇḍita:

I prostrate myself at the lotus feet of the excellent Great Paṇḍita,
Who is proficient in all objects of knowledge,
Who delights only in benefitting others,
Who is adorned with the glory of the characteristic marks of a
bodhisattva.

The statue of the Great Paṇḍita, [commissioned] to fulfil the intentions
Of Gyeltsap Kūnga Wangchuk,
By the excellently given order of Sakyong Āyi Sengge,
Is the pinnacle of craftsmanship. Maṅgalaṃ.³⁹

³⁶ For a short essay on these two statues, see Heimbel 2025a.

³⁷ On Ratön, who also wrote the still missing biography of the third Ngor abbot, Jamyang Sherap Gyatso (1396–1474), see Heimbel 2017: 335, n. 526, 336, 364, 514, *passim*. On Kūnga Wangchuk's two visits to Mustang, see Heimbel 2017: 334–335. On Ngorchen's three journeys to Mustang, see Heimbel 2017: 271–343.

³⁸ See Yon tan dpal bzang, *Kun dga' dbang phyug gi rnam thar* (fol. 35a5–b1): *slar yang bstan pa'i sbyin bdag chen po | chos rgyal bkra shis mgon pa yum sras rnam bka' bgro ba mdzad | mi'i dbang po | ā seng rdo rje bstan pa bas | [...] gsol ba btab pa dang | [...]*.

³⁹ Transliteration of the inscription on the statue of Sakya Paṇḍita: @ | *shes bya kun la blo gros can | | gcig tu gzhan don la dga' ba | | rgyal sras mtshan dpe'i dpal gyis mdzes | | paṇ chen bzang po'i zhabs pad 'dud | | rgyal tshab kun dga' dbang phyug pa'i | | thugs*

Statue of Ngorchén:

I respectfully bow to the supreme guide
 Of all beings, whose activities are excellent,
 Whose omniscient Dharma eye illuminates everything,
 Who lovingly hosts the joyous celebration of the holy Dharma.
 The statue of the Lord, [commissioned] to fulfil the intentions
 Of Gyeltsap Künga Wangchuk,
 By the excellently given order of Sakyong Ayi Sengge,
 Is the pinnacle of craftsmanship. Maṅgalaṃ.⁴⁰

Previous scholarship had documented the existence of both statues, but misinterpretations of their inscriptions led to confusion over the identity of the masters depicted. The two statues were identified as different portraits of Künga Wangchuk, rather than Sakya Paṇḍita and Ngorchén. In addition, the name of an artist, “Tsuktorlak,” who is said to have cast the statues, was read into the inscriptions.⁴¹ As a result, another statue depicting Jetsün Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147–1216) was also attributed to this artist, based on a comparison with the two present statues.⁴² However, the relevant parts of both inscriptions, at least as I have understood them so far, and as I have discussed them with Tibetan scholars, do not name an artist, but could be understood in the sense that each statue “is the pinnacle of craftsmanship” (... *bzo rig gtsug gtor lags* |).

Recently, my attention was drawn to another statue—this one depicting Tārā—that was also commissioned by Aseng Dorjé Tenpa (aka

dgongs rdzogs phyir paṇ chen sku | | sa skyong ā yi seng ge'i bkas | | legs gñang bzo rig gtsug gtor lags | | maṅ ga lam | |

⁴⁰ Transliteration of the inscription on the statue of Ngorchén: @ | mkhyen pa'i chos spyan kun la gsal | | rtse bas dam chos dga' ston 'gyed | | phrin las bzang po 'gro kun gyi | | 'dren pa mchog la gus pas 'dud | | rgyal tshab kun dga' dbang phyug pa'i | | thugs dgongs rdzogs phyir rje yi sku | | sa skyong ā yi seng ge'i bkas | | legs gñang bzo rig gtsug gtor lags | | maṅ ga lam | |.

⁴¹ See Heller 2010: 90–92. See also Grewenig and Rist 2016: 42–45, 438–441 (nos. 192–193), Sotheby's 2008: lots 304–305. For images of the statue of Sakya Paṇḍita, see Grewenig and Rist 2016: 43, 439 (identified as Künga Wangchuk), HAR 12576 (identified as Künga Wangchuk), HAR 32720 (identified as Ngorchén), Heller 2010: 92, pls. 7.2a–b (identified as Künga Wangchuk), Sotheby's 2008: lot 306 (identified as Künga Wangchuk). For images of the statue of Ngorchén, see Grewenig and Rist 2016: 441 (identified as Künga Wangchuk), HAR 12577 (identified as Künga Wangchuk), HAR 32719 (unidentified), Heller 2010: 90, pls. 7.1a–b (identified as Künga Wangchuk), Sotheby's 2008: lot 307 (identified as Künga Wangchuk).

⁴² See Bonhams 2023: 42–45, lot 16. In addition, there are two other similar statues from a set with possible Mustang provenance, depicting Zhang Könchok Pel (1240/50–1307/17) and Nabza Drakpukpa Sönam Pel (1277–1350). However, as they have different types of inscriptions, I do not consider them to be part of the same set as the statues of Sakya Paṇḍita and Ngorchén; see Heimbel 2025a.

Achok Senggé Dorjé Tenpa), according to a lengthy inscription engraved below the lotus pedestal.⁴³ Referred to in the inscription as “Sakyong Achog, the Lion Among Men,” he had it made “to fulfil the intentions of a [deceased] youthful friend.” The inscription ends with a slight variation of the last verse of the previous two statues but also mentions the word *tsuktor* (*gtsug tor*). I have tentatively translated the inscription as follows (changing the order of some verse lines to better suit the syntactic structure of the English language):

The Venerable Lady, the Blessed One, Tārā,
 Having united the wisdom and compassion of all Victorious Ones,
 Always brings benefit and happiness to infinite beings and
 Protects all beings from the total fear of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.
 In order to be protected by the loving affection
 Of her who protects all beings through the glory of an āryā's
 compassion,
 Of her who is the supreme mother of all, the glorious protectress,
 The statue of Tārā was excellently made as by the order given
 By the one who rules over the glory of the four continents
 With the golden wheel of wonderful merit,
 By Sakyong Achok, the Lion Among Men.
 [Commissioned] to fulfil the intentions of a [deceased] youthful friend,
 It is a manifestation of numerous precious substances of various
 kinds and
 It is the pinnacle of craftsmanship, a masterpiece.⁴⁴

While the two statues of Sakya Paṇḍita and Ngorchon were being exhibited in China by Bonhams as part of the collection of Jules Speelam (*Monks & Mahasiddhas Living the Teachings of Buddha*),⁴⁵ I learned that an anonymous source was said to be in possession of relevant texts mentioning an artist called Tsuktor to whom the statues can be attributed. If the last verse of the inscriptions of all three statues does indeed refer to an artist of that name, it seems to be a deliberate play on words with his name, and the last part of my original translations will have to be partially revised:

⁴³ Private Collection, courtesy of Rossi & Rossi/Carlton Rochell.

⁴⁴ Transliteration of the inscription: @@ | l rgyal ba kun gyi mkhyen brtse gcig bsdus nas | l mtha' yas 'gro la phan bde kun bsgrub cing | l 'gro kun srid zhi'i 'jigs pa ma lus las | l skyob mdzad rje btsun bcom ldan sgrol ma'i sku | l 'phags ma'i thugs rje'i dpal gyis 'gro kun skyong | l kun gyi yum mchog dpal skyong gang de yis | l thugs la brtse ba brtse bas bskyang ba'i phyir | l bkas gnang ji bzhi'n legs par bsgrub mdzad pa | l rnam byung bsod nams gser gyi 'khor lo yis | l chab srid gling bzhi'i dpal la dbang bsgyur ba | l sa skyong a mchog mi yi seng ge des | l gzhon nu'i grogs kyi thugs dgongs rdzogs bya'i phyir | l rnam mang rin chen du ma sprul pa la | l bzo rig gtsug tor mkhas pa'i rnam' phrul lags | l .

⁴⁵ See Bonhams 2025.

Statue of Sakya Paṇḍita:

As for the statue of the Great Paṇḍita [commissioned] to fulfil
the intentions
Of Gyeltsap Kūnga Wangchuk,
On the order of Sakyong Ayi Sengge,
The craftsman who made it excellently was Tsuktor. Maṅgalaṃ.

Statue of Ngorchén:

As for the statue of the Lord [commissioned] to fulfil the intentions
Of Gyeltsap Kūnga Wangchuk,
On the order of Sakyong Ayi Sengge,
The craftsman who made it excellently was Tsuktor. Maṅgalaṃ.

Statue of Tārā:

[Commissioned] to fulfil the intentions of a [deceased] youthful
friend,
It is a manifestation of numerous precious substances of various
kinds and
Its craftsman was Tsuktor, an embodiment of a master artist.

Comparisons with the inscriptions of other funerary commissions, both in painting and statue, suggest that the statues of Sakya Paṇḍita and Ngorchén were part of a larger set, though the lineage of the masters represented cannot be definitively identified at present. In a Sakya context, and particularly in its Ngör branch, the most prominent teaching cycle was the Lamdré, and numerous examples of its lineage masters are known in painting and statue. The set, therefore, may indeed represent the Lamdré lineage masters, although the invocations engraved on the two statues are not those commonly used in the context of the Lamdré, and we know of other commissions, such as those of the lineage masters of Cakrasaṃvara or of the Profound Path Guruyoga.

