

The *Ultimate Repelling Yamāntaka Practice:* A Shared Ritual Repertoire Among the rNying ma Byang gter and the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud Traditions Examined through the Texts of Chos kyi grags pa

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Introduction

Tibetan Buddhists invoke the fierce deity Yamāntaka (a wrathful form of Mañjuśrī) to clear away negative forces. This deity's practice is an antidote to all sorts of calamities, for instance malicious spirits, negative emotions, or the spells of rival sorcerers. Perhaps most prominently, monks perform large public Yamāntaka rituals prior to the festivities of Lo gsar to usher in an auspicious new year.² Despite typical public performance, Yamāntaka practice is widely known as a secret and dangerous, yet effective, approach to saṃsāric obstacles; and as such, Yamāntaka is a deity that spans all traditions and manifests in myriad forms. The recent compilation of Northern Treasures (*Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*) contains ten volumes completely dedicated to this deity within the cycle known as '*Jam dpal tshe bdag, Mañjuśrī Master of Life*.³ This article

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² For example, monks at sMin grol gling in Dehradun, India, perform a *gtor bzlog* of '*Jam dpal gshin rje dregs 'joms*, and the monks at Khams pa sgar bKra shis ljongs in Himachal Pradesh, India, perform a *sgrub chen* of '*Jam dpal khro chu* in close proximity to the new year. Additionally, a *sgrub chen* of *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri* is performed at mGar chen Institute in Arizona, USA. In Shimla, India at rDor rje brag, the monks alternate between '*Jam dpal tshe bdag* (a specifically Yamāntaka practice) and *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* (in which Yamāntaka is one of eight of the deities practiced), performing each biennially. However, some institutions invoke other wrathful deities in corresponding new year rites; e.g., at 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud Byang chub gling monastery in Dehradun, India, monks perform a *sgrub mchod* invoking Mahākāla.

³ For an introduction to this 63-volume anthology, see Arguillère 2022.

offers a preliminary examination of the texts contained within one particular sub-cycle of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* which appears in both the Northern Treasure compilation and the texts of 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud masters—the *Ultimate Repelling Blazing Razor* (*Yang bzlog me'i spu gri*). This investigation will focus specifically on the texts attributed to the 24th 'Bri gung throne-holder, Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659), a renowned *gter ston* whose work remains popular in contemporary Buddhist practice.

1. Danger and Secrecy

Since Yamāntaka practice targets maleficence and provides the training to potentially harm others, instructions for performing such practices are purportedly highly guarded. For example, in my recent field work in Dehradun, India, I was not allowed to observe the *gtor ma*-making sessions for the Yamāntaka *gtor bzlog* at sMin grol gling monastery. If non-monastic members of the broader saṅgha are interested in the *gtor ma*-making ceremony, they must watch the carefully curated video online that focuses on the artistic prowess of the monks rather than any meanings or textual instructions which are not ostensibly meant to be accessible to mere lay practitioners. Likewise, Byang gter *Yang bzlog* texts reflect this reticence to share specialized Yamāntaka instructions widely, as several texts contain warnings against dissipating the teachings. For instance, in the Byang gter collection a ritual which gives instructions for a wheel, effigy, and the magical substances of the *Yang bzlog* emphasizes its secret nature not only in the closing section, but also in the title itself. The title culminates in a strong imperative to conceal the text: *Herein lies these hidden, most secret aspects which are the wheel, effigy, and magical substances of the Ultimate Repelling Blazing Razor. Conceal them!*⁴ Moreover, the final line reads: "Do not reveal these techniques to anyone. Conceal them!"⁵ Likewise, another rite, *gShin rje yang zlog me'i spu gri* (*The Ultimate Repelling Blazing Razor Yama*) ends with this warning: "It is not appropriate to spread to people who are devoid of vows. If spread, there is danger of it reversing on oneself. Because of that, do it in secret."⁶ Even though this rhetoric of secrecy is common to Buddhist esoterica more generally (e.g., across texts of the Highest Yoga Tantra, Skt. *yoga-niruttara*), based on ethnographic field work,

⁴ *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i 'khor lo dang lingga dang rdzas rnams kyi gab sbas ches gsang ba rnams 'dir yod do sbos shig go. Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs, vol. 25, p. 33.*

⁵ *gNad 'di rnams su la yang ma ston par sbos shig. Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs, vol. 25, p. 36.*

⁶ *Dam tshig dben pa'i mi la spel du mi rung ngo / spel na rang la ldog pa'i nyen yod pas gsang bar bya'o. Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs, vol. 26, p. 361.*

Yamāntaka text and practice seem particularly problematic if given to the wrong person or performed without the utmost pure intent. Despite these explicit, adamant warnings and pervasive stories about its possible danger, Yamāntaka rites have been practiced in Tibet for centuries and have propagated throughout tantric networks. One such practice is the *Yang bzlog*, which has expanded worldwide to various saṅghas (in Nepal, Taiwan, Europe, and America). The corresponding empowerment and *sgrub chen* ceremonies (especially footage from America and Taiwan) are now broadcast online, reaching hundreds of practitioners across the globe. Among these teachings, the practices and commentaries attributed to Chos kyi grags pa, as a prominent 'Bri gung master and eventual friend to the 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1682), have proven especially influential. This consequential figure in the tumultuous history of 17th-century Tibet developed a Yamāntaka ritual repertoire that notably permeates sectarian boundaries and has endured for centuries.

Thus, I approach this Yamāntaka secret ritual knowledge as a “cultural capital” which enables ritual specialists to form these networks both historically and more recently throughout the modern Tibetan diaspora, including digital environments.⁷ Here, secrecy, or perhaps narratives of secrecy, paradoxically function as a mode of transmission. Yamāntaka practice, like the *Yang bzlog*, affords a specialized tantric asceticism by nature of magic/sorcery and secrecy that is seemingly amplified compared to other fierce deity traditions. Indeed, I have been told by several informants that incorrect Yamāntaka practice can easily cause adverse effects, such as natural disasters or car accidents. These concerns are narrated as so paramount that even when content is shared online for example, it is deliberately controlled (and openly discussed as such).

Modern lamas such as mGar chen Rin po che (b. 1936), who founded the mGar chen Buddhist Institute in Chino Valley, Arizona, claim Yamāntaka ritual knowledge is typically divided into two main components—protection and destruction. This dual framework serves as both an entry point to tantric practice, providing protective benefits for all practitioners, and a barrier to more advanced rites, as destructive rituals are reserved for experienced adepts. This two-tiered system operates as a built-in mechanism for balancing secrecy and display.⁸ Through this interpretation, the practice can be managed

⁷ Bourdieu 1977. For a discussion on “cultural capital” as applied specifically to Tibetan Buddhist studies, see Ducher 2017.

⁸ This echoes theories of secrecy by Bellman 1981 and Company 2009. Bellman envisions secrecy as a form of communication, and claims that oftentimes narratives about secret content trump the importance of the secret content itself. Likewise, in the context of east Asian traditions, Company argues that Daoist

while also allowing some form of participation to a wider audience. Yamāntaka practice thus affords⁹ a form of askesis, or tantric asceticism, in two significant ways: First, it functions as an ethical affordance of self-discipline, requiring practitioners to maintain secrecy and share knowledge only with those deemed worthy. Second, it serves as an ethical restraint on harmful magic—offering practical knowledge of how to harm enemies but mandating abstention from its use. These dual ethical affordances not only provide pragmatic skills (both for lay and monastic followers), but also serve as a source of power for lamas, who navigate the tensions between secrecy and disclosure. Ritual specialists leverage this knowledge to form connections beyond their sectarian affiliations, as demonstrated here by the historical friendships between lamas of dGe lugs pa, rNying ma, and bKa' brgyud pa sects centering around these tantric practices, and more recently, extending beyond geographic constraints as they are disseminated across the global Tibetan diaspora and into digital spaces.

I conceptualize the transmission of secret ritual knowledge as a dynamic dialogue, wherein practitioners actively create new interpretive spaces and negotiate alternative approaches to secrecy. This is particularly relevant in digital environments, where the ease of network building increases the risk of widespread access to traditionally guarded practices. Traditions must adapt over time, striking a balance between transmutability and the preservation of authenticity and ritual power as they integrate into new socio-historical contexts, including the digital realm. It is thus clear that the *Yang bzlog* Yamāntaka (through its flexibility and secret power) is particularly valuable as cultural capital since it afforded political alliances in the 17th century, and its significance is apparent nowadays as the practice (at least the protection part) becomes widely accessible via online practice opportunities that bring together practitioners from around the world.

transcendents/immortals (仙), often construed as hermetical bearers of secret content, are paradoxically defined through publicly social pathways.

⁹ For a discussion on “affordances,” see Keane 2014; 2018.

2. *The Yang bzlog Version of Yamāntaka
as a Sub-Cycle in the Byang gter*

The main *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri* (Ultimate Repelling Blazing Razor) deity who is at the center of these practices is similar in appearance to other versions in the *'Jam dpal tshe dag* (*Mañjuśrī Master of Life*) cycles found in the Northern Treasure literature. He boasts three faces—his right face is white, his middle face is dark blue, and his left face is red. He has six arms and four legs. He is distinctive, however, in wielding an iron hook in his upper left hand (see the curved blade in Fig. 1). In his right hands, from top to bottom, he holds a sharp wheel, a sword, and a nine-pronged *vajra*. In his lower left hands, he holds a pestle in his middle left hand, while his final left hand is engaged in a threatening *mudrā*.¹⁰



Fig. 1—Detailed image of Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka Lord of Life
thang ka print (original is housed at mGar dgon).
Courtesy of mGar chen Buddhist Institute.¹¹

¹⁰ For example, his accoutrements differ from those of the *Khro chu dug sdong* Yamāntaka who holds battle axes in his right hands and human hearts in his left (Brown 2024). Most versions of Yamāntaka within *'Jam dpal tshe bdag*, however, consistently display the wheel, sword, *vajra*, scepter, pestle, and *mudrā*. See Arguillère 2024b for a comprehensive description of the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* maṇḍala (pp. 335–44).