Unfortunately, the set does not appear to be recorded in Kūnga Wangchuk's biographies, which only mention a set of Lamdré lineage master paintings made on his shroud (*gdung ras*) as part of his funerary commissions, which were overseen by Lowo Khenchen Sönam Lhündrup (1456–1532), a princely Sakya scholar-monk of the ruling family of Mustang and a disciple of Kūnga Wangchuk.⁴⁶ However, Aseng

⁴⁶ See Kun dga' grol mchog, *Glo bo mkhan chen gyi rnam thar* (fols. 16a4–7, 48b4): *rje btsun kun dga' dbang phyug nyid kyi dgongs pa rdzogs pa'i slad du* [...] | *sku'i rten gser zangs las grub pa'i rdo rje 'chang dang* | *rje nyid kyi sku 'dra zhe dgu ma'i khongs su legs par bsgrubs pa dang* | *bris thang gi lam 'bras bgyud pa gzab bris* | ; *gtso bor snga smos pa'i rje btsun rdo rje 'chang kun dga' dbang phyug gi dgongs pa khyad par can yongs su bskang ba'i slad du lam 'bras bgyud pa* | ; *Yon tan dpal bzang, Kun dga' dbang phyug gi rnam thar* (fol. 45a7–8): *slar yang chos rje bsod nams lhun grub legs pa'i 'byung gnas rgyal mtshan dpal bzang pos* | *sku'i rten zangs gser las bsgrubs pa'i rdo rje 'chang dang* |

Dorjé Tenpa, Künga Wangchuk's royal patron and the brother of Lowo Khenchen, is mentioned in other works as having commissioned several statues. Among the funerary commissions he had made for his late mother, the *Royal Succession of Mustang* records him as the patron of two gilded statues of Tārā (the length of an arrow) and two sets of statues of the Lamdré lineage masters, one of which was a set of twenty-six statues and the other of which was a set of twenty-one.⁴⁷ Aseng Dorjé Tenpa also invited Gorampa Sönam Sengge, the sixth abbot of Ngor, to Mustang during his tenure as abbot (1483–1486), but this visit did not take place. As a result, Aseng Dorjé Tenpa commissioned twenty-four statues of the Lamdré lineage masters from Vajradhara down to Gorampa himself (plus an additional statue of a protector, most likely Pañjaranātha Mahākāla), which were later kept at Gorampa's monastic seat at Tupten Namgyel.⁴⁸

Since his elder brother and former king of Mustang, Tashi Gön, died in 1489, it is likely that Aseng Dorjé Tenpa became Tashi Gön's successor in the last years of his elder brother's life. The inscriptions of the two statues of Sakya Paṇḍita and Ngorchon suggest that the set of which they were part was commissioned during the reign of Aseng Dorjé Tenpa, as he is referred to with the title "Sakyong" (*sa skyong*), "Protector of the Realm," a title for a ruler or king. Therefore, the commission of the two statues and the set of which they were part can most likely be dated to the last two decades of the fifteenth century, if not to the year of Künga Wangchuk's death in 1478 or shortly thereafter, and their provenance attributed to Mustang. The statue of Tārā mentioned above, which was commissioned by Aseng Dorjé Tenpa as a funerary commission for an unnamed friend, can also most likely be dated to the final two decades of the fifteenth century.

rje nyid kyi sku 'dra | zhe dgu ma'i khongs su legs par? grub pa dang | gdung ras la gsung ngag gi bla ma brgyud pa rnam bzab ris su bzhengs pa | ; bSod nams lhun grub, Kun dga' dbang phyug gi rnam thar (fol. 110b4–5): sku'i rten lam 'bras bla ma brgyud pa tshang ma dang | gsung gi rten [...] la sogs pa bar tshod med par grub pa yin la | .

⁴⁷ See Tshe dbang don yod rdo rje, *Glo bo rgyal rabs* (p. 20.4–7): *yang yum rin mo che'i dgongs pa rdzogs phyir | [...] lam 'bras bla ma brgyud pa sku nyi shu rtsa drug | sgrol ma'i sku mda' tshad gnyis rnam zangs gser las legs par bsgrubs | yang lam 'bras bla brgyud gser sku nyi shu rtsa cig bzhengs pa | .* For two other sets of statues from the Lamdré lineage (at Namgyel monastery, a Ngor branch in Mustang), dating from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, which depict Künga Wangchuk as the possible last master of the set, see Luczanits 2016: 128–129. For these and other Lamdré sets at Namgyel, see Klohe 2022, Klohe 2024. A mid-seventeenth-century inventory (*dkar chag*) from Mustang records statues from three different Lamdré lineage sets kept at the Tsarang Palace, Samdrup Gepel, which was founded a century earlier by Aham Döndrup Dorjé (fl. c. 1580), see Heimbel 2017: 318, n. 442. On Döndrup Dorjé and his founding of the Tsarang Palace, see Tshe dbang don yod rdo rje, *Glo bo rgyal rabs* (pp. 23.21–25.3), Jackson 1984: 105, 125, 128–129, 149, 166.

⁴⁸ See Heimbel 2017: 335–336.

Another set of Lamdré lineage masters appears to have been part of the funerary commissions for Sönam Zangpo (1689–1749), the thirtieth abbot. In addition to two portrait statues of him—one of which was a Lamdré supplement—and his memorial *thangka*, additional funerary commissions recorded are “statues of the Lamdré lineage masters” (*lam 'bras bla brgyud 'bur sku* |), as well as *thangka* paintings of Guhyasamāja Akṣobhya and the Buddha with the Sixteen Elders (either as a single painting or also as a set).⁴⁹

4. Different Types of Funerary Commission Statues Portraying the Abbots of Ngor

The study of statues associated with the Ngor tradition (or of those housed at Ngor) is rather limited compared to that of its paintings. As a small contribution to this understudied field, I shall now present different types of Ngor abbot portrait statues, which were usually made as part of funerary commissions. This classification is based on the textual analysis of references contained in the literary corpus of Ngor abbot biographies. It is hoped that this classification will prove useful in identifying available statues portraying Ngor abbots, a challenging task in the absence of epigraphic-historical evidence.

As mentioned above, the literary corpus suggests that four different types of abbot portrait statues were commissioned:

- chamber statues (*gzims mal sku 'dra*) that were apparently destined for the abbot's former chamber or living quarters
- statues created as a supplement continuing an existing set or series of statues of masters representing the lineage of the Lamdré instructions
- statues created as a supplement continuing an existing set or series of statues of masters representing the lineage of the Pro-found Path Guruyoga (*Lam zab bla ma'i rnal 'byor*)
- additional statues portraying the abbot (for which biographies do not indicate a specific function)

In the following discussion, the term “statue” has been used indiscriminately to refer to a wide variety of Tibetan terms used in the literary corpus of Ngor abbot biographies, including *kundra* (*sku 'dra*), *kunyen* (*sku brnyan*), *draku* (*'dra sku*), *drabak* (*'dra 'bag*), *drazhel* (*'dra zhal*), *nangnyen* (*snang brnyan*), and *burku* (*'bur sku*).

⁴⁹ See Ngag dbang chos grags, *Ngag dbang chos skyong bzang po'i rnam thar* (fol. 13b2–4): [...] *gzhan yang dgongs rdzogs su dmigs gnang gis lam 'bras bla brgyud 'bur sku | gsang 'dus mi bskyod pa | thub pa gnas brtan gyi zhal thang rnams kyang bzhengs |*.

4.1 The Chamber Statue

Chamber statues are mentioned as part of the funerary commissions for eleven of the first twenty-four abbots of Ngor, including the statues of two former abbots that were made in the monastic institutions where they had been active after retiring from the abbacy of Ngor. As there is no later written evidence to its commissioning after the twenty-fourth abbot, Lhündrup Penden (1624–1697), it seems likely that this type of statue was no longer made.

The chamber statue may also have taken on a new role. For three of these eleven statues it is specified that they were not placed in the former living quarters of the abbot they depicted, but in the Lamdré Chapel of Ngor—namely, those of Könchok Penden, the twelfth abbot, Drangti Penchen Namkha Pelzang, the thirteenth abbot, and Sherap Jungné (1596–1653), the eighteenth abbot. This placement suggests that they took on a new role as a supplement (*kha skong*) to continue the Lamdré lineage. This observation is confirmed by the reference to the chamber statue of Sherap Jungné, which is described as “residing as part of the supplements in the Lamdré Chapel” (*lam 'bras lha khang du kha skong gi sdebs su bzhu gs pa*).⁵⁰

The references to the eleven chamber statues reveal that they were made in a variety of sizes and materials. One was life-size (*sku tshad*), others were the length of an arrow (*mda' tshad*),⁵¹ and for some the biographies do not specify any size at all. Some statues were made of gilded copper (*gser sku*, *sku 'dra gser zangs*), others were made of clay mixed with medicinal substances (*sman sku*), and for some no material was specified.

A more systematic overview is complicated by the fact that in some cases, where several sources refer to the commissioning of one and the same statue, the information about its material or size differs from source to source. For instance, in the two passages translated above about the funerary commissions for Sanggyé Senggé, the eleventh abbot, the size of his chamber statue is given as life-size by his biography, but as about the length of an arrow in the biography of its commissioning patron.

⁵⁰ See Ngag dbang bsod nams rgyal mtshan, *Shes rab 'byung gnas kyi rnam thar* (fols. 106b6–107a1).

⁵¹ According to Jackson and Jackson 1984: 23, n. 5, an arrow's length (*mda' tshad*) is “approximately four spans.” And one span (*mtho*) is, according to Jackson and Jackson 1984: 50, “the distance from the end of the extended thumb to the tip of the middle finger.” Krang dbyi sun et al., *Bod rgya tshig tshod chen mo* (s.v. *mtho*) give the same definition and add as a second meaning that one span was equal to twelve finger widths (*sor mo bcu gnyis kyi zheng tshad l*). The literary corpus under discussion refers to the size as “about an arrow” (*mda' gang tsam*) or “slightly more than an arrow” (*mda' gang lhag tsam*).

For the chamber statue of Könchok Lhündrup (1497–1557), the tenth abbot, the matter is even more complicated. One of his two biographies describes the statue as being made of sandalwood and measuring a little more than the length of an arrow.⁵² His other biography, while not mentioning his chamber statue, refers to another statue of him, a medicinal clay statue made of such ingredients as sandalwood.⁵³ The description of the material of this other statue raises the question of whether his chamber statue, which was said to be made of sandalwood, was also made of clay containing some sandalwood, rather than entirely of sandalwood. Moreover, the biography of the Ngor abbot who patronised the funerary commissions for Könchok Lhündrup also mentions his chamber statue, but describes it as a life-size gilded statue (*gser sku sku tshad ma*).⁵⁴ One could consider the possibility that these sources refer to different chamber statues, but given that they describe the same funerary commissions and mention only one such statue, this seems rather unlikely.

Table 1 below relates the sizes and materials of the eleven chamber statues, with the unclear cases of Sanggyé Senggé and Könchok Lhündrup recorded as “unclear.”

Chamber Statue	Life-size	Arrow's length	Size not specified	Size unclear
Gilt copper gser sku gser zangs	1	1 1	1	1
Medicinal clay	—	2	—	—
Material not specified	—	—	3	—
Material unclear	—	—	—	1

Table 1 — Size and material of chamber statues

Although the funerary commissions for Ngorchén, the founder of Ngor, only mention that his gilded statue was made in life-size,⁵⁵

⁵² See dKon mchog dpal ldan, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 284a1–2).

⁵³ See Ngag dbang brtan pa'i rdo rje, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 306b4–5).

⁵⁴ See Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *Sangs rgyas seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 337b3–4).

⁵⁵ See dKon mchog rgyal mtshan, *Ngor chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 236b5); *sku 'dra gser sku sku tshad ma dang l*; Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Ngor chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 45a5); *rje nyid kyi sku tshad kyi 'dra 'bag gser skur bsgrub pa l*; Heimbel 2017: 338–389. See also

Künga Drölchok (1507–1566), in his biography of Ngorchen's disciple Shākya Chokden (1428–1507), makes several references to the existence of Ngorchen's chamber statue at Ngor.⁵⁶ It is therefore possible that the gilded statue of Ngorchen was in fact his chamber statue.