¹¹ An electronic version of this image can be found here: <https://www.garchen.store/store/p248/thangka-yamantaka.html> - /.

In the recent Byang gter 63-volume compilation, *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, the *Yang bzlog* texts which invoke this deity appear primarily in volumes 25 and 26, with a few distributed in other volumes. For example, a separated and arranged daily recitation practice (*gShin rje tshe bdag yang bzlog gi ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len bkol zhing bsgrigs pa*)¹² appears in volume 27 among several others. This text parallels the practice at the mGar chen Institute, specifically beginning at the generation-stage portion of the mGar chen liturgy. As the mGar chen liturgical text notes, Chos kyi grags pa has compiled an annotated version of this text which can be found in his *gSung 'bum*.¹³ The version that appears in the Byang gter collection lacks the annotations and has no colophon, perhaps predating the annotated version written by Chos kyi grags pa. However, based on preliminary fieldwork, contemporary masters understand this as Chos kyi grags pa's *gter ma*. Whether he personally revealed the *gter ma* (perhaps as a re-revelation) or whether this refers more broadly to his position as one of the main progenitors of the *Yang bzlog 'Bri gung* practice remains unclear and requires further research.

To reiterate, the *Yang bzlog* section of texts is a subsection of the larger portion of the collection dedicated to the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* cycle, which spans 10 volumes from volume 18 to volume 27. The majority of these texts are *gter ma* discovered by the 11th-century sorcerer rGya Zhang khrom. Some texts, most notable in the context of the *Yang bzlog*, were revealed by *lHa rje gNubs chung* (also 11th century). These texts are thus part of the Byang gter in the broadest sense, as they are not the core treasures revealed by *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* (1337–1408) in the first 15 volumes of the compilation. *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem*'s particular association with the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* Yamāntaka cycle remains unclear. Stéphane Arguillère points to evidence that he was known as a Yamāntaka master, practicing the form Nāgarakṣa.¹⁴ He is also noted as a lineage holder by the 5th Dalai Lama of a Yamāntaka-adjacent deity Yab shud dmar po. Moreover, he is listed in a lineage prayer to *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* by *'Ju Mi pham* (1846–1912) which mirrors the lineage of a rDzogs chen cycle mentioned in the 5th's *gSan yig*.¹⁵ This suggests perhaps that the Byang gter inclusion of the Yamāntaka cycle stems from its connection to rDzogs chen which originally were practices embedded in the larger Mahāyoga corpus.¹⁶

¹² *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 27, pp. 385–406.

¹³ *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 191–236.

¹⁴ For more information about *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem*'s practice of this deity see Arguillère 2024a.

¹⁵ Arguillère 2024b, pp. 297–99.

¹⁶ See Arguillère, forthcoming 2026.

The 'Bri gung *Yang bzlog* texts (as part of the sub-cycle to *'Jam dpal tshe bdag*) in particular were most likely incorporated into the Byang gter via connections between masters such as Chos kyi grags pa's grandfather rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs (1509–1557) and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's reincarnation, Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje (1452–1565). The 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* provides further clues on the flow of teachings from 'Bri gung masters to key rNying ma figures associated with the Byang gter (e.g., one lineage for the empowerment of the sharp inner cutting (*rnon po nang gcod*) flows from Chos kyi grags pa to Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1657), and a lineage for a reading transmission (marked with “*khon*” in his text) flows from Rin chen phun tshogs to *Rgyal sras* Padma chos rgyal to *Chos rgyal* bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550?–1603), etc.).¹⁷ However, as will be explained in a later section, the main *gter ma* transmission lineage does not reflect these connections. Nevertheless, this time period corresponds closely to the founding of rDo rje brag, when there was a need to consolidate the practices in which the key figures of the Northern Treasures tradition were experts.¹⁸ Since it was imagined as an open canon as such, these were most likely gradually worked in as part of the Northern Treasures in the broader sense of the term, especially as they were an effective means to political power via magical warfare.

3. 'Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa's *Yang bzlog* in 17th-Century War Magic

Perhaps the most infamous use of the *Yang bzlog* Yamāntaka cycle is attributed to the 'Bri gung master Chos kyi grags pa who exacted magic against the armies led by Gushri Khan (1582–1654) in the 17th century.¹⁹ That period is generally known for the employment of so-called “war magic” against rival factions.²⁰ Both the 5th Dalai Lama and Chos kyi grags pa were well known as skilled magicians with the technical expertise and charismatic power to wield various destructive rites against their enemies. Since *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* practices afford the ritual means to assert dominance in political and quite literally, military battlefield, the *Yang bzlog* cycle held significant importance for both great masters. They each contributed to the writings and compilations of *Yang bzlog* materials and purportedly later shared

¹⁷ *gSung 'bum / Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, vol. 3, p. 42.

¹⁸ Arguillère, Ducher, Achard 2024, p. 11.

¹⁹ FitzHerbert 2018, p. 106. See Bailey and Wenta 2024 for a discussion on the category of “magic” specifically in a Tibetan context.

²⁰ FitzHerbert 2018 extensively discusses war magic in this period; see also Cuevas 2019.

notes on the subject.²¹ Indeed, several texts in the Byang gter *Yang zlog* section are attributed to them.

Chos kyi grags pa, perhaps not as well-known as the illustrious 5th Dalai Lama, was nonetheless a prominent figure in this time period and particularly in the development of the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud tradition. He was a renowned scholar of multiple disciplines. Besides his expertise in sorcery, he exhibited mastery over various subjects including astrology and medicine.²² He is certainly a standout figure in the events surrounding the consolidation of Tibet, and his relationship with the 5th Dalai Lama is of particular interest in the context of the Northern Treasures. Despite his relative importance to the tradition, few works of Western scholarship have investigated his contributions.²³ Here, I will summarize some of the main events of his life that have been previously documented to provide further context for his ritual repertoire.

Chos kyi grags pa lived during a period of significant political tension between the gTsang kings, various Mongol factions, and the rising dGa' ldan pho brang. He was born to the sKyu ra clan in 1595 to the 21st throne-holder of 'Bri gung, Chos rgyal Rin chen phun tshogs (1547–1602). He had three brothers: Nā ro bKra shis phun tshogs (1574–1628), the sixth Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi dbang phyug (1584–1630),²⁴ and dKon mchog rin chen (1590–1654). Throughout his and his brothers' lives, various groups of Mongols threatened the security and control of 'Bri gung lands. In 1623, his brother Nā ro bKra shis phun tshogs was abducted by Thumé Mongols.²⁵ Not long after the death of this brother (who died in prison), Chos kyi grags pa, although reticent, assumed responsibility of the throne at 'Brig gung 'thil. In the context of his new position, he married, but later separated from, the gTsang princess (whose family was an enemy to the 5th Dalai Lama); he also deployed war magic on the Thumé Mongols who continued to encroach on 'Bri gung pa territory.²⁶ Unable to produce an heir, he established an incarnation lineage in which he identified a reincarnation of his older brother, dKon mchog rin chen, as the Che tshang or "older brother" who would in turn identify Chos kyi grags pa's reincarnation as the Chung tshang or "younger brother," with he and his brother traditionally recognized as the first of each

²¹ FitzHerbert 2018, pp. 106–7; Sobisch 2020, pp. 20–21.

²² For information on Chos kyi grags pa's medical expertise see Czaja 2007, pp. 349; 355 and Czaja 2013, pp. 81–82.

²³ Most notably, Czaja 2007; 2013, FitzHerbert 2018, and Sobisch 2020.

²⁴ For an examination of the biography and writings of Chos kyi dbang phyug, see Bhutia 2023.

²⁵ Sobisch 2020, p. 18.

²⁶ FitzHerbert 2018, p. 65 ; Sobisch 2020, p. 18.

succession.²⁷ After the Qoshot Mongols, commanded by Gushri Khan, came to capture the gTsang king and advanced the 5th's consolidation of power (1642), Chos kyi grags pa was arrested in 1645 for exacting destructive magic against the enemies of gTsang.²⁸ However, according to some sources, the Dalai Lama visited him while he was imprisoned and insisted that Chos kyi grags pa be released; other accounts suggest he recommended his release from afar.²⁹ In either scenario, he was freed, and sources emphasize that they specifically exchanged knowledge on the *Yang bzlog* Yamāntaka practices, either during this meeting or subsequent ones.³⁰

Despite the variation in these accounts, the implicit narrative suggests that this specialized magical secret practice formed a bond or alliance between the lamas. In other words, the *Yang bzlog* teachings served as a connector, a unifying element. The sharing of secret knowledge defined lines of trust and respect and bolstered the reputation of each lama. In fact, the 5th Dalai Lama generally embraced diverse practices across sectarian boundaries; he even supported practices like Chos kyi grags pa's, which might seem surprising given the political rivalries at the time (recall, Chos kyi grags pa was married into the family of the gTsang kings who were ultimately defeated by Gushri Khan, solidifying the 5th's rule).