In general, references to chamber statues in the biographies of other Tibetan masters show that this type of statue was not confined to the Ngor tradition alone, as seems to have been the case with the memorial *thangka*, but was also found in other monasteries.⁵⁷ One possible surviving example is the life-size clay statue of Ngawang Sönam Wangchuk (1638–1685), the twenty-eighth hierarch of Sakya.⁵⁸

4.2 The Lamdré Lineage Supplement

A statue of the abbot, made as a supplement to continue the lineage of Lamdré masters, is the funerary commission most frequently recorded in the literary corpus of Ngor abbot biographies. In total, I was able to locate written records of the commission of this type of statue for twenty-seven Ngor abbots.

As with the chamber statue discussed above, the Lamdré lineage supplements were made in a variety of sizes and materials, and since for many of them either the size or the material, or even both, are not specified in the sources, a detailed systematisation is not possible. However, despite the fact that the size of ten statues is unspecified, it is worth noting that fourteen were made to the length of an arrow (*mda'*), while only one was made to the size of a cubit (*khru*; = 20 or 24 *sor*),⁵⁹ one to life-size (*sku tshad*), and one even to the height of a storey (*thog tshad*). Similarly, although the material of six statues is unspecified, the majority (fifteen statues) were gilded, while only six were made of medicinal clay. The correlation between size and material (Table 2) shows that most (i.e., eleven) of the sixteen statues for which both size and material were given were made to the length of an arrow

bSod nams seng ge, *Mus chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 70b5): *gzhan yang sku'i rten du chos rje nyid kyi sku 'dra sku tshad mā dang*! [...] *zangs gser las grub pa dang*!.

⁵⁶ See Kun dga' grol mchog, *Shākya mchog ldan gyi rnam thar* (fols. 39a2, 69a7, 69b3): *ngor gyi rdo rje 'chang gi gzims mal sku 'dra'i drung du 'bul mi gnang*!; *de gong rje rdo rje 'chang chen gyi dus chen sa ga'i nyer lnga'i stengs su ngor tshor lo re bzhiin mang ja re dang*! *gzims mal sku 'dra'i drung du dar chen gyi snam sbyar re 'bul ba gnang nas*!; *da gzims mal sku 'dra'i na bza' de skyel mi mi 'byor snang bas sku tshab cig 'dir bzhengs dgos pa 'dug gsung nas*!.

⁵⁷ These references can be found, for instance, by searching for the term *gzims mal sku 'dra* in the digital texts of BUDA by BDRC or in those of the SRC (e.g., R168, R181, R185, R187, R189, R193, R245, R248, R997).

⁵⁸ See Henss 2021: 401.

⁵⁹ See Krang dbyi sun et al., *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *khru*), *sMon lam tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.vv. *khru*, *khru gang*).

and gilded.⁶⁰

Lamdré Lineage	Height of one story	Life-size	Arrow's length	Cubit	Size not specified
Gilt copper	1	1	11	1	1
Medicinal clay	—	—	2	—	4
Material not specified	—	—	1	—	5

Table 2 — Size and material of the Lamdré lineage supplements

References to Lamdré lineage supplements as funerary commissions are not always explicit in the corpus of Ngor abbot biographies and can require some interpretation in comparison with other references. The most straightforward mentions of this type of statue refer to “a supplement for the Lamdré lineage masters” (*lam 'bras bla ma brgyud pa'i kha skong*), “a supplement for the Lamdré lineage” (*lam 'bras brgyud pa'i kha skong*), “a Lamdré supplement” (*lam 'bras kha skong / bskang*), or “a supplement for the Lamdré” (*lam 'bras su kha skong*).⁶¹

There are other references that do not specify the lineage that these supplements continue but seem to clarify the function of the supplements by mentioning the chapel in which they were installed, namely, the Lamdré Chapel, where, as mentioned above, one of the two sets of statues portraying the Lamdré lineage masters commissioned by Ngorchén was found as well. These mentions refer, for instance, to “a supplement for the lineage masters in the Lamdré Chapel” (*lam 'bras lha khang du bla ma brgyud pa'i kha skong*) or “a supplement for the lineage in the Lamdré Chapel” (*lam 'bras lha khang du brgyud pa'i kha*

⁶⁰ For the Lamdré lineage supplement, the table has not been further subdivided for gilt copper statues because in some cases different sources describe the material of one and the same statue differently. For instance, for the lineage supplements of Sanggyé Rinchen, the eighth abbot, and Lhachok Senggé, the ninth abbot, three sources refer to each one in three different ways: (1) as a *gser sku*, (2) as made of *gser zangs*, and (3) as made of *zangs gser*; see respectively Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *lHa mchog seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 262b3–4), dKon mchog dpal ldan, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 273b4–5), Ngag dbang brtan pa'i rdo rje, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 294a3–4).

⁶¹ See respectively dPal ldan chos skyong, *rTogs pa brjod pa* (vol. *wam*, fol. 485a4), Sangs rgyas rin chen, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 196a1), bsTan 'dzin rgya mtsho, *bSod nams lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 14b3), lHun grub dpal ldan, *bSod nams rgya mtsho'i rnam thar* (fol. 151a5), dPal ldan chos skyong, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fols. 12a1–2, 34a5).

skong).⁶² Shorter mentions refer to “a supplement in the Lamdré Chapel” (*lam 'bras lha khang du kha skong*) or simply “a statue in the Lamdré Chapel” (*lam 'bras lha khang du sku 'dra*).⁶³ The extensively detailed biographies of abbots from the Tartsé Labrang—such as Jampa Künga Tenzin (1776–1862), the seventy-fourth abbot, or Jampel Zangpo (1789–1864), the fifty-first abbot—even include accounts of manufacturing the statues, their ceremonial installation in the Lamdré Chapel, and the associated rituals that were performed.⁶⁴

In some cases, it is only possible to identify a statue as a Lamdré lineage supplement by interpreting references from multiple sources. For instance, after the death of Lhachok Senggé, the ninth abbot, his biography records the commissioning of both an arrow-length gilded statue of Sanggyé Rinchen, his predecessor as abbot, and of Lhachok Senggé himself.⁶⁵ However, the two biographies of Könchok Lhündrup, the patron of the funerary commissions and Lhachok Senggé's successor as abbot, make it clear that both statues were found in the Lamdré Chapel, which allows them to be identified as Lamdré lineage supplements.⁶⁶

This latter example also illustrates the fact that the Lamdré lineage supplement was sometimes not made directly after the death of the abbot it portrayed, but as part of the funerary commissions for a later abbot. Three such cases are recorded for the early abbots of Ngor:

- (1) The supplement of Penden Dorjé (1411–1482), the fifth abbot, was made as part of the funerary commissions for Könchok Pel, the seventh abbot⁶⁷
- (2) The supplement for Gorampa Sönam Senggé, the sixth abbot, was made as part of the funerary commissions for Könchok Pel, the seventh abbot⁶⁸
- (3) The supplement of Sanggyé Rinchen, the eighth abbot, as mentioned above, was made as part of the funerary commissions

⁶² See respectively dPal ldan chos skyong, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fol. 28b6), bKra shis dbang phyug, *Tshul khrims dpal bzang gi rnam thar* (fol. 290a4).

⁶³ See respectively dPal ldan chos skyong, *Sangs rgyas dpal bzang gi rnam thar* (fol. 384a1–2), dKon mchog dpal ldan, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 283a6).

⁶⁴ See Byams pa Kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, *Byams pa kun dga' bstan 'dzin gyi rnam thar* (fols. 170a5–171b1), Byams pa Kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, *'Jam dpal bzang po'i rnam thar* (fols. 254b5–255b6).

⁶⁵ See Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *lHa mchog seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 262b3).

⁶⁶ See dKon mchog dpal ldan, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 273b4–5), Ngag dbang brtan pa'i rdo rje, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 294a2–4).

⁶⁷ See Nātha, *Sangs rgyas rin chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 224b4–6), Sangs rgyas rin chen, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 196a1),

⁶⁸ See Nātha, *Sangs rgyas rin chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 224b4–6), Sangs rgyas rin chen, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 196a1–3)

for Lhachok Senggé, the ninth abbot⁶⁹

Moreover, as two rare cases— Sanggyé Püntsok, the twenty-fifth abbot, and Tsültrim Pelzang (1675–1710), the twenty-eighth abbot— show, the Lamdré supplement could have already been made during the lifetime of an abbot but still be considered part of his funerary commissions.⁷⁰

It should be noted that, as mentioned above, the chamber statue was sometimes placed in the Lamdré Chapel to take on a new role as a Lamdré lineage supplement. The clearest indication of this change of function is recorded for the chamber statue of Sherap Jungné, the eighteenth abbot, which is described as “residing as part of the supplements in the Lamdré Chapel” (*lam 'bras lha khang du kha skong gi sdebs su bzhugs pa*).⁷¹

There are also similar references for the chamber statues of Könchok Penden, the twelfth abbot, and Drangti Penchen Namkha Pelzang, the thirteenth abbot. The former abbot's biography refers to the making of “the chamber statue of the Lord himself, a gilded image slightly larger than the length of an arrow, which resided in the Lamdré Chapel.”⁷² The biography of Künga Sönam Lhündrup (1571–1642), the fifteenth abbot, records that Drangti Penchen's “gilded chamber statue of the length of an arrow [...] resided in the Lamdré Chapel of [Ngor] Ewam [Chöden].”⁷³ The biography of Drangti Penchen, who was the patron of Könchok Penden's funerary commissions, mentions both statues but does not identify them as chamber statues. The former is merely described as “a Lamdré lineage master supplement slightly larger than the length of an arrow” and the latter as “a Lamdré supplement about the length of an arrow.”⁷⁴ However, as they all refer to only one supplement, they are most likely referring

⁶⁹ See dKon mchog dpal ldan, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 273b4–5), Ngag dbang brtan pa'i rdo rje, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 294a2–4).

⁷⁰ See respectively Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Sangs rgyas phun tshogs kyi myong ba brjod pa* (fol. 212a5–b1), Tshul khrims dpal bzang, *Sangs rgyas phun tshogs kyi rnam thar* (fol. 261b3–4), bKra shis dbang phyug, *Tshul khrims dpal bzang po'i rnam thar* (fol. 289b1–2).

⁷¹ See Ngag dbang bsod nams rgyal mtshan, *Shes rab 'byung gnas kyi rnam thar* (fols. 106b6–107a1).