However, this tolerance and cosmopolitan attitude was not extended to all ritual specialists. The 5th Dalai Lama openly criticized specific rNying ma groups that aligned themselves with gTsang power, namely the lineages of Zhig po gling pa (1524–1583) and his eminent student, the famed Sog bzlog pa (“Mongol-repeller”) Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624).³¹ These tensions are referenced in at least one of the Byang gter *Yang bzlog* texts, an empowerment ritual with an unknown author, perhaps written or at least edited by the 5th himself.³² The text's title indicates that the empowerment was composed by Rin chen phun tshogs (*Tshe bdag yang bzlog gi dbang dpal 'bri gung pa rin chen phun tshogs kyis mdzad pa'i khungs dag yin*), who

²⁷ Sobisch 2020, p. 17. This reincarnation lineage survives today in the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud tradition. The current Che tshang (07), dKon mchog bstan 'dzin kun bzang 'phrin las lhun grub (b. 1946), presides over the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud Institute in Dehradun, India. Che tshang Rin po che travels the world teaching the dharma and advocating for environmental conservation through his Go Green Go Organic initiative. Meanwhile, the current Chung tshang (08), bsTan 'dzin chos kyi snang ba (b. 1942) has remained in the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

²⁸ Esler 2022, p. 198; FitzHerbert 2018, p. 106.

²⁹ FitzHerbert 2018, p. 107; Karmay 2014, p. 200.

³⁰ Esler 2022, pp. 198–99; FitzHerbert 2018, pp. 107–08; Karmay, 2014 p. 407.

³¹ For an extensive study on the ritual repertoire of Sog bzlog pa see Gentry 2017.

³² *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 25, pp. 209–15.

could be Chos kyi grags pa's grandfather and previous incarnation.³³ The ritual itself notes that Ratna (a common name for his grandfather, with Chos kyi grags pa known as the second Ratna) composed a manuscript on the ritual details of practice (which is related to the sharp inner cutting (*rnon po nang gcod*)).³⁴ As mentioned previously, Rin chen phun tshogs is connected to the Byang gter tradition as the treasure companion of Legs ldan rdo rje, the Second rDo rje brag *rig 'dzin*.³⁵ Also, it is through rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs that the *Yang bzlog* practice enters the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud tradition.³⁶ However, it is also possible that this Rin chen phun tshogs is Chos kyi grags pa's father, Chos rgyal Rin chen phun tshogs. Indeed, in his *gSan yig*, the 5th discusses a *gtor ma* empowerment of the sharp inner cutting (*rnon po nang gcod*) compiled by Chos rgyal Rin chen phun tshogs.³⁷ The 5th follows this with a warning that the sNang rtse *sde pa* that is, the sNang rtse faction (*phyogs*)—Zhic po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa, and his disciple Gong ra lo chen gZhan phan rdo rje (1594–1654), or perhaps simply Zhig po gling pa himself as a *sde pa* (leader) of said faction,³⁸ misinterpreted the language of this empowerment as essence (*bcud*) rather than cutting (*gcod*). It is in the same spirit that the subtitle of the Byang gter text includes a critical comment about the sNang rtse *sde pa*, characterizing Rin chen phun tshogs' (whichever one it is) teaching as authentic (*khungs dag*) without the corruption of self-fabrication (*rang bzo'i slad pa med pa*) in contrast to the sNang rtse teachings, implying that the latter produced inauthentic doctrine.³⁹ In this way, the 'Bri gung teachings were legitimized with a strong reputation that continued through to Chos kyi grags pa. An interesting future avenue of research would include further examination of the

³³ Sobisch 2020, p. 17. For an extensive study on Rin chen phun tshogs see Burghart 2017.

³⁴ *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 25, p. 215.

³⁵ Esler 2022, p. 198.

³⁶ Confirmed during a practice hosted by contemporary Lama Thub bstan nyi ma (b. 1965) who has trained extensively in Yamāntaka practice.

³⁷ *gSung 'bum / Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, vol. 3, p. 34. Of course it is possible that this is an erroneous attribution (being the grandfather as well).

³⁸ Gentry 2017 discusses the sNang rtse faction (named after the homeland of Zhig po gling pa) and the continual rhetoric of the 5th Dalai Lama which denigrates this group, yet lauds the Northern Treasures (see especially, pp. 380–408). Also see FitzHerbert 2018, pp. 52; 103. FitzHerbert makes the compelling argument that the 5th's self-proclaimed expertise in "war magic" was critical to the success of the dGa' ldan pho brang. Important to this context, he describes how the 5th appropriated fierce rites from the powerful rNying ma Byang gter and 'Bri gung pa masters and used discourse on legitimacy and efficacy as a platform to marginalize political enemies, e.g., the sNang rtse faction.

³⁹ *Tshe bdag yang bzlog gi dbang dpal 'bri gung pa rin chen phun tshogs kyi mdzad pa'i khungs dag yin / snang rtse sde pa sogs kyi rang bzo'i slad pa med pas yid ches kyi gnas so*. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 25, pp. 209–15.

'Bri gung pa texts for similar criticisms coupled with a comparison of the relevant sNang rtse texts. However, it is my initial inclination that much of this criticism may stem from the 5th since it is well documented that rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs had an amicable relationship and shared political interests with Zhig po gling pa.⁴⁰

The details of 'Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa's life (including the relationship to his father's and grandfather's teachings, his relationship with the Fifth, and his relationship to the sNang rtse figures) will become clearer with further research on his autobiography, found in his *Collected Works (gSung 'bum)*, as well as on the various biographies composed by other 'Bri gung masters. His contribution to the Yamāntaka ritual text tradition is extensive; there are two volumes in his *gSung 'bum* dedicated to Yamāntaka and four independent volumes of the *Yang bzlog* based on his direct visions of the deity (*'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i chos skor*). In fact, Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899) notes that Chos kyi grags pa revealed his own mind treasures of the *Yang bzlog*.⁴¹ Suffice it to say, he is an illustrious figure in the Tibetan world, and his importance and contributions to Yamāntaka practice deserve greater scholarly attention.

4. Chos kyi grag pa's Yang bzlog in the Byang gter and 'Bri gung Texts

Based on colophonic materials, Arguillère has identified several *Yang bzlog* texts within the *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* that were authored by Chos kyi grags pa—at least one in volume 21, seven in volume 25, and three in volume 26.⁴² Many of these texts also appear in Chos kyi grags pa's *gSung 'bum*. Chos kyi grags pa's *gSung 'bum* contains a diverse range of text types, certainly not limited to Yamāntaka teachings. As a veritable polymath, his collected works span various subjects such as grammar, medicine, and perhaps most notable in terms of previously examined texts in Western scholarship—a commentary on the *Single Intention (dGongs gcig)* of 'Jig rten gsum mgon (1143–1217).⁴³ Here I present a preliminary investigation of the overlap between the *Yang bzlog* inclusions in the

⁴⁰ See Burghart 2017, p. 159 ; Sørensen and Hazod 2007, pp. 514-20.

⁴¹ See Kong sprul 2011, p. 346 for a brief biography.

⁴² For his catalogue (including notes on authorship, etc.) of the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* texts in the *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, see: <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/manjusri-master-of-life-a-table-of-the-4-first-volumes-of-the-jam-dpal-tshe-bdag-cycle-included-in-the-byang-gter-phyogs-sgrigs>.

⁴³ See Sobisch 2020 and Viehbeck 2009.

Byang gter compilation and the *gSung 'bum*, as well the 4-volume *Yang bzlog chos skor*.

The Yamāntaka texts appear in volumes 11 and 12 of his *gSung 'bum*. There are several other Yamāntaka cycles included in these two volumes, for instance the *Khro chu dug sdong* cycle, but most of the texts, especially those found in volume 11, are dedicated specifically to the *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri* cycle. Table 1 (in the Appendix) shows each Byang gter text (from Vol. 21, 25, 26, and 27) that I have found in Chos kyi grags pa's collection described above (the *gSung 'bum* and the *Chos skor*).⁴⁴ My findings are listed here by numbered order of appearance in the Byang gter collection:

- from volume 21, one text—a liturgy and ritual procedures for a *homa* of the four activities;
- from volume 25, eleven texts—a practice of the yoga of the four-*vajra* completion stage, a purification ritual, two empowerment-related rituals, a supplement for a *gaṇacakra* (*tshogs kyi 'khor lo*), an accomplishment and approach ritual from the *Zla gsang gzhi bsnyen*, an explanation of the series of vows written in 1631, a pacification *sādhana* written in 1636, another four-*vajra* completion stage practice, an application of activities of the hostile fire, and minor actions substituting the hostile fire rite;
- from volume 26, six texts—the main body of practice of the *Yang bzlog*, an important repelling ritual, a supplement to the daily practice of *Yang bzlog*, a dagger ritual, an extended history of the *Yang zlog*, and a transmission supplication of shared *bka' ma* and *gter ma* lineages;
- from volume 27, two *Yang zlog* texts—an arrangement of regular recitation practice and a text containing oral instructions for the approach and accomplishment.⁴⁵

In the following sections, I will discuss in detail two of these texts found in both the *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* and the *gSung 'bum*—the transmission supplication (*gsol 'debs*)⁴⁶ and a “liberating”

⁴⁴ Note there are other 'Bri gung masters that have contributed to the 4-volume *Chos skor* collection.

⁴⁵ Note the texts in volume 27 are *gter ma* texts that appear with notes written by Chos kyi grags pa in his compilations.

⁴⁶ *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri dang zla gsang gi rgyud bka' gter rnam thun mong gi brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs bsdus pa*, *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 277–80; *gShin rje'i gshed yang zlog gi brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs bsdus pa*, *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 187–90.

(i.e., killing) dagger rite.⁴⁷

5. *Chos kyi brag pa's Yang bzlog*
Example 1: Transmission Supplication

The transmission supplication provides a glimpse into the traditional lineages of the *Yang bzlog* textual tradition. These texts are simply a list of names that are read in reverence to the masters who propagated the particular teachings, generally in chronological order. As mentioned above, there is a layered complexity regarding the identity of the *gter ston* responsible for the *Yang zlog* cycle. As Arguillère has noted, a text by the 5th Dalai Lama in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* (also contained in the Byang gter compilation) includes a *Yang bzlog* lineage that identifies these practices as a *gter ma* discovered by *lHa rje gNubs chung*, but all the '*Jam dpal tshé bdag* sections in the collection begin with a blurb about rGya Zhang khrom.⁴⁸ Both the Byang gter and *gSung 'bum gsol 'debs* indicate that these two figures are in succession within the lineage (*lHa rje gNubs chung* following Zhang khrom).

Table 2 (in the Appendix) shows a comparison between the transmission lineage in the 5th Dalai Lama's *Yang bzlog* text and the lineages found in the Byang gter and the *gSung 'bum gsol 'debs* texts. Both the Byang gter and *gSung 'bum* lineages generally mirror⁴⁹ the 5th Dalai Lama's list up through *gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes* (marked with a star "*" on Table 2). In fact, the Byang gter and *gSung 'bum* lists mainly differ from the 5th's because these lists have collapsed the *bka' ma* and *gter ma* lineage into a single "shared" (*thun mong*) lineage, meaning they omit all *bka' ma* transmission after *gNubs chen* since this is the juncture in which *lHa rje gNubs chung* or rGya Zhang khrom would be the discoverer of a treasure hidden by him. Thus, after *gNubs chen*, the 5th Dalai Lama's list continues to *Yon tan rgya mtsho* then several other names included in the *bka' ma* list (which is not shown in the others) prior to reaching the *gter ma* at the juncture of *lHa rje gNubs chung*, interestingly omitting rGya Zhang khrom altogether. From the lineage lists, it is not clear that they discover the cycle separately, as revealed in the histories (*lo rgyus*) of this cycle discussed below, which by nature of genre can provide more nuance compared

⁴⁷ *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las phur gdab kyi man ngag gud du bkol ba*, *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 181–95; *Yang zlog me'i spu gri las / phur gdab kyi man ngag gud du bkol*, *Chos kyi brags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 359–76.

⁴⁸ Arguillère 2024b, p. 317–18; 327. *Rin chen gter mdzod*, *Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'*, vol. 26, pp. 434–6; *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, *Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'*, vol. 25, pp. 1–32 (relevant lineage list appears on pp. 3–4).

⁴⁹ Note, only slight variation of names in spelling/style.

to a simple linear enumeration characteristic of the *gsol 'debs*. However, receiving the transmission separately still does not account for this absence. In the 5th's list, he seemingly notes that *lHa rje gNubs chung* received the teachings from the *bka' ma* transmission and also later as a *gter ma*.⁵⁰ It is possible that the 5th purposely omitted *rGya Zhang khrom* for simplicity or some other reason (indeed, as the histories shows all texts are eventually funneled to *lHa rje gNubs chung*). However, elsewhere in the 5th's writings *Zhang khrom* is prominent, in the context of the *Yang bzlog* generally and this ritual more specifically, therefore this is unlikely. It is more probable that specific texts within a given cycle follow different transmission lines; the multiple lineages marked with special signs (as previously mentioned, e.g., "*khon*") in his *gSan yig* confirm this. The 5th's list in this particular texts notes that there is a union (*zung 'jug*) of the *bka'* and *gter* at the juncture of *rGya ston Nam mkha' dpal* (*alias Rig 'dzin gsang ba*), prior to the teachings entering the 'Bri gung *bKa' brgyud* tradition through *rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs*. This may suggest that there are different texts passed through via each mechanism—*bka'* and *gter*. *rGya Zhang khrom* may not have received certain transmissions that were passed along via the *bka' ma* route. Given the union of the texts, perhaps these were later indistinguishable from a *gter* and hence incorporated in *gter* compilations. It may remain unclear which texts followed the *bka' ma* transmission and which texts originated from *rGya Zhang khrom's* treasures—later transmitted to *lHa rje gNubs chung*—and which were discovered independently by *lHa rje gNubs chung* himself (or, as will be described below, whether such a distinction in regard to the *gter ma* exists at all). Careful charting of the texts enumerated in the 5th's *gSan yig* and *Chos kyi grags pa's* expanded history may reveal the later traditions' understandings of these matters.

Setting aside the more prominent issue of *Zhang khrom's* absence, another point of inquiry is whether the names of *Byang chub mgon po* and *Nam mkha' mtshan*⁵¹ represent different individuals. The numbered list in the *Byang gter* and the pattern of listing in the *gSung*

⁵⁰ *Bka' nas brgyud dang slar yang gter ston rgya. Rin chen gter mdzod, Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'*, vol. 26, p. 435; *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs, Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'*, vol. 25, p. 4. Note, this section (describing the propagation as a *gter ma*) is a bit unclear. It is possible to read this "*rgya*" as *rGya Zhang khrom's* name, but the structure seems to indicate two verbs (*brgyud* and *rgya*); furthermore, if it is the name, this would be a truncated form that seems abnormal compared to other mentions of *Zhang khrom*.

⁵¹ Note, *mtshan can* (or its truncated form *mtshan*) appears in multiple name enumerations in this article; this simply means "having the name." For example, here, *Nam mkha' mtshan* means "the one who has the name *Nam mkha'.*"

'bum (two names per independent linear section) suggests that they are different individuals. Additionally, further down the list, the Byang gter *gsol 'debs* numbering system indicates that mChog grub rgyal po maṅga'i mtshan may refer to a single individual (perhaps based on the 5th Dalai Lama lineage, it could be Chos kyi grags pa's father Chos rgyal Rin chen phun tshogs since he follows his own father rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs *alias* gNam lcags me 'bar; rJe ratna). However, it is more likely that these are two distinct names as indicated by the *gSung 'bum* lineage list and the histories—mChog grub rgyal po as Chos rgyal Rin chen phun tshogs (Chos kyi grags pa's father), and Maṅga'i mtshan as Nā ro bKra shis phun tshogs (Chos kyi grags pa's brother).⁵² Note both *gsol 'debs* culminate here since the text is compiled by Chos kyi grags pa.

Returning to the ambiguities surrounding the *gter* discoveries of gNubs chung and Zhang khrom, one may consult Chos kyi grags pa's *gSung 'bum* which contains an abridged history not found in the Byang gter (*Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i lo rgyus mdor bsdu*).⁵³ Scholar-practitioner Eric Fry-Miller (*alias* Eric Yon tan rgya mtsho) has translated this truncated history into English.⁵⁴ The tantric lineage follows closely the lineages in Table 2 from the Byang gter collection and *gSung 'bum*; however, there are important points not conveyed in the supplication due to its condensed format, which cannot accommodate an extended narrative framework.

For example, in the lineage described by the history, after dGa' rab rdo rje receives the tantras from the deities (gShin rje'i gshed by means of rDo rje rnon po),⁵⁵ he entrusts them to Mañjuśrīmitra ('Jam dpal bshes gnyen). Then Mañjuśrīmitra conceals a root tantra (*Zla gsang 'jam dpal kyi thugs*) to be discovered directly by Jñānagarbha (Ye shes snying po),⁵⁶ but all other texts, it is said, were given to *Śāntiṅgarbha (the *gsol 'debs* enumeration is Mañjuśrīmitra, *Śāntiṅgarbha, then Jñānagarbha). A subsequent key point in this history clarifies how the

⁵² It should be noted that in the 5th Dalai Lama's work (e.g., in his *gSan yig*), Maṅga'i mtshan refers to *Byang bdag* bKra shis stobs rgyal. This name seems to be used for Chos kyi grags pa's brother only in this specific context.

⁵³ *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 37–46.

⁵⁴ Fry-Miller's translation of several *Yang bzlog* materials (including the truncated history) can be found here: <https://www.buddhavisions.com/shop/yamantakas-fire-razor-of-ultimate-repelling/>.

⁵⁵ Rather than rDo rje rnon po (Skt. Vajratīkṣṇa) and Lag na rdo rje (Skt. Vajrapāṇi), who appear in the Byang gter *gsol 'debs* (or *gSang bdag* rdo rje in the *gSung 'bum* version) the history reads that Lag na rdo rje alone collected Yamāntaka's teachings. *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum* Vol. 11, p. 40.

⁵⁶ The root tantra lineage given by Fry-Miller is not directly given in the *gSung 'bum* text (that is, Jñānagarbha to Khrag 'thung nag po to gTsug lag dpal dge). However, some of these finer points are elucidated and expanded upon in the extended history.

Yang bzlog cycle emerged. Here, the text states that gTsong lag dpal dge extracted the pith of all the instructions on protection, repelling, killing, and suppression (*srung, bzlog, bsad, mnan*), which coalesced to form the *Yang bzlog*.⁵⁷ Then these were given to Padmasambhava, Vasudhara, then gNubs (who the text identifies as the reincarnation of Vasudhara's brother who had passed away).⁵⁸

The next noteworthy point, returning to the question of whether the treasures belong to Zhang khrom or *lHa rje gNubs chung*, is that this text explains that both are treasure revealers of the *Yang bzlog* cycle. Zhang khrom discovered the treasure gNubs hid at Phung po Ri bo che, and then entrusted them to *lHa rje gNubs chung*. Meanwhile, *lHa rje gNubs chung* independently discovered treasures (it not clearly narrated in this history whether these are the exact same texts) hidden by gNubs at mKho mthing Temple of lHo brag.⁵⁹ Thus, the history highlights several nuances that cannot be depicted in a singular lineage of the *gsol 'debs*.

Close analysis of the extended history found both in the *Byang gter* and the *gSung 'bum* will hopefully further elucidate these issues, but for now, I will simply provide a few preliminary notes about this text. This extended history offers a five-part explanation (*bshad pa*) of the *Yang bzlog* history: 1) The taming of 'Chi bdag gshin rje by bCom ldan 'das 'Jam dpal dbyangs, 2) The transmission of the tantras, 3) The manner in which they were disseminated to the world ('jig rten khams), 4) The arising of the sādhanas based on those tantras, and 5) The manner in which they were condensed to the essence which is the *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri*.⁶⁰ Table 3 (in the Appendix) offers a visual representation of the lineages described above and reflects the more extensive lineage list found in this extended history (noted in grey).⁶¹ Fascinatingly, the extended text claims that the treasures *lHa rje gNubs chung* uncovers are not different (*khyad par ma mchis pa*) from Zhang khrom's discoveries.⁶² Thus, perhaps the answer to the previously

⁵⁷ *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 41–2.