⁷² See Kun dga' bkra shis, *dKon mchog dpal ldan gyi rnam thar* (fol. 450b4–6): [...] rje de nyid kyi gzims mal sku 'dra lam 'bras lha khang du bzhugs pa'i gser sku mda' gang lhaq tsam dang | [...].

⁷³ See Kun dga' blo gros, *Sa skya'i gdung rabs kha skong* (p. 95.2–5): [...] pañ chen nam mkha' dpal bzang gi gzims mal sku 'dra gser zangs kyi mda' tshad ma | shing gi khri rgyab na bza' bcas dang | dus thang che ba rnams e wañ lam 'bras lha khang du bzhugs shing |.

⁷⁴ See bSod nams shes rab, *Nam mkha' dpal bzang gi rnam thar* (fols. 14b2, 27a3–4): sku'i rten rje de nyid kya [= kyi] sku 'dra lam 'bras bla brgyud kha bskang mda' tshad lhaq tsam dang |; sku'i rten rje de nyid kyi sku 'dra lam 'bras kha bskang mda' gang tsam dang |.

to the same one.

As many of those references suggest, the Lamdré lineage supplements were installed in the Lamdré Chapel. There also exists a brief description of this six-pillared chapel by Katok Situ Chökyi Gyatso (1880–1925), who visited Ngor in 1919, that seems to support my observation. Katok Situ wrote:

In the six-pillared Lamdré Chapel at the top of the Labrang [i.e., the Wangkhang Chenmo], there is the statue of Ngorchén in realistic likeness and down to Mûchen a set of Lamdré lineage masters from the time of Ngorchén. Other than that, there are complete statues of the line of successive abbots in sizes of a cubit, an arrow, and life-size, etc., according to the financial means of their patrons, together with offering items such as thrones, symbolic hand implements, and *damaru* drums.⁷⁵

The set of Lamdré lineage master statues Katok Situ mentioned could perhaps be identified as one of the two sets of statues that Ngorchén had commissioned in honour of his teacher Buddhaśrī. As noted above, the set of larger clay statues was installed in the Lamdré Chapel, although Mûchen Könchok Gyeltsen, the second abbot, was not originally part of it. The variously sized statues of the entire line of successive abbots mentioned by Katok Situ can most likely be identified with all the statues discussed in the present section and are therefore proposed as supplements of the Lamdré lineage. With few exceptions, the Lamdré lineage of Ngor has been identical with the succession of the abbots of Ngor, as can be seen in the representations of the lineage in painting, where after Ngorchén the Lamdré lineage is depicted as being transmitted through the successive abbots of Ngor.⁷⁶

In his description of the two main temples of Ngor, Katok Situ used specific terms that are sometimes difficult to understand. In the passage just translated above, he referred to the assembly hall of Ngor, the Wangkhang Chenmo, as the Labrang. This term, which I cannot explain, would be more appropriate for the second main temple, the

⁷⁵ Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *dBus gtsang gnas yig* (fol. 215b4–5): *bla brang thog lam 'bras lha khang ka drug na | ngor chen nga 'dra ma | mus chen bar ngor chen sku dus kyi lam 'bras bla brgyud tshar gcig | de min mkhan rabs rnams khru gang | mda' gang | mi tshad sogs 'byor pa ltar khri phyag dam sogs mchod rdzas bcas cha tshang |*. The statue of Ngorchén in realistic likeness is most likely the same one mentioned by 'Jam dbyangs Shes rab rgya mtsho, *Byams pa kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar* (fol. 303b2): *lam 'bras lha khang du ngor chen rdo rje 'chang gi 'dra sku rin po cher bzang gos las grub pa'i dbu gdugs |*. There are at least four extant smaller statues of Ngorchén that are traditionally known as “Ngorchén in realistic likeness” (*ngor chen nga 'dra ma*), one gilded and three made of clay. Three of these from the Lamdré Chapel of Ngor are shown in figs. 18–20.

⁷⁶ For depictions of Ngor's Lamdré lineage surrounding the main figure of memorial thangkas, see Heimbel 2021.

Zimkhang Kadrugma, the “Six-pillared Residence,” where Ngor’s central office, the Labrang Zhung, was located. The abbot had his residence on the second floor of this temple, where he also performed important functions such as giving ordinations and the summer teachings (*dbyar chos*) at the sixteen-pillared Yapchen, and where important meetings of all four lama palaces were also held.⁷⁷

Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (1820–1892), who lived at Ngor some seventy years before Katok Situ’s visit, gave a similar but slightly shorter description of the Lamdré Chapel:

In the Lamdré Chapel, there is, for instance, a Lamdré lineage master set headed by a statue of Ngorchén and statues and reliquaries of the line of successive abbots.⁷⁸

Dezhung Rinpoche (1906–1987), who visited Ngor in 1949, gave a similar account of the Lamdré Chapel, adding a few details:

In the Lamdré Chapel, there is the medical clay statue of Ngorchén Dorjechang in realistic likeness and the statues of the Lamdré lineage masters from Vajradhara down to Mūchen Sempa Chenpo, which were consecrated by Ngorchén Dorjechang, [...]. Moreover, there are variously sized statues of the successive abbots, and in particular the

⁷⁷ Katok Situ’s account begins with a detailed description of the chapels of the Tartsé Labrang where he stayed in the Göjung Tsomchen; he does not describe the temples of any of the other three main lama palaces of Luding, Khangsar, and Pendé. He then adds some brief remarks on Ngor’s annual ritual calendar, continues with a description of the chapels of Ngor’s two main temples, the Wangkhang Chenmo (i.e., the assembly hall which he calls Labrang) and the Zimkhang Kadrugma (without clearly stating when his description moves from the former to the latter), and ends with some final remarks, on things such as the location of the lama palaces. See Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *dBus gtsang gnas yig* (fols. 214a2–b6, 214b6–215a4, 215a4–216b6, 216b6–217a6, 217a6–b4). See also Thub bstan snying po, *Ngor e wam chos ldan gyi lo rgyus* (pp. 28–43). The basic structure of Katok Situ’s account is not properly reflected in the translation of the section on Ngor prepared by Everding (2019, vol. 2: 271–281), who understands the Labrang Zhung as a reference to the Tartsé Labrang. Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (1820–1892) properly used the term Labrang Zhung for locating the Lamzap Chapel as part of the Zimkhang Kadrugma; see ‘Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po, *dBus gtsang gi gnas rten* (fol. 13a2): *khyad par du bla brang gzhung du ngor chen gzim chung | lam zab phug tu lam ‘bras bla brgyud dang | phyag dpe rigs bka’ rgya ma* |.

⁷⁸ ‘Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po, *dBus gtsang gi gnas rten* (fol. 13a2–3): *lam ‘bras lha khang du ngor chen ‘dra sku gtsos lam ‘bras bla brgyud dang | gdan rabs rim byon gyi ‘dra zhal dang sku gdung sogs* |. Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo was recognised as one of the first reincarnations within the Ngor tradition—namely that of Jampa Namkha Chimé (1765–1820), the forty-fourth abbot of Ngor—, studied at Ngor (in the early 1840s and from 1848–1851), was chosen as a candidate for Ngor’s abbacy from the Tartsé Labrang (*thar rtse zhabs drung*), and was even considered for the abbacy, but rejected for lack of sufficient wealth; see Heimbel 2017: 245.

statues of Könchok Lhündrup, Sanggyé Püntsoḳ, and Penden Chökyong are incredibly marvelous, glowing with the radiance of blessings, almost as if they were about to speak. [...]⁷⁹

Katok Situ referred to a further five sets of statues of the Lamdré lineage masters in other chapels at Ngor. He mentioned a total of some three hundred statues in the Dochel Lhakhang, which stood in front of the assembly hall, including two sets of Lamdré lineage masters.⁸⁰ One Lamdré set was for the abbatial quarters, with each statue measuring approximately the distance between the extended thumb and the tip of the middle finger (*mtsho*).⁸¹ There were also two Lamdré sets of Newari-style metal images (*bal li*) in the Lamzap Chapel, Ngorchen's original residence, the aforementioned Zimchung Kanyima, where the set of smaller clay statues of Lamdré lineage masters had also been installed and where all the aforementioned Lamdré lineage paintings were kept.⁸² Thirty years later, in 1949, Dezhung Rinpoche also saw

⁷⁹ Thar lam mKhan po 'Jam dbyangs shes rab, *sKyabs rje sde gzhung rin po che'i mdzad rnam* (vol. 2, pp. 22.20–23.5): *lam 'bras lha khang na | ngor chen rdo rje 'chang gi sman sku nga 'dra ma dang | rdo rje 'chang nas mus chen sems dpa' chen po'i bar gyi lam 'bras bla brgyud kyi sku brnyan rnams la ngor chen rdo rje 'chang gis rab gnas gnang ste | ye shes sems dpa' dngos su bzhugs pa byin rlabs can rnams dang | gzhan yang gdan rabs rim byon gyi 'dra zhal che chung sna tshogs dang | khyad par dkon mchog lhun grub | sangs rgyas phun tshogs | dpal ldan chos skyong rnams kyi 'dra zhal rnams ni byin rlabs kyi gzi 'od 'bar ba gsung 'byon la khad pa lta bu shin tu ngo mtshar ba bzhugs 'dug gsungs | [...].*

⁸⁰ See Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *dBus gtsang gnas yig* (fol. 215b2–3): *rdo gcal lha khang | bde mchog bla brgyud bal sku tshar gnyis | lam 'bras bla brgyud tshar gnyis bcas sku dngos gtsang sum brgya tsam | [...].*

⁸¹ See Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *dBus gtsang gnas yig* (fol. 216b3–6): *g.yab chen ka ba bcu drug pa'i sbug tu | [...]. | sbug tu gzim chung nang | [...]. | lam 'bras bla brgyud mtho gang tsam dang | [...]. |*

⁸² See Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *dBus gtsang yig* (fol. 217a2–5): *sbug lam zab mdzod nag tu | [...]. | lam 'bras bla brgyud bal li cha gnyis | [...]. | 'di'i sbug na | [...]. | sogs yod pa'i mdzod bka' rgya |*. Katok Situ used two different terms for the Lamzap Chapel, first referring to it as the Lamzap Dzöṅak and then referring to an interior part of it as the Dzö Kagya. This is again confusing because the Dzöṅak or Dzöṅakma, the “Black Treasury,” is also a common reference to a different monastic structure, namely the pitch-black and windowless storehouse of Ngor's assembly hall, the Wangkhang Chenmo. According to the late Luding Khenchen Rinpoche (1931–2023), the seventy-fifth abbot, the storehouse was part of the assembly hall (on the second floor?) and could only be entered from above by descending a staircase carrying a lamp in order to be able to see anything in the otherwise pitch-black room (Interview, Ngor ma dgon, 12 May 2009). The Lamzap Chapel, on the other hand, was part of the Zimkhang Kadrugma and originally served as Ngorchen's “Two-pillared Residence Quarter,” the Zimchung Kanyima, before becoming the repository for Ngor's most sacred objects and thus being known as Dzö Kagyama, the “Sealed Treasury.” See also Thub bstan snying po, *Ngor e waṃ chos ldan gyi lo rgyus* (pp. 28–43). Dezhung Rinpoche also called it Lamzap Dzöṅak; see n. 79. Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo called it Lamzap Puk; see n. 77 above.

these five sets of Lamdré lineage master statues.⁸³

A quick glance at the lama portrait statues currently housed in the cabinets of the Lamdré Chapel at Ngor reveals that there are at least four different sets of inscribed lineage master statues of smaller size (about 15cm), possibly representing the Lamdré (or Profound Path Guruyoga). Unfortunately, all four sets are incomplete and the inscriptions do not mention the patron or the occasion of their commission, but the statues of at least two sets appear to be of relatively recent origin.⁸⁴ In addition, there is another incomplete set of eighteen statues of lineage masters, but instead of the Lamdré they represent the Cakrasaṃvara lineage according to the system of Kṛṣṇacārin, and its last existing statue I have elsewhere proposed to identify as Lowo Khenchen Sönam Lhündrup (1456–1532).⁸⁵ This set might have been one of the two sets of Saṃvara lineage master statues in a Newari style (*bal sku*) that both Katok Situ and Dezhung Rinpoche described for the Dochel Lhakhang.⁸⁶

4.3 The Lineage Supplement of the Profound Path Guruyoga

The lineage supplement of the Profound Path Guruyoga (Lam zab bla ma'i rnal 'byor), a Hevajra guruyoga meditation practice used in the Lamdré, is another statue depicting the abbot that was made as part of funerary commissions. However, references to its commission in the literary corpus of Ngor abbot biographies are less common than those for the Lamdré lineage supplement, although this observation does not exclude the possibility that it was usually made, but simply not recorded in many biographies.

So far I have been able to locate references to the commissioning of seven such lineage supplements. These references are generally found for the early abbots of Ngor, with the latest being for Tsültrim Pelzang (1675–1710), the twenty-eighth abbot.

⁸³ See Thar lam mkhan po 'Jam dbyangs shes rab, *sKyabs rje sde gzhung rin po che'i mdzad rnam* (vol. 2, pp. 22.18–20, 23.4–5, 23.5–17): *rdo bcal lha khang du bde mchog lu hi pa | kye rdor sogs rgya nag tā ming dus kyi li ma mang po | thub pa chu lon ma li rnying khyad 'phags | bal li'i bde mchog bla brgyud tshar gnyis | lam 'bras bla brgyud tshar gnyis | [...]; sbug gi gzim chung nang du | ngor chen dkon mchog lhun grub kyi 'dra zhal che tsam dang | lam 'bras bla brgyud mtho gang tsam dang | [...]; sbug lam zab mdzod nag tu | [...]* bal li'i lam 'bras bla brgyud tshar gnyis | [...].

⁸⁴ For two examples portraying Nyenchenpa Sönam Tenpa (1222–1317) and Mūchen Sanggyé Rinchen, the eighth abbot, from a set possibly depicting the lineage masters of the Lamdré or Profound Path Guruyoga; see figs. 13–14. Both have inscriptions on the back of the statue between the petals of the lotus pedestal: *nyan chen pa and rje mus chen*.

⁸⁵ See von Schroeder 2001: 1124, 1206–1217, pls. 330–335E, Heimbel 2017: 21.

⁸⁶ See nn. 80, 83 above.

Table 3 shows that four statues were gilded (*gser sku*), one was made of medicinal clay (*sman sku*), and for two the material was not specified in the biographies. The statues were made in smaller sizes than those of the Lamdré lineage. These include, from largest to smallest, two statues measuring the distance between the extended thumb and the tip of the middle finger (*rgyab mtho* or *mtho*; = 12 *sor*), one measuring the distance between the extended thumb and the base of the little finger of a hand made into a fist (*mkhyid*; = 7 *sor*; also given as 5 *sor*), and one measuring the distance from the tip of the index finger to its base at the third joint (*mdzub*; = 6 *sor*).⁸⁷ For the one statue whose size is unclear—that of Sanggyé Senggé, the eleventh abbot—the biographies give different details. According to his own biography, it was the size of the distance between the extended thumb and the base of the little finger of a hand made into a fist (*mkhyid gang*), whereas the biography of Könchok Penden, the twelfth abbot, who oversaw his funeral, gives it with the size of about the distance between the extended thumb and the tip of the middle finger (*rgyab mtho gang tsam*).⁸⁸

Guruyoga Lineage	mtho	mkhyid	mdzub	Size not specified	Size unclear
Gilt copper	2	—	—	1	1
Medicinal clay	—	—	—	1	—
Material not specified	—	1	1	—	—

Table 3 — Size and material of the Profound Path Guruyoga lineage supplements

Most references to the commissioning of the lineage supplement are straightforward, referring to the statue as “a supplement for the lineage of the Profound Path” (*lam zab brgyud pa'i kha skong*) or “a Profound

⁸⁷ See Krang dbyi sun et al., *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.vv. *mtho*, *mtho gang*; *mkhyid*; *mdzub gang*), *sMon lam tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.vv. *mtho*; *mkhyid*, *mkhyid gang*, *mkhyud gang*; *mdzub gang*). The size of the statues is generally specified by stating how many units of that size each statue was, namely “one” (*gang*), and in many cases the Tibetan word *tsam* (“about”) or *lhag tsam* (“slightly larger than”) is added to clarify that the size is given only approximately.

⁸⁸ See nn. 3, 6 above.

Path supplement" (*lam zab kha skong / bskang*).⁸⁹ Only two require a little more interpretation, when the supplement is referred to as "a gilded statue for the Profound Path" (*lam zab du gser sku*) or "a statue of medicinal clay in the Lamzap Chapel" (*lam zab lha khang du sman sku*).⁹⁰ As with the Lamdré Chapel, the location of the latter statue in the Lamzap Chapel suggests that it served there as a lineage supplement for the Profound Path Guruyoga. I am therefore inclined to think that all those statues continuing or updating an earlier set or series of lineage masters of the Profound Path were installed in the Lamzap Chapel. As mentioned above, this chapel was originally Ngorchen's residence quarter on the second floor of the Zimkhang Kadrugma, the "Six-pillared Residence," and it was in this chapel that the set of smaller statues of Lamdré lineage masters he had commissioned were installed. It was also here that the Lamdré lineage master paintings were kept, and that is described as the repository of Ngor's most sacred objects.

To provide a point of reference for comparison, when mentioning the commissioning of a new statue, there are also mentions of pre-existing sets or series of statues of masters of the Profound Path Guruyoga lineage. For instance, among the funerary commissions for Könchok Pel, the seventh abbot, the very first casting (*lugs phud*) was a gilded statue of Mūchen Könchok Gyeltsen, the second abbot, which was "equal [in size?] to those of the Profound Path lineage" (*lam zab brgyud pa dang mnyam pa l*).⁹¹ Similarly, the biography of Tsültrim Pelzang, the twenty-eighth abbot, states that his "statue of medicinal clay in the Lamzap Chapel was of the same type as those of the previous lamas" (*lam zab lha khang du sman sku gong ma rnam dang gras mnyam l*).⁹²

4.4 Additional and Obscure References to Statues Portraying the Abbots of Ngor

The literary corpus of Ngor abbot biographies occasionally mentions funerary commissions of statues depicting a deceased abbot, without

⁸⁹ See, for instance, Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *Sangs rgyas seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 337b3–4), bSod nams shes rab, *Nam mkha' dpal bzang gi rnam thar* (fol. 27a3–4), bSod nams lhun grub, *Kun dga' dbang phyug gi rnam thar* (fol. 110b5).

⁹⁰ See dKon mchog dpal ldan, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 284a2), bKra shis dbang phyug, *Tshul khrims dpal bzang po'i rnam thar* (fol. 289b2). If the term "Lamzap" in the first passage is used as an abbreviation for the Lamzap Chapel, the passage could also be translated as "a gilded statue in the Lamzap Chapel" (*lam zab du gser sku*).

⁹¹ See Sangs rgyas rin chen, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 196a1–2), Nātha, *Sangs rgyas rin chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 224b4–5).

⁹² See bKra shis dbang phyug, *Tshul khrims dpal bzang po'i rnam thar* (fol. 289b2).

specifying the statue's purpose or function as one of the three types introduced above. Some of these statues can be identified as additional funerary commissions, while others might have been one of the three types but were not specifically identified as such. Some examples of both cases will now be briefly discussed.

In the case of Könchok Lhündrup, the tenth abbot, in addition to his chamber statue and the two Lamdré and Lamzap lineage supplements that were made as his funerary commissions, his disciple Wönchen Serkuba Könchok Gyeltsen had a life-size portrait statue made of medicinal clay including sandalwood, which was installed as the central image of the Serku Lhakhang, the famous "Chapel of Gilded Statues" (see figs. 15–17).⁹³ This two-pillared chapel was on the third floor of Ngor's assembly hall, the Wangkhang Chenmo, and Katok Situ described it in 1919 as containing about two hundred statues of various metals. He also mentioned the statue of Könchok Lhündrup still present there at the time, with a high-quality gilded statue of Virūpa in front of it.⁹⁴

The funerary commissions for Sanggyé Senggé, the eleventh abbot, included a clay statue of him of about one cubit (*lder sku khru gang tsam*), in addition to his chamber statue and Lamzap lineage supplement. However, this description in the biography of the commissioning patron, Könchok Penden, the twelfth abbot, leaves it unclear whether this clay statue might actually have been his otherwise unmentioned Lamdré lineage supplement. For unknown reasons, this statue is not recorded in Sanggyé Senggé's own biography, which only mentions those other two statues.⁹⁵

Among the funerary commissions for Sherap Jungné, the eighteenth abbot, two statues of him are described, with their material costs recorded, but without any indication of whether they were chamber statues or lineage supplements. However, the biography goes on to say that his chamber statue, which was not mentioned earlier, was part of the lineage supplements of the Lamdré Chapel. This order of presentation seems to suggest that one of these two statues was his chamber statue.⁹⁶

For Pelchok Geltsen, the twenty-second abbot, and Ngawang

⁹³ See dKon mchog dpal ldan, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fols. 283a6–284a2), Ngag dbang brtan pa'i rdo rje, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 306b4–5). In the biographies of Könchok Lhündrup, his disciple Könchok Gyeltsen also appears with the titles Wönchen Serkuné, Tuksé Jangchub Sempa, and Tuksé Dampa.