⁵⁸ *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, p. 42.

⁵⁹ *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 42–3. The phrasing regarding each text is as follows: *lho brag mkho mthing gi lha khang dang / phung po ri bo che gnyis su tshar re sbas so*. For an extended conversation on *lHa rje gNubs chung* and particularly his connection to Mi la ras pa's (1040?–1123?) activities, see Martin 1982 (who also relays a version of this history, especially see pp. 56–58). Martin also notes the two sets were identical.

⁶⁰ *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, p. 216.

⁶¹ *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 231–9.

⁶² Lama dGa' dpe's (Lama Thub bstan nyi ma) text describes these two sets as the earlier and later *gter ma*, noting that gNubs chung possesses the lineage of both (p. 27). mGar chen Rin po che has described the teachings that he gives online as teachings from the Zhang khrom treasures. Further field research will reveal whether or not this implies a different set of texts. There is also a perplexing line

posed question of which texts are whose, may be a moot point. This certainly warrants further investigation and raises important questions about Zhang khrom's function as a fundamental treasure revealer and incarnation of gNubs. If *lHa rje* gNubs chung discovers and transmits the same treasure, what then is Zhang khrom's role? What might behoove a treasure concealer to hide the same text independently for different discoverers in this context, especially since all seemingly are funneled to *lHa rje* gNubs chung eventually? I will leave these essential questions for future investigation and instead turn to an example of the ritual content shared in the *Yang bzlog* cycle of the *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum* and Byang gter compilation.

6. *Chos kyi grag pa's* Yang bzlog
Example 2: A "Liberating" Dagger Ritual

This ritual (*Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las phur gdab kyi man ngag gud du bkol ba*, *From the Ultimate Repelling Blazing Razor, the separate pith instructions for striking the dagger*), which appears in both the Byang gter compilation and *Chos kyi grags pa's gSung 'bum*, is a dagger ritual that "liberates" (a euphemism for killing).⁶³ The dagger (Skt. *kīla*) is a prominent ritual implement in tantric Buddhist liturgy, often associated with the deity Vajrakīla as discussed extensively in the scholarship of Martin Boord, Cathy Cantwell, and Robert Mayer.⁶⁴ In fact, I suspect that this ritual is an appropriation of ritual content from a Vajrakīla cycle refashioned as a sort of Yamāntaka/Vajrakīla aggregate.⁶⁵ Below, I provide a preliminary summary coupled with

in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* that implies Zhang khrom discovered treasures at mKho mthing temple (*gSung 'bum / Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, vol. 3, p. 34.).

⁶³ *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 181–95; *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 359–76.

⁶⁴ For example, Boord 1993; 2013, Cantwell 1997; 2020; 2022, Cantwell and Mayer 2007, and Mayer 1996. Also notable is Elser's article (2020) which discusses a *phur pa* text within the revelations of Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192). See Li 2018 for an overview of previous scholarship on *phur pa* texts, relevant Tibetan histories, and various transmissions.

⁶⁵ Cantwell's descriptions of early *phur pa* and Vajrakīla texts contain overlapping themes of this ritual, e.g., a deified *kīla* as the Supreme Son (*sras mchog*), (Cantwell 2020, p. 10) and similar phrasings on compassionate killing, such as noting that the *samaya* for killing via compassion is not actually killing and suppressing (Cantwell 1997, p. 115). Also, based on the writings of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms (1725–1789), Boord (1993) describes three types of Vajrakīla within the Byang gter literature, one which is particularly similar to the main *Yang bzlog* deity—i.e., a deity with three faces and six hands. He also notes that it is common for Vajrakīla, to manifest with a *kīla* body (Boord 1993, p. 90), similar to the version of Yamāntaka within this ritual. Given these details, the similarities between Vajrakīla and Yamāntaka texts certainly warrant further investigation to uncover any aspects of appropriation, or perhaps mutual sharing of ritual elements (some that may predate the specific

direct translations of the rite from the Byang gter compilation to illustrate the general function and structure of the ritual.

The rite promises to crush all enemies and obstacles (*dgra bgegs brlag*). The instructions include a combination of visualization sequences, physical movements, and manipulation of material objects to liberate (*bsgral*) a victim and elevate his consciousness to a pure land in the ultimate act of compassionate violence. Since this is such an overtly violent ritual, the text carefully expresses a justification for compassionate killing. This exemplifies why these rites are deemed dangerous (given the potential for nefarious misuse or misinterpretation of meaning) and hence narrated as secret and efficacious war magic.

The ritual begins with an homage to Yamāri. The practitioner must first grasp a wrathful-faced dagger (*phur*) in between joined palms, manifesting (*gsal*) the right hand as the sun and the left as the moon. On the right five fingers, the five families manifest from OM, HŪM, HRIM, HRĪH, ĀH and on the left five fingers, the five consorts manifest from MŪM, LĀM, MĀM, PĀM, TĀM. The union of the *yab yum* creates *bodhicitta* which emanates the Supreme Son (*sras mchog*), Yamāntaka-Vajrakīlaya.⁶⁶ This *yab yum* formation and resultant deity will be a prominent aspect of the mechanics throughout the ritual. This resultant deity is similar to the main deity of the *Yang bzlog* cycle described above but notably with wings and a dagger body similar to depictions of Vajrakīla. The text describes him thus:⁶⁷

He has adamantine wings⁶⁸ and three faces: black, white, and red. In his three right hands he holds a wheel, sword, and *vajra*. In his three left, he holds an iron hook, a wooden pestle, and the third makes a threatening *mudrā*. The final two, roll (*bsgril*) a *vajra* dagger at the heart.⁶⁹ He is adorned with the eight charnel

development of either cycle). As will be clear in the translation of the text, the author is careful to add that the “Son’s” (the language of a “Son” applied not only to the deified *kīla* but also to the victim) liberation in the pure land is only part of some transmissions.

⁶⁶ The version in the *gSung 'bum* varies slightly, noting that the *yab yum* union emanates a black *rdo rje phur bu*, then the Supreme Son rises forth. *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, p. 360.3. This language is similar to the *'phrin las phur pa* texts translated by Cantwell 2020, p. 67.

⁶⁷ See https://library.bdrclio/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 182.3–3.1.

⁶⁸ Note in most rNying ma depictions the deity has wings as described here; however, sometimes he is depicted without wings as in the form shown in Fig. 1.

⁶⁹ Based on Cantwell’s (2020, p. 10) description of the typical Vajrakīla iconography of the central deity (right face white, middle face dark blue, left face red with his bottom two hands rolling a dagger), this certainly seems like an amalgamation of Yamāntaka/Vajrakīla. That is to say, I understand the final two hands described

ground ornaments. His lower body is a meteoric iron dagger sparking fire like it was extracted from the bed of coals (*sol ma*) of a blacksmith, emitting from the mouth of a water dragon. He bears (*chang*) a garland of snakes.

The visualization sequence continues with several *yab yum* pairs, manifold peaceful and wrathful deities, along with dharma protectors, *yamas*, and various spirits juxtaposed on a five-pointed *vajra* [dagger].⁷⁰ The practitioner then visualizes:⁷¹

From the three corners of the [*phur bu*] tip, various weapons rain down. By mere rolling (*bsgril*), the three realms tremble. And by merely brandishing (*phyar*) it, the three realms of existence are frightened. By merely striking (*gdab*), enemies and obstacles can be destroyed.

Then, from the dagger, light rays emanate and all the blessings of the buddhas gather and dissolve into the dagger. The practitioner becomes endowed with the power of liberating the three realms in a single instant. He rolls the dagger (as Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka), and the text reiterates the spatially defined *yab yum*, a manifestation of skillful means on the right and wisdom on the left, a union which results in the Son arising from an azure HŪM. The Son (Yamāntaka-[Vajra]kīlāya with the lower body as the dagger) is said to have the capability of purifying enemies, obstructors, the five poisons, the three poisons and so on; the power is invested to him who is liberated as the Son of the Victor (*rgyal ba'i sras*), having annihilated action (*las*) and afflictive emotions (*nyon mongs*).⁷²

rolling the dagger as the bottom of the three sets of hands—the right holding the *vajra* (which is perhaps a dagger with a *vajra* handle), and the left making the threatening *mudrā* (basically transforming the base Yamāntaka form into a form that undertakes a Vajrakīla action); however, the description here is ambiguous.

⁷⁰ I understand this as a five-pronged *vajra* atop a *kīla* (the wrathful face the opposite end of the *kīla*, *vajra* in the middle). The text specifies that this sequence is *de dag gi sked*, which presumably means at the center of the previous *yab yum* formation. This possibly references the physical dagger that the practitioner is holding between his hands wherein the *yab yum* emerges. However, the text does not specify this identification of the implement explicitly. The body of the deity as a dagger (and the dagger in the deity's own hands) further complicates the interpretation of this passage.

⁷¹ See https://library.bdr.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, p. 183.2–3.4.

⁷² It is my understanding that the practitioner (as Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka) rolls the dagger which activates the rolling of the dagger by the main dagger-bodied deity, the Son (Vajrakīla-Yamāntaka). The language of “Son” seemingly is used in this

After once again rolling the dagger and reciting mantras, the practitioner strikes an effigy at the place where the life-force resides. Importantly, after this instruction to strike, the text includes a cited excerpt and notes on wrathful compassion:⁷³

{Note:⁷⁴ From the *Golden Rosary* written by Padmasambhava: ‘First, as the commitment (*dam pa*) of power (*mthu*), generate the supreme mind of enlightenment in oneself and by compassion for the benefit of others, accomplish power. Generating hatred (*zhe sdang*) at the time the dagger strikes the effigy—this is the method (*thabs*) of enlightened activities of a buddha.’ So, it is said. As the causal and temporal motivation (*rgyu dus kyi kun slong*),⁷⁵ one must be inspired (*kun nas slangs*) by the mind of enlightenment and compassion, and one must also generate fierce anger as the motivation at the time of action (i.e., the temporal motivation, *dus kyi kun slong*.)} Then strike {note: the blade (*dbal*) just disappearing (*nub*)} at the RNRI/NR⁷⁶ of the heart. And regarding lifting up to the realm (*gnas spar*):⁷⁷ {note: This enemy with negative karma, wanders saṃsāra because he previously also performed non-virtuous deeds. Now moreover, if he stays for a long duration, having performed many non-virtuous actions he will not cease (*’gog*)⁷⁸ from being born in the lower realms. Because of that, at this moment, having severed the negative karmic continuum, he will attain the Son of the

context for the resultant deity and the victim. Further research, particularly comparisons to Vajrakīla texts, may clarify this interpretation.

⁷³ See https://library.bdr.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 184.6–5.3.

⁷⁴ Notes in braces indicate text that appears in a smaller font which is usually added to the main larger-font text (which is often recited) to provide further instruction or explanation.

⁷⁵ The *sGom sde tshig mdzod chen mo* (vol. 1, p. 504) suggests this term is a combination of the two terms for types of motivation: *rgyu’i kun slong* (causal motivation) and *dus kyi kun slong* (temporal motivation). I interpret this to mean that a practitioner must have a general motivation of compassion to approach the practice which should also manifest explicitly during the action; meanwhile the temporal motivation (at the very time of action) should not only carry this compassionate motivation but also a fierce motivation. Admittedly this is unclear and must be clarified with further research.

⁷⁶ The syllable in the *gSung ’bum* is NR (vol. 11, p. 364.5). This NR is used throughout the rest of the text in the *Byang gter* as well, thus it is likely the extra ‘R’ and the non-vocalic middle ‘R’ are scribal errors.

⁷⁷ This means liberating the consciousness to a pure land.

⁷⁸ Interestingly, the *gSung ’bum* rather reads *’os med*, which conveys the meaning that this victim would not be worthy of such a fate, that is, he does not deserve to be continually reborn in these unfortunate circumstances (vol. 11, p. 346.6).

Mañjuśrī Wisdom Being (Skt. *Jñānasattva*).⁷⁹ The wrathful-thinking mind is generated.}

Within the notes, the text continues to emphasize compassion, gentleness, and the lack of malicious thoughts in performing such actions, drawing from the tantra *The Wheel that Achieves All Actions of Black Yamāntaka* (*gShin rje'i gshed nag po'i las thams cad 'grub par byed pa 'khor lo'i rgyud*), the words of Nāropā (d. 1040), and the teachings of Atiśa (982–1054) to 'Brom (1004–1064) in the *bKa' gdams Scriptures of Father Teachings* (*bKa' gdams glegs bam pho chos*). In fact, the text claims that this *samaya* which liberates via compassion is not killing (*bsad*) and suppressing (*mnan*), but instead a liberating (*bsgral*) of the aggregates through the union of compassion and skillful means.

Then, with this orientation of compassion established, the practitioner raises (*spar*) the consciousness (*rnam shes*) as the Son of the Victor. The text continues with specific instructions on dagger placement, and then explains the victim's predicament, having broken his vows. Citing the 9th chapter of the *Dark Red Yama, Blazing Impurities* (*gShin rje dmar nag 'bar ba'i dme rgyud*), the text asserts that when a previous lama has given an empowerment, the wisdom being resides there in the heart, and thus if the vow is protected, *siddhis* (*dnagos grub*) are bestowed; however, if the vow is broken, a demon devours the heart blood. Expanding from this citation, the text describes the wisdom being (in the case of vow breaking) rather as Las kyi *gshin rje'i gshed*, transforming into a nine-headed iron scorpion who devours from the eight heart channels, drinking the heart blood. The related visualization sequence describes light rays emanating from the dagger. The subtle essence of the wind scatters and the subtle essence of the blood gathers and dries, causing all the vow-breaker's constituent elements to dissolve into one another sequentially, and finally into the essence of consciousness (NR). That essence of consciousness is gathered up at the tip of the dagger and then passes through the interior space of the dagger. The remaining visualization describes how the consciousness transforms and then transports to the

⁷⁹ A similar process of raising the consciousness of the victim to the pure land and the victim attaining (in this case) *Vajrasattva's* son is described in Cantwell 1997, p. 114. In reviewing this article, Arguillère has pointed out that the *jñānasattva* designation functions distinctively in this context, whereas in usual tantric meditation it simply refers to the "actual" deity that descends and merges with the mentally created deity, *samayasattva*. This unique function warrants further investigation.

pure land, again highlighting the function of the *yab yum* formation:⁸⁰

That NR̄ itself, at the heart of the *yab*, Mañjuśrī Jñānasattva who is at the middle of the *vajra*, dissolves into the form of a white ĀḤ. Having dissolved, it becomes a dharmakāya buddha. Consequently, when the Mañjuśrī *yab yum* perform the union, that ĀḤ itself transmits through the middle path of the *yab*. From the path of the *vajra*, it falls into the secret center of the *yum*, transforming into the Son Mañjuśrī Jñānasattva, attaining buddhahood as the sambhogakāya in the southern pure land, Tiers of the Immaculate and Pure (rDul bral yang dag brtsegs). By means of that, the emanations radiate without limits, liberating beings of the three realms. Due to that, visualize buddhahood is attained as the nirmāṇakāya form, accomplishing the two goals.

More visualization sequences follow (similar to above, reiterating the dagger shape of the body, etc.). The text then calls on the practitioner to plant the dagger, the blade barely disappearing; the weapons in the ritual are said to have the power to sever the roots of enemies, obstructors, and saṃsāra itself. The practitioner must strike the weapon in different locations to separate each aspect of the victim's consciousness (*rnam shes*; Skt. *viññāna*):⁸¹

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the navel, separate the body-consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion ('*khrol*) of body!

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the throat, separate the speech-consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion of speech!

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the eye, separate the form-consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion of form!

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the nose, separate the nose-consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion of smell!

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the ear, separate the ear-consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion in sound!

⁸⁰ See https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 186.6–187.3.

⁸¹ See https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 187.6–188.3.

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the tongue, separate the tongue-consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion in taste!

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the secret part (*gsang ba*), separate the substratum (*kun gzhi*, Skt. *ālaya*) consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion in saṃsāra!

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the four limbs, separate the tactile sensation (*reg bya*) consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion in touch!

After striking, the eight consciousnesses dissolve into the dagger. Then a series of subsequent dissolution stages occur (from dagger to deities to Mañjuśrī Jñānasattva), culminating with Mañjuśrī Jñānasattva ultimately dissolving into the practitioner himself. Next, three restorations (*gso*) must be performed: restorations for the self, the dagger, and the enemy. These restorations involve visualization sequences that enliven or invigorate. For example, for the self, one imagines merit, fortune, and so forth dissolving into the self, and for the dagger visualizations, countless daggers emanate and sever enemies and obstacles. During the restoration of the enemy, the defilements (*grib*) and transgressions (*nyes ltung*) of the eight consciousnesses are purified by light rays of mantras striking the heart of the effigy. This causes him to immediately transform into Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka.⁸² Thus:⁸³

Having been lifted up by the crossed-*vajra* wind, visualize that he transforms, taking birth as the Son of the Victor, by means of being cast to the point of union of the Mañjuśrī *yab yum*, in the field of The Immaculate (rDul bral) of the southern direction.

Upon leading the enemy to liberation in the buddha field, the practitioner takes up a series of daggers that target different aspects of the victim, reciting mantras and striking at the place where those aspects abide: the *bla* dagger (a *mi'i mchog* dagger), the heart dagger (a teakwood dagger), and the life-force dagger (a dagger of knife-iron). Subsequent striking instructions follow, along with a direction to perform an activation of substances (*thun bskul byas*) of the *Zla gsang*.

⁸² Note that the identity of the victim, the practitioner, the Son, and Yamāntaka seem to be quite fluid throughout the ritual. Further research must be conducted to parse through the complexities of these seemingly conflated designations.

⁸³ See https://library.bdr.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, p. 189.3–189.4.

The practitioner then must again take up the wrathful-faced dagger from before, and various weapons emanate:⁸⁴

Visualize as the three: body, speech, and mind of the enemy are crushed to dust. And, HŪṂ, I, Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka perceived that you were tormented by the three poisons which are stirred up (*bsnyogs pa*) by afflictions and habitual tendencies. From that, Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka, in order to liberate you by means of compassion, DZAḤ! DZA!, even though having spread out like the planets, summons and liberates [you] with *vajra* weapons. From the tip of the adamantine dagger, cutting the root of hatred (*zhe sdang*), the adamantine weapons come down like a rain of fierce thunderbolts.⁸⁵ HŪṂ E DZAḤ!

By emanating a collection (*tshogs*) of blazing iron hooks {note: if there is joy as they excessively emanate, strike each and every weapon at the effigy, like in the chanting text, but it is merely a possibility}, hook! BADZRA ANGKUŚA DZAḤ!⁸⁶

By emanating a collection of blazing lassos, bind! BADZRA PĀṢE HŪṂ!

By emanating a collection of blazing iron chains, restrain! BADZRA SPHO ṬA BAṂ!