⁹⁴ See Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *dBus gtsang gnas yig* (fol. 215b5–6): *gser sku lha khang ka gnyis na | ngor chen dkon mchog lhun grub sku mdun du birwa pa'i gser sku spus dag | li rag zangs gser sna tshogs sku gnyis brgya tsam |*.

⁹⁵ See nn. 3, 6 above.

⁹⁶ See Ngag dbang bsod nams rgyal mtshan, *Shes rab 'byung gnas kyi rnam thar* (fols. 106a5–107a1).

Chökyong Zangpo, the fortieth abbot, there are mentions of funerary commissions that raise the question of whether they were actually chamber statues as well. In the case of Pelchok Geltsen, his medicinal clay statue is recorded as having been commissioned by Zhalu Khenchen Rinchen Sönam Chokdrup (1602–1681) and placed in Ngor's Drupkhang, the monastic building where Pelchok Geltsen had lived and died.⁹⁷ The biography of Ngawang Chökyong Zangpo mentions among his funeral commissions a statue of him made of red sandalwood in the Khangsar Labrang, the lama palace to which he belonged.⁹⁸

Another possible chamber statue is also recorded among the funerary commissions for Könchok Pel, the seventh abbot. In addition to his Lamdré and Lamzap supplements, a medicinal clay statue of him is mentioned for the Tarpatsé residence, the nucleus of which would become the Drangti family-run Tartsé Labrang. It was in this residence that Könchok Pel settled after his retirement from the abbacy and where he died.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ See Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *dPal mchog rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar* (fol. 162a3): *sman sku gcig zha lu mkhan chen gyis bzhengs nas da lta sgrub khang na bzhugs so* |.

⁹⁸ See Ngag dbang chos grags, *Ngag dbang chos skyong bzang po'i rnam thar* (fol. 54b4–5): *phun tshogs khang gsar du tsandan dmar po las bsgrubs pa'i 'dra sku gcig bcas bzhugs shing* |.

⁹⁹ See Sangs rgyas rin chen, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 196a2–3): *thar pa rtser bzhugs rgyu'i rje nyid kyi sku 'dra sman skur bzhengs nas* [...] |; Nātha, *Sangs rgyas rin chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 224b6): *thar pa rtser bzhugs rgyu'i rje ngor chen rang gi sku rnams sman skur bzhengs nas* |.

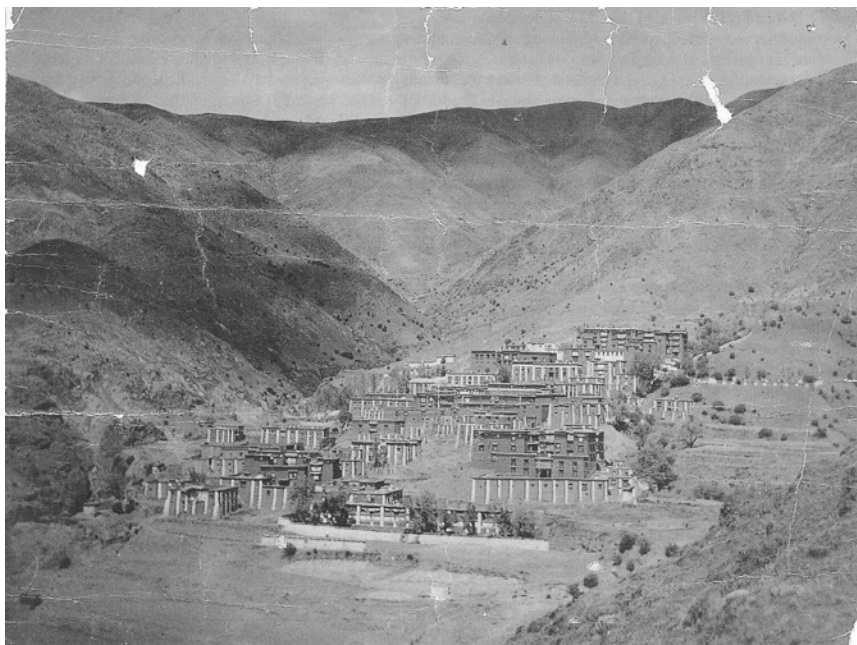


Figure 1 – Ngor Monastery; Photo by Chöga, the business manager (phyag mdzod) of the late Luding Khenchen Rinpoche

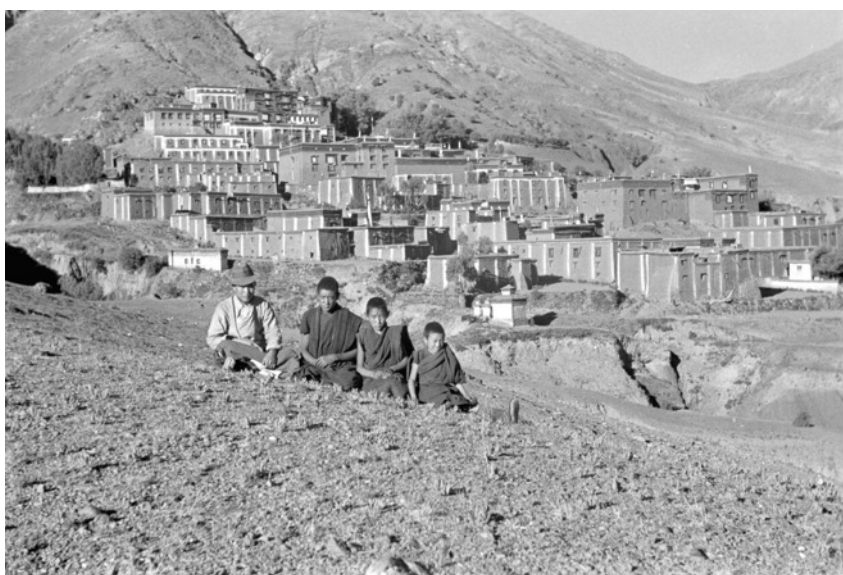


Figure 2 – Ngor Monastery, Tucci Expedition, 1939 (MNAO, neg. Dep. IsIAO 6105/08); Photo by Felice Boffa Ballaran



Figure 3 – Buddhaśrī (1339–1420) surrounded by the Yogacara lineage masters of the bodhisattova vow; 11th painting from a set depicting the lineage masters of the Profound Path Guruyoga commissioned by Lhachok Senggé; ca. 1516–1534; 31 1/4 × 19 1/8 in.?, Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art, Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin, C2006.66.220; After HAR 269



Figure 4 – Vajradhara as the Original Teacher of the Lamdré instructions flanked by Vajragarbha and Nairātmyā (the latter as 2nd lineage master); 1st painting of Ngorchén's Lamdré set; 1420s; 86.40 x 78.70 cm; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; Stella Kramrisch Collection, 1994; 1994-148-634; After Heimbel and Jackson 2023: pl. 3



Figure 5 – Virūpa and Kāṇha as 3rd and 4th lineage masters; 2nd painting of Ngorchén's Lamdré set; 1420s; 86.40 x 80 cm; The Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert H. Kinney; After Heimbel and Jackson 2023: pl. 4



Figure 6 – Damarūpa and Avadhūtipa as 5th and 6th lineage masters; 3rd painting of Ngorchen's Lamdré set; 1420s; 87.50 x 80 cm; Private Collection?; After Heimbel and Jackson 2023: pl. 5



Figure 7 – Sönam Tsemo and Drakpa Gyeltsen as 12th and 13th lineage masters; 7th painting of Ngorchen's Lamdré set; 1420s; 84 x 78.20 cm; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Gift of John Goelet; 67.831; After Heimbel and Jackson 2023: pl. 6



Figure 8 – Lamdré lineage supplement commissioned by Lhachok Senggé portraying Künga Wangchuk and Gorampa; 14th painting of the series; ca. 1516–1534; 86 x 78.50 cm; Private Collection



Figure 9 – A possible Lamdré lineage supplement commissioned by Sanggyé Senggé portraying Lhachok Senggé and Könchok Lhiindrup; 15th painting of the series?; ca. 1557–1569; 85.70 x 76.30 cm; After HAR 41215



Figure 10 – Drokmi Lotsāwa Shākya Yeshe, Setön Künrík, and Zhangtön Chöbar as lineage masters of the Lamdré from a set commissioned by Jampa Kiing Tashi as a funerary commission for Könchok Pen-den; ca. 1590s; 74 x 47 cm; Private Collection; Photo by Karl E. Ryavec



Figures 11–12 – Sakya Paṇḍita (left) and Ngorchon (right) as lineage masters of a set commissioned by Aseng Dorjé Tenpa as a funerary commission for Künga Wangchuk; ca. 1478; Heights: 32,5 cm and 34 cm; After HAR 12576 and HAR 12577 (images modified)



Figures 13 –14 – Nyenchenpa Sönam Tenpa (left) and Mūchen Sanggyé Rinchen (right) from a set possibly portraying the lineage masters of the Lamdré or Profound Path Guruyoga; Photos by Jörg Heimbel (images modified)



Figures 15–17 – Statues in the Serku Lhakhang, Ngor Monastery; Tucci Expedition, 1939 (MNAO, neg. Dep. IsIAO 6105/13, 6105/14, 6105/21); Photos by Felice Boffa Ballaran
The string connecting the statues was used to check that they were complete when the abbacy was handed over (Interview Luding Khenchen Rinpoche, Ngor ma dgon, 08 February 2015).



Figures 18–20 – Three small statues of Ngorchen Künga Zangpo known as “Ngorchen in realistic likeness” (ngor chen nga 'dra ma); Photos by Jörg Heimbel (images modified)

Appendices¹⁰⁰

A. List of Chamber Statues with References

Künga Wangchuk (1424–1478), the fourth abbot

- dKon mchog lhun grub, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 182a1)
- bSod nams lhun grub, *Kun dga' dbang phyug gi rnam thar* (fol. 110b5)

Gorampa Sönam Senggé (1429–1489), the sixth abbot; the chamber statue was made at Tupten Namgyel in Tanak, the main seat of Gorampa, under the sponsorship of Könchok Pel (1445–1514), the seventh abbot

- dKon mchog lhun grub, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 182a2)
- Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, *Go rams pa'i rnam thar* (p. 269.1)
- Yon tan 'byung gnas, *Go rams pa'i rnam thar* (p. 364.10–11)

Sanggyé Rinchen (1453–1524), the eighth abbot; the chamber statue was made at Lingkha Dewachen, one of his seats in his native Mü, where he also passed away

- Kun dga' bsod nams, *Sangs rgyas rin chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 208a2)
- Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, *Sangs rgyas rin chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 63a3)
- Nātha, *Sangs rgyas rin chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 240a4)

Lhachok Senggé (1468–1535), the ninth abbot

- Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *Sangs rgyas seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 337b1–2)

Könchok Lhündrup (1497–1557), the tenth abbot

- dKon mchog dpal ldan, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 284a1–2)
- Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *Sangs rgyas seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 337b4)

Sanggyé Senggé (1504–1569), the eleventh abbot

- Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *Sangs rgyas seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 337b4)

¹⁰⁰ For the terms of office of all Ngor abbots, see Heimbels 2017: 513–546.