By emanating a collection of blazing bells, descend! BADZRA GHANṬA HO!

By emanating a collection of *vajra* wheels, cut! BADZRA ṬSAKRA ṂA!

By emanating a collection of *vajra* swords, cleave! BADZRA KHANGGA ṂA!

By emanating a collection of nine-pointed *vajras*, grind⁸⁷ (*lhogs*) to dust! BADZRA ṂA!

By emanating a collection of iron *vajra* hooks, quickly hook! NR TRI DZAḤ!

By emanating a collection of *vajra* pestles, beat! BADZRA MU KHA LA!

⁸⁴ See https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 190.3–192.1.

⁸⁵ Due to the context which follows, this sentence is translated from the version in the *gSung 'bum* (vol. 11, p. 370.6) which reads *rdo rje phur bu'i rtse mo nas / zhe sdang* (whereas, the Byang gter version reads *rdo rje phu bu zhe sdang*).

⁸⁶ Note I am transcribing phrases and mantras as they appear in the Tibetan text rather than rendering them in Sanskrit.

⁸⁷ The Byang gter version reads *rdul du lhogs shig*, whereas the *gSung 'bum* (vol. 11, p. 371.4) reads *rdul du rlogs shig*.

By emanating a collection of *vajra* threatening hand gestures, hit!
BADZRA TATDZA NI!

By emanating a collection of blazing goads (*mchil pa*), lead!
BADZRA Ā NA YA!

By emanating a collection of blazing blood skulls, intoxicate!
PATTA KA RA!

By emanating a collection of blazing butcher's knives, liberate!
BADZRA TSHENDHA NA!

By emanating a collection of blazing *citta*, corrupt! BI RU DDHA!

By emanating a collection of blazing Mount Merus, completely suppress! KRANTA KU RU!

By emanating a collection of blazing battle-axes, split! BADZRA
PA ŚU PA!

By emanating a collection of blazing *daṇḍa*, hit! BADZRA TĀ ṬA
YA!

By emanating a collection of blazing lassos, bind firmly!
BANDHA NA!

Moreover, a collection of emanated messengers, with various weapons intensely blazing, cast to strike, TĀ ṬA YA! Stick in the vital places, SU TSI YA! Quickly kill, MĀ RA YA! Devour the meat, BHU DZA THAḤ! Drink the blood, PI BA THA! Gnaw⁸⁸ the bone, BHAKṢA YA! Destroy the entrails, BHAÑDZA NA! Strike the brain,⁸⁹ KHĀ RAḤ KHĀ HI! Accomplish the enlightened activities, KARYA HO! Thus, strike {note: as the blade disappears}.

Then striking with weapons that have killed a human (*mi bsad pa'i mtshon cha*): HŪM! I am the wisdom body of all buddhas who are present throughout the three times. Regarding the weapons of sharp wisdom: The unobstructed weapon of fierce action, by means of the intensely blazing great *vajra* fire, severs from the root—the obstructors and the enemies who are intensely tormented by afflictions and karma, the wrong views, the assemblage of the five poisons, the continuous birth in saṃsāra.

⁸⁸ The Byang gter version reads *myur*, whereas the *gSung 'bum* (vol. 11, p. 372.3) reads *mur*.

⁸⁹ Perhaps this is a variant of *'debs*. The Byang gter version reads *klad pa bsdabs*, whereas the *gSung 'bum* reads *klad pa stobs* (vol. 11, p. 372.3).

Next, a mantra is recited and wheels and effigies are manipulated by the practitioner. Again, the ritual returns to the *yab yum* configuration:⁹⁰

Then, place one dough effigy (*zan ling*) and the corpse effigies (*ling ro*) of the liberated inside a stone mortar {note: which is three-sided} and strike it with a *vajra* pestle. And, strike with the *vajra* of the *yab*, which is the pestle, in the womb (*bha ga*) of the *yum*, which is the mortar. By striking, cut from the root the afflictions of the enemy and visualize as he is born as the Son of the Victor. HŪM DZAḤ! Strike, the pestle which is a blazing *vajra*. This evil-doer who has transgressed the teachings, liberate him with the *vajra* weapon.

Then, the practitioner adorns a *gtor ma* with a small piece of the corpse effigy, sprinkles it with *amṛta* and *rakta*, and tosses it, burning the remaining corpse effigy. The next section of the ritual ensures that these procedures are not killing in a mundane sense, again by citing salient canonical sources. It reads as follows:⁹¹

From the *Tantra of Black Yamāri* (*gShin rje gshed nag po'i rgyud*):⁹² 'E MA HO! The true secret which is the innermost: It is not killing [rather] delivering (*bkrol*) from evil action. As much as there is killing, nevertheless it is not killing. By doing thousands of misdeeds, one is not born in Avīci hell, for example. E MA HO! The nature of a great buddha, by means of killing, causes one to attain enlightenment. Killing a sentient being, killing itself, is done by great compassion itself. E MA HO! The supreme power of compassion will not become accomplished by means of inferior compassion.' Thus, it is said. The *Tantra of Black Yamāri* (*gShin rje dgra nag gyi rgyud*) was translated by Paṅḍi ta Thugs rje chen po and Lo tsā ba Rwa rDo rje grags. Later, Paṅḍi ta Sa manta Śrī and Lo tsā ba Rā chos grags,⁹³ produced a modified translation. From this modification: 'by means of killing like this, that one will be born as the son of a buddha; that one will be liberated from evil deeds,' {note: Moreover, the *Tantra of the*

⁹⁰ See https://library.bdrclio/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, p. 192.3–192.4.

⁹¹ See https://library.bdrclio/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 193.2–194.1.

⁹² For a complete English translation of this tantra, see Galasek-Hul 2025 in the 84000 Reading Room (<https://84000.co/translation/toh467>).

⁹³ The *gSung 'bum* names this translator as Rwa Chos rab (vol. 11, p. 374.2). For more information on the activities of these translators, see Cuevas 2021.

Wheel, Performing the Accomplishment of All Activities of Black Yamāri (gShin rje gshed nag po'i las thams cad grub par byed pa 'khor lo'i rgyud) as translated by Bā ro phyag sdum⁹⁴ and Rwa Rdo rje grags, has solely this transmission} hence, which is thus said.⁹⁵ If in possession of this key point, and if the enlightened activities which are wrathful, fierce activities are performed in earnest, the *mantrin*, from the fire pit, will inevitably become enlightened ('tshang mi rgya ka med pa).

The remaining section of the ritual contains some instructions on suppressing and cursing wheels as well as further information about liberating rituals. For example, the ritual text cites the *Secret Companion of the Longevity Lord Assemblage Tantra* (Tshe bdag zla gsang 'dus pa'i tantra), in regard to three different types of liberation: liberation by realization (*rtog pa*) and the view (*lta ba*); liberation by approach, accomplishment, and rituals; and liberation by inciting and dispatching messengers. The final lines read as follows:⁹⁶

Nowadays in this Land of Snow, some practitioners, having engaged in unwholesome practices such as, [violations] of monastic comportment, quarreling, deception, greed, and poison applications, degrade themselves and others. Some who do good, noble things are ridiculed by all. Therefore, the teachings, especially those which are Vajrayāna, have many methods that do not tame sentient beings via peace—those who have aversion to the Buddhist teachings and masters, those harming yogis, and those who have become entangled (*bcur*) are vanquished by an undertaking (*las ka*) such as this. If taken up out of compassion, at this time one's own happiness and the Three Jewels are elevated. Having severed his misdeeds, the continuation of saṃsāra, happiness is established. Due to that, one accomplishes unmatched benefit to beings. Subsequently, among the fire pit, I, the *mantradhara*, will achieve Buddhahood. Because of that, the two purposes (self/others) will arise implicitly. The teaching, especially of Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka, like this killing method,⁹⁷ may it be realized by all. U YA AKṬHAM!

⁹⁴ The *gSung 'bum* reads *rdum* (vol. 11, p. 374.3).

⁹⁵ Note Chos kyi grags pa employs these *gSar ma* authoritative texts within a rNying ma context, seemingly combining the traditions. This legitimation strategy warrants further investigation, especially in contrast to how other figures have navigated these different textual traditions (e.g., the 5th Dalai Lama).

⁹⁶ See https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, p. 195.2–195.5.

⁹⁷ The *Byang gter* text reads *gsod 'dugs*, meanwhile the *gSung 'bum* reads *gsod lugs* (vol. 11, p. 376.1).

In short, this dagger ritual provides instructions for liberating a victim by severing his consciousness via ritual weapons and an effigy, then transferring it to a pure land. Essential to this process is the correct understanding and application of compassionate motivation connected to the two aims (*don gnyis*), that is, benefit to oneself, as performing this action facilitates one own's enlightenment, and benefit of others, as it purifies the karma and defilements of another. Due to the violent aspects of the process, for example stabbing the victim's effigy with a dagger and visualizing as it is hooked, bound, restrained and so forth, a significant portion of the text serves as an internal justification of compassionate violence and carefully describes the mechanics of such action. Interestingly, this act of liberating is narrated in terms of birth rather than simply death and destruction. The liberation comes to fruition from the seed of the union between skillful means and wisdom, visualized as the Son produced from the *yab yum* pair. This reiterates the proper orientation of the practitioner and necessary prowess not only as a practical magician but also as an adept in contemplation.