344a2)

- Kun dga' bkra shis, *dKon mchog dpal ldan gyi rnam thar* (fol. 436b6)

Könchok Penden (1526–1590), the twelfth abbot

- Kun dga' bkra shis, *dKon mchog dpal ldan gyi rnam thar* (fol. 450b4–5)

Drangti Penchen Namkha Pelzang (1535–1602), the thirteenth abbot

- Kun dga' blo gros, *Sa skya'i gdung rabs kha skong* (p. 95.2–4)

Jampa Künga Tashi (1558–1615), the fourteenth abbot

- Ngag dbang brtan pa'i rdo rje, *Kun dga' bkra shis kyi rnam thar* (fol. 61b5)

Sherap Jungné (1596–1653), the eighteenth abbot

- Ngag dbang bsod nams rgyal mtshan, *Shes rab 'byung gnas kyi rnam thar* (fols. 106b6–107a1)

Lhündrup Penden (1624–1697), the twenty-fourth abbot

- Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *lHun grub dpal ldan gyi rnam thar* (fol. 178a2–3)

B. List of Lamdré Lineage Supplements with References

Penden Dorjé (1411–1482), the fifth abbot

- Nātha, *Sangs rgyas rin chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 224b6)
- Sangs rgyas rin chen, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 196a1)

Gorampa Sönam Senggé (1429–1489), the sixth abbot

- dKon mchog lhun grub, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 188a4)
- Nātha, *Sangs rgyas rin chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 224b5–6)
- Sangs rgyas rin chen, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 196a2)

Könchok Pel (1445–1514), the seventh abbot

- dKon mchog lhun grub, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 188a4)
- Nātha, *Sangs rgyas rin chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 224b5–6)
- Sangs rgyas rin chen, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 196a2)

Sanggyé Rinchen (1453–1524), the eighth abbot

- dKon mchog dpal ldan, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 273b4)
- Ngag dbang brtan pa'i rdo rje, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 294a3–4)
- Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *lHa mchog seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 262b3)

Lhachok Senggé (1468–1535), the ninth abbot

- dKon mchog dpal ldan, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 273b4–5)
- Ngag dbang brtan pa'i rdo rje, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 294a3–4)
- Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *lHa mchog seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 262b3)

Könchok Lhündrup (1497–1557), the tenth abbot

- dKon mchog dpal ldan, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fols. 283a6–b1, 284a1)
- Ngag dbang brtan pa'i rdo rje, *dKon mchog lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 306b4)

Könchok Penden (1526–1590), the twelfth abbot

- Kun dga' bkra shis, *dKon mchog dpal ldan gyi rnam thar* (fol. 450b4–5)
- bSod nams shes rab, *Nam mkha' dpal bzang gi rnam thar* (fol. 14b2)

Drangti Penchen Namkha Pelzang (1535–1602), the thirteenth abbot

- Kun dga' blo gros, *Sa skya'i gdung rabs kha skong* (p. 95.2–5)
- Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fol. 17b3)
- bSod nams shes rab, *Nam mkha' dpal bzang gi rnam thar* (fol. 27a3–4)

Sherap Jungné (1596–1653), the eighteenth abbot

- Ngag dbang bsod nams rgyal mtshan, *Shes rab 'byung gnas kyi rnam thar* (fols. 106b6–107a1)

Sönam Gyatso (1616–1667), the twenty-first abbot

- Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fol. 24b1)
- lHun grub dpal ldan, *bSod nams rgya mtsho'i rnam thar* (fol. 151a5)

Pelchok Geltsen (1599–1673), the twenty-second abbot

- bKra shis dbang phyug, *Tshul khrims dpal bzang gi rnam thar* (fol. 290a4)

Sanggyé Püntsok (1649–1705), the twenty-fifth abbot

- Tshul khrims dpal bzang, *Sangs rgyas phun tshogs kyi rnam thar* (fol. 261b3–6)
- Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Sangs rgyas phun tshogs kyi myong ba brjod pa* (fol. 212a5–b1)

Sheja Zangpo (1661–1702), the twenty-seventh abbot

- dPal ldan chos skyong, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fol. 12a1–2)

Tsültrim Pelzang (1675–1710), the twenty-eighth abbot

- bKra shis dbang phyug, *Tshul khrims dpal bzang po'i rnam thar* (fol. 289b1–2)
- dPal ldan chos skyong, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fol. 14a1)

Sönam Penden (1669–1713), the twenty-ninth abbot

- dPal ldan chos skyong, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fol. 16a2)

Sönam Zangpo (1689–1749), the thirtieth abbot

- Ngag dbang chos grags, *Ngag dbang chos skyong bzang po'i rnam thar* (fol. 13b2–4)

Tashi Lhündrup (1672–1739), the thirty-first abbot

- dPal ldan chos skyong, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fols. 26b6–27a1)
- Sangs rgyas ye shes, *bKra shis lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fols. 366a6–b6, 369b2, 370a2–372a1)

Tsültrim Lhündrup (1676–1730), the thirty-second abbot

- dPal ldan chos skyong, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fols. 28b6–29a3)

Namkha Samdrup (1696–1755), the thirty-third abbot

- dPal ldan chos skyong, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fol. 34a5)

Penden Chökyong (1702–1759), the thirty-fourth abbot

- dPal ldan chos skyong, *rTogs pa brjod pa* (vol. 4 (*wam*), fol. 485a4–6)

Sanggyé Pelzang (1699–1745), the thirty-fifth abbot

- dPal ldan chos skyong, *Sangs rgyas dpal bzang gi rnam thar* (fol. 384a1)

Sönam Lhündrup (1714–1745), the thirty-sixth abbot

- bsTan 'dzin rgya mtsho, *bSod nams lhun grub kyi rnam thar* (fol. 14b3)
- dPal ldan chos skyong, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fols. 41b6–42a1)

Ngawang Chökyong Zangpo (1723–1779), the fortieth abbot

- Ngag dbang chos grags, *Ngag dbang chos skyong bzang po'i rnam thar* (fol. 54b3)

Namkha Chimé (1765–1820), the forty-fourth abbot; his biography suggests that the statue was made in Degé—where he died while serving as court chaplain to the royal family—and then brought to Ngor

- Byams pa Kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, *'Jam dpal bzang po'i rnam thar* (fols. 202a3–208a1)
- Byams pa Kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, *Nam mkha' 'chi med kyi rnam thar* (fols. 72b5–73a2)

Jampa Künga Tenzin (1776–1862), the forty-seventh abbot

- 'Jam dbyangs Shes rab rgya mtsho, *Byams pa kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar* (fols. 305a3–306a1)
- Byams pa Kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, *Byams pa kun dga' bstan 'dzin gyi rnam thar* (fols. 170a5–171b1)

Jampel Zangpo (1789–1864), the fifty-first abbot

- Byams pa Kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, *'Jam dpal bzang po'i rnam thar* (fols. 254b5–255b6)

Jampa Künga Tenpé Gyeltsen (1829–1870), the fifty-fourth abbot

- 'Jam dbyangs Shes rab rgya mtsho, *Byams pa kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar* (fols. 333b4–334a2)¹⁰¹

C. List of Profound Path Guruyoga Lineage Supplements with References

Künga Wangchuk (1424–1478), the fourth abbot

- bSod nams lhun grub, *Kun dga' dbang phyug gi rnam thar* (fol.

¹⁰¹ Although the funerary statue of Jampa Künga Tenpé Gyeltsen is not identified as a Lamdré lineage supplement in his biography, the description of his statue is similar to that of the statues of the two previous abbots recorded in the list. Both of their statues were installed in the Lamdré Chapel, and so it has been added here and counted as a Lamdré supplement.

110b5)

Könchok Pel (1445–1514), the seventh abbot

- Sangs rgyas rin chen, *dKon mchog 'phel gyi rnam thar* (fol. 196a2)
- Nātha, *Sangs rgyas rin chen gyi rnam thar* (fol. 224b5–6)

Könchok Lhündrup (1497–1557), the tenth abbot

- Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *Sangs rgyas seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 337b4)

Sanggyé Senggé (1504–1569), the eleventh abbot

- Nam mkha' dpal bzang, *Sangs rgyas seng ge'i rnam thar* (fol. 344a2)
- Kun dga' bkra shis, *dKon mchog dpal ldan gyi rnam thar* (fol. 436b6)

Könchok Penden (1526–1590), the twelfth abbot

- bSod nams shes rab, *Nam mkha' dpal bzang gi rnam thar* (fol. 14b2)
- Kun dga' bkra shis, *dKon mchog dpal ldan gyi rnam thar* (fol. 450b5)

Drangti Penchen Namkha Pelzang (1535–1602), the thirteenth abbot

- bSod nams shes rab, *Nam mkha' dpal bzang gi rnam thar* (fol. 27a4)
- Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Ngor gyi gdan rabs* (fol. 17b3)

Tsültrim Pelzang (1675–1710), the twenty-eighth abbot

- bKra shis dbang phyug, *Tshul khrims dpal bzang po'i rnam thar* (fol. 289b2)

Transliteration Table

THL Phonetic Transcription

Achok

Achok Sengge Dorjé Tenpa

Aham Döndrup Dorjé

Amezhab

Aseng Dorjé Tenpa

Beri

Chöga

Wylie Transliteration

A chok

A mchog seng ge rDo rje brtan
pa

A ham Don grub rdo rje

A mes zhabs

A seng rDo rje brtan pa

Bal ris

Chos dga'

Degé	sDe dge
Dezhung Rinpoche	sDe gzhung Rin po che
Dochel Lhakhang	rDo gcal lha khang
Dorje Rinchen	rDo rje rin chen
Drangti	Brang ti
Drangti Penchen Namkha Pelzang	Brang ti Paṇ chen Nam mkha'
	dpal 'bzang
Drendü	Bran bdud
Drokmi Lotsāwa Shākya Yeshé	'Brog mi Lo tsā ba Shākya ye shes
Drupchen Buddhapa	Grub chen Buddha pa
Drupchen Buddhawa	Grub chen Buddha ba
Drupkhang	sGrub khang
Dzö Kagyama	mDzod bka' rgya ma
Dzö Nak	mDzod nag
Gorampa Sönam Senggé	Go rams pa bSod nams seng ge
Göjung Tsomchen	dGos 'byung tshom chen
Gyüde Küntü	rGyud sde kun btus
Jampa Künga Tashi	Byams pa Kun dga' bkra shis
Jampa Künga Tenpé Gyeltsen	Byams pa Kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan
Jampa Künga Tenzin	Byams pa Kun dga' bstan 'dzin
Jampa Namkha Chimé	Byams pa Nam mkha' 'chi med
Jampa Ling	Byams pa gling
Jampel Zangpo	'Jam dpal bzang po
Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo	'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po
Jamyang Sherap Gyatso	'Jam dbyangs Shes rab rgya mtsho
Jebtsün Drakpa Gyeltsen	rJe btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan
Karpo Drakpa Rinchen Senggé	dKar po brag pa Rin chen seng ge
Katok Situ Chökyi Gyatso	Kaḥ thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho
Khangsar Labrang	Khang gsar bla brang
Khyenri	mkhyen ris
Könchok Drakpa	dKon mchog grags pa
Könchok Lhündrup	dKon mchog lhun grub
Könchok Pel	dKon mchog 'phel
Könchok Penden	dKon mchog dpal ldan
Künga Drölchok	Kun dga' gröl mchog
Künga Sönam Lhündrup	Kun dga' bsod nams lhun grub
Künga Wangchuk	Kun dga' dbang phyug
Labrang	Bla brang

Labrang Zhung	Bla brang gzhung
Lama Dampa Sönam Gyeltsen	Bla ma dam pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan
Lamdré	Lam 'bras
Lamdré Lhakhang	Lam 'bras lha khang
Lamzap	Lam zab
Lamzap Lhakhang	Lam zab lha khang
Lamzap Puk	Lam zab phug
Lhachok Senggé	lHa mchog seng ge
Lhündrup Penden	lHun grub dpal ldan
Lingkha Dewachen	Gling kha bDe ba can
Lowo	Glo bo
Lowo Khenchen Sönam Lhündrup	Glo bo mKhan chen bSod nams lhun grub
Luding	Klu sdings
Luding Khenchen Rinpoche	Klu lding/sdings mKhan chen Rin po che
Menri	sMan ris
Mü	Mus
Müchen Könchok Gyeltsen	Mus chen dKon mchog rgyal mtshan
Müchen Sanggyé Gyeltsen	Mus chen Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan
Müchen Sanggyé Rinchen	Mus chen Sangs rgyas rin chen
Müchen Sempa Chenpo	Mus chen Sems dpa' chen po
Nabza Drakpukpa Sönam Pel	Na bza' Brag phug pa bSod nams dpal
Namkha Chimé	Nam mkha' 'chi med
Namkha Samdrup	Nam mkha' bsam 'grub
Namgyel	rNam rgyal
Ngawang Chökyong Zangpo	Ngag dbang chos skyong bzang po
Ngawang Sönam Wangchuk	Ngag dbang bsod nams dbang phyug
Ngor Ewam Chöden	Ngor E wam chos ldan
Ngorchen Dorjechang	Ngor chen rDo rje 'chang
Ngorchen Künga Zangpo	Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po
Ngorpa	Ngor pa
Nyenchenpa Sönam Tenpa	Nyan chen pa bSod nams brtan pa
Nyengön Chenpo	gNyan mgon chen po
Pelchok Geltsen	dPal mchog rgyal mtshan
Pendé	Phan bde
Pendé Khen Rinpoche	Phan bde mKhan Rin po che

Penden Chökyong	dPal ldan chos skyong
Penden Dorjé	dPal ldan rdo rje
Penden Tsültrim	dPal ldan tshul khrims
Putra	Pu tra
Ratön Yönten Pelzang	Rwa ston Yon tan dpal bzang
Ritröpa Lodrö Tenpa	Ri khrod pa Blo gros brtan pa
Sachen	Sa chen
Sachen Künga Nyingpo	Sa chen Kun dga' snying po
Sakya	Sa skya
Sakya Paṇḍita Künga Gyeltsen	Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan
Sakyong Āyi Senggé	Sa skyong Ā yi seng ge
Samdrup Gepel	bSam grub dge 'phel
Sanggyé Pelzang	Sangs rgyas dpal bzang
Sanggyé Püntsok	Sangs rgyas phun tshogs
Sanggyé Rinchen	Sangs rgyas rin chen
Sanggyé Senggé	Sangs rgyas seng ge
Serku Lhakhang	gSer sku lha khang
Setön Künrik	Se ston Kun rig
Sharchen Yeshé Gyeltsen	Shar chen Ye shes rgyal mtshan
Shākya Chokden	Shākya mchog ldan
Sheja Zangpo	Shes bya bzang po
Sherap Jungné	Shes rab 'byung gnas
Shinjé Nakpo	gShin rje nag po
Sönam Gyatso	bSod nams rgya mtsho
Sönam Lhündrup	bSod nams lhun grub
Sönam Penden	bSod nams dpal ldan
Sönam Sherap	bSod nams shes rab
Sönam Zangpo	bSod nams bzang po
Tanak	rTag nag
Tarpatsé	Thar pa rtse
Tartsé Labrang	Thar rtse bla brang
Tashi Göñ	bKra shis mgon
Tashi Lhündrup	bKra shis lhun grub
Tsang	gTsa ng
Tsarang	rTsa brang, gTsa ng drangs, etc.
Tsejang Penpa Wangdü	brTse byang sPen pa dbang 'dus
Tsuktor	gTsug tor/gtor
Tsültrim Pelzang	Tshul khrims dpal bzang
Tsültrim Lhündrup	Tshul khrims lhun grub
Tuksé Jangchub Sempa	Thugs sras Byang chub sems dpa'
Tuksé Dampa	Thugs sras dam pa

Tupten Namgyel	Thub bstan rnam rgyal
Ume	dBu med
Wangkhang Chenmo	dBang khang chen mo
Wönchen Serkuba Könchok Gyeltsen	dBon chen gSer sku ba dKon mchog rgyal mtshan
Wönchen Serkuné	dBon chen gSer sku nas
Yapchen	g.Yab chen
Zhalu Khenchen Rinchen Sönam	Zha lu mKhan chen Rin chen
Chokdrup	bsod nams mchog grub
Zhang Könchok Pel	Zhang dKon mchog dpal
Zhangtön Chöbar	Zhang ston Chos 'bar
Zimkhang Kadrugma	gZims khang ka drug ma
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Compte-rendu

Prem Poddar & Lisa Lindkvist Zhang, *Through the India–China Border: Kalimpong in the Himalayas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024, 274 pages.

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La ville de Kalimpong, située aux confins du Sikkim, du Bhoutan, du Bengale du Nord et du Tibet, à la frontière entre l'Inde et la Chine, est décrite comme une zone de contacts et comme un espace d'échanges commerciaux, culturels et politiques. Le flux de ces échanges, leur variabilité et leurs effets sont analysés à travers plusieurs études de cas qui gardent comme point central le rôle joué par des membres de la diaspora chinoise vivant à Kalimpong (entre 70 et 600 selon les sources) et la façon dont la migration tibétaine et les actions menées par les Tibétains l'a affecté. L'étude suit les mouvements migratoires chinois amorcés par la Seconde Guerre sino-japonaise à partir de la fin des années 1920 et le conflit frontalier indo-chinois du début des années 1960, tout en prenant en considération les migrations tibétaines à la même période.

C'est donc une histoire connectée de Kalimpong et de sa population chinoise que Prem et Zhang proposent en analysant finement les informations à leur disposition. Celles-ci émanent de documents d'archives britanniques, indiens ou chinois (India Office Records, National Archives, Delhi et Intelligence bureau, Calcutta, de la province chinoise du Yunnan), d'interviews (menées à Kalimpong et dans la province chinoise du Yunnan), de littérature grise (celle de l'école Chung Hwa), de journaux (*The Himalayan Times*, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, le journal chinois *People's Daily*), de mémoires (*wenshi ziliao*) ou encore d'une exposition muséale (celle consacrée à Ma Zhucai (1891–1963) au Yunnan). Ainsi, Prem et Zhang rendent compte des parcours de vie des subalternes, probablement espions, que sont à la fois les professeurs des écoles (Shen Fumin, né en 1911) et les commerçants (Ma Zhucai). Ils livrent toute la complexité géopolitique de la région himalayenne et l'adaptation identitaire, politique et économique des « frontaliers ».

Prem et Zhang rebattent de multiples cartes disciplinaires et méthodologiques tout au long de l'ouvrage, discutant notamment la notion de zone frontière, de nationalités, d'hybridité culturelle et d'histoire transculturelle, par exemple. Ils livrent une approche nuancée d'un territoire frontalier d'une importance stratégique pour les pays

concernés et considéré comme étant un « nid d'espions » par Jawaharlal Nehru, le Premier ministre indien dans les années 50. Les auteurs décrivent admirablement combien Kalimpong, comme porte d'accès vers le Tibet et la Chine, autorise de multiples interactions et la circulation des personnes, des biens, des informations, des armées, des armes. Le plus fascinant reste la description d'une ville frontalière comme étant au cœur d'un jeu diplomatique (britannique, indien, tibétain et chinois) qui se déploie non seulement aux plus hauts niveaux gouvernementaux mais aussi au cœur d'un peuple de migrants dont le rôle est mis en lumière. Au-delà de la géopolitique, la question identitaire des Chinois et des Tibétains vivant à Kalimpong est également longuement abordée. Ces populations, qui se reconnaissent loyalement attachées à leur pays, sont aussi des « frontaliers » affiliés à des réseaux forgés tout au long de leurs déplacements. Ils sont, par conséquent, à l'origine d'un espace transculturel qui dépasse leur nationalité d'origine, d'où la volonté de la population chinoise de Kalimpong de perpétuer ses traditions par la construction d'une école chinoise, par exemple. De la sorte, Kalimpong n'est pas seulement décrite comme étant une ville transculturelle et commerciale entre l'Inde et la Chine via le Tibet, mais aussi comme une marge où l'identité ethnique et l'appartenance politique de ses habitants étaient constamment rediscutés du fait de l'évolution de la géopolitique dans la région et des événements politiques internationaux.

En décentrant la perspective de recherche et en faisant de Kalimpong et de ses habitants transfrontaliers chinois et tibétains des acteurs majeurs de la géopolitique himalayenne et internationale, Prem et Zhang livrent un ouvrage magistral sur les enjeux de la transculturalité et de l'identité. Ils proposent un schéma théorique dense et discutent constamment des limites des nombreuses sources à leur disposition. Le livre est un modèle pour qui s'intéresse aux lieux de passage à l'origine de la circulation des personnes, des idées et des biens.