7. *Chos kyi grags pa's Yang bzlog in Contemporary Practice*

One of the most fascinating aspects of the *Yang bzlog* practice is its continuity from a rich historical legacy to contemporary practice. Rituals texts included in both the Byang gter compilation and Chos kyi grags pa's *gSung 'bum* (namely a *ganacakra* ritual and an arrangement of regular practice)⁹⁸ are practiced in 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud centers at close proximity to the lunar new year, particularly at the mGar chen Buddhist Institute in Arizona and its sister monastery in Taiwan. Practitioners worldwide are invited to join the *Yang bzlog* Yamāntaka *sgrub chen* in the comfort of their own home via online practice (of course with the understanding they must receive the empowerment prior to participation). According to mGar chen Rin po che, this practice has both a protective function as well as a destructive function. Due to the risk of misinterpretation or misuse of this practice, he deliberately restricts online practice to the protective aspects only. Observing his discourse on the practice, it is evident that mGar chen

⁹⁸ *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las / kha skong tshogs kyi 'khor lo* (Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs, vol. 25, pp. 195–202; *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 865–70). *gShin rje tshé bdag yang bzlog gi ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len bkol zhing bsgrigs pa* (Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs, vol. 27 (pp. 385–406); *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11 (pp. 191–236). This latter regular practice arrangement is a *gter ma* text included in the Byang gter; technically it is only the *gSung 'bum* which contains Chos kyi grags pa's annotated version. A significant portion of the liturgy used in the mGar chen practices seems to stem from this text.

Rin po che is keenly aware of potential criticisms regarding the transmission of empowerments of such a potent, and hence traditionally restricted, practice through an online medium. He has taken much care to address this, framing the online experience within Buddhist principles of non-attachment and the illusions of an essential reality. In this context, mGar chen Rin po che explicitly articulates why dharma transmissions retain their authenticity in digital medium, suggesting it may enhance effectiveness by diminishing the physical attachment to the guru and defy the seemingly concrete world of conceptual reality by transversing temporospatial boundaries. The complete in-person practice (not limited to the protection portion) held at their center in Arizona is narrated as significantly more austere. Practitioners must enter a lottery drawing in order to secure a seat. During the retreat, participants observe prohibitions against bathing, “seeing the sky,” and speaking (except when reciting mantras and liturgical texts). The ‘Bri gung bKa’ brgyud Rin chen dpal ri monastery (founded by H.E. Grub dbang bSod nams ‘byor ‘phel Rin po che, b. 1939) also hosts a *Yang bzlog* retreat at the Great Lotus Stūpa in Lumbini, Nepal. And recently, beyond the practices near the new year (September 2025), Lama Thub bstan nyi ma (*alias*, Lama dGa’ dpe, b. 1965) held a truncated form of the practice from ‘Bri gung’s Seattle location, broadcasted online. Notably, Lama Thub bstan nyi ma has produced a compilation (translated into English) on the practice of Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka.⁹⁹ Many of the sections of this text, for example the historical background, overlap with the *Yang bzlog* histories presented here. Both Lama Thub bstan nyi ma, and mGar chen Rin po che who provides the forward to the book, emphasize the suitability of this practice for the degenerative age since peaceful deities are unable to tame the dense afflictions that plague sentient beings during this time period. Furthermore, Lama Thub bstan nyi ma claims that Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka practice in particular contains the power necessary “to clear away the dark fog of ignorance,” clarifying that, “the wisdom mind of such a deity is a union of great wisdom and compassion.”

Beyond the *Yang bzlog* practice itself, Chos kyi grags pa specifically remains an important figure in the contemporary traditions. For example, *rDo rje slob dpon* Dr. Hun Lye (b. 1970), spiritual director of Urban Dharma (a ‘Bri gung center in Asheville, North Carolina), named his broader dharma initiative (Drikung Dharmakīrti International) after Chos kyi grags pa (Skt. Dharmakīrti). This organization’s website, characterizes Chos kyi grags pa as a

⁹⁹ The full title of this text is *The Protection and Repelling Drubchen of Manjushri Yamantaka: Commentary and Compilation by Venerable Lama Gape* (translated by Ina Bieler).

“renaissance man” and “probably the most important master in the Drikung Kagyu lineage after Kyobpa Jigten Sumgön.”¹⁰⁰ Evidently, this tradition maintains its relevance for present-day practitioners who, while perhaps not deploying ritual magic in the context of physical warfare, engage these practices to repel a multitude of contemporary obstacles.

Conclusion

The examination of the *Yang bzlog* in both the Byang gter and 'Bri gung tradition raises several important questions. First, do certain ritual practices possess inherent qualities that facilitate their historical significance and continued relevance in contemporary ritual repertoires? Additionally, how do these enduring traditions narrate their legitimacy and historical development to further consolidate their authority for future generations of practitioners who now can access teachings quickly and easily through digital media? Furthermore, how does the textual history of this ritual system contextualize broader sociopolitical developments during its composition, compilation, and transmission? Clearly the *Yang bzlog* played a substantial role in the 17th-century events that fundamentally altered modern conceptions of “Tibet” as a political and cultural entity.

On a final concluding note, my preliminary analysis suggests two points: firstly, the *Yang bzlog* practice itself affords a tiered system that enables ritual specialists to exact power and establish networks through the controlled dissemination of coveted secret instruction (even when the content’s secrecy may be less significant than the discourse of secrecy itself). Secondly, and relatedly, although the *Yang bzlog* is particularly felicitous to this result, the charismatic authority and framing of power and secrecy remain fundamental to the success and sustained relevance of these practices (regardless of whether they are actively performed or simply revered as part of a distinguished cycle). The enduring significance of the *Yang bzlog* in both the Byang gter and 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud traditions may stem from a convergence of factors—the historical happenstance of certain influential ritual masters focusing on these particular rites, combined with the intrinsic structure of the *Yang bzlog* itself as a tiered system of power and wrathful efficacy.

¹⁰⁰ <https://drikungdharmakirti.com/about-2/who-we-are/>.

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- Zla gsang gzhi bsnyen las don grub bsnyen pa'i sdebs dang ma grub na ar la gtad pa dang ru khugs kyi las shintu gsang ba, vol. 25, pp. 223–9.
- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las gshin rje'i gshed kyi rgyud rnams nas bshad pa'i dam tshig gi rim pa rnams, vol. 25, pp. 231–41.
- Phiyag rgya zil gnon zhi bar bsgrub pa'i thabs, vol. 25, pp. 243–55.
- 'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed phiyag rgya zil gnon gyi thun mong ma yin pa'i rdzogs rim rdo rje bzhi'i rnal 'byor zhes bya ba ches zab cing gsang ba snying khrag lta bu, vol. 25, pp. 299–375.
- gShin rje yang zlog me'i spu gri, vol. 25, pp. 351–61.
- Zla gsang las bsad pa mthar thug gdug pa me'i las sbyor, vol. 25, pp. 385–406.
- gDug pa me'i las sbyor gyi kha bsgyur las phran rnams, vol. 25, pp. 417–25.
- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i lag len dngos gzhi, vol. 26, pp. 41–63.
- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i nye bar mkho ba'i bzlog byang asti, vol. 26, pp. 149–58.
- Yang zlog me'i spu gri'i ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len lhan thab [=thabs] med du mi rung ba, vol. 26, pp. 173–80.
- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las phur gdab kyi man ngag gud du bkol ba, vol. 26, pp. 181–95.
- Yang zlog me'i spu gri'i lo rgyus rgyas pa, vol. 26, pp. 215–44.
- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri dang zla gsang gi rgyud bka' gter rnams thun mong gi brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs bsdus pa, vol. 26, pp. 277–80.
- gShin rje tshe bdag yang bzlog gi ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len bkol zhing bsgrigs pa, vol. 27, pp. 385–406.
- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i bsnyen sgrub kyi zhal gdams gud du sbas pa, vol. 27, pp. 557–65.

— Unknown

- *Tshe bdag yang bzlog gi dbang dpal 'bri gung pa rin chen phun tshogs kyis mdzad pa'i khungs dag yin / snang rtse sde pa sogs kyi rang bzo'i slad pa med pas yid ches kyi gnas so*, vol. 25, pp. 209–15.

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- *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i dbang chog bdud dpung zil gnon gyi nyer mkho lhan thabs kyi rim pa*, vol. 11, pp. 129–158.
- *Phyag rgya zil gnon zhi bar sgrub pa'i thabs*, vol. 11, pp. 159–74.
- *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i lo rgyus las / gshin rje'i gshed kyi rgyud rnam nas bshad pa'i dam tshig gi rim pa rnam*, vol. 11, pp. 175–86.
- *gShin rje'i gshed yang zlog gi brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs bsdus pa*, vol. 11, pp. 187–90.
- *Yang zlog gi ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len bkol zhing bsgrigs pa*, vol. 11, pp. 191–236.
- *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i kha skong tshogs kyi 'khor lo*, vol. 11, pp. 253–67.
- *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las / phur gdab kyi man ngag gud du bkol ba*, vol. 11, pp. 359–76.
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- *Yang zlog me'i spu gri'i bsnyen sgrub kyi zhal gdams gud du sbas pa*, vol. 11, pp. 831–52.
- *Zla gsang gzhi bsnyen las / don grub bsnyen pa'i bsdebs dang ma grub na ar la gtad pa ru khug gi las shintu gsang ba*, vol. 11, pp. 865–70.

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Appendix

Table 1 — *Overlapping of Chos kyi grags pa's Yang bzlog texts between the Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs, Chos kyi grags pa's gSung 'bum, and the 'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i chos skor.*

| <u>Byang gter Compilation</u> | <u>gSung 'bum</u> | <u>Yang bzlog chos skor</u> |
|--|-----------------------|---|
| Key: + indicates overlap with Arguillère's colophon examination ¹⁰¹ | | |
| Volume 21 | | |
| 22) 'Jam dpal gshin rje gshed phyag rgya zil gnon gyi las bzhi'i sbyin sreg gi lag len dang ngag 'don dngos grub kyi 'dod 'jo (pp. 335–91)+ | Vol. 11 (pp. 467–528) | Vol. 1 (pp. 455–519) |
| Volume 25 | | |
| 5) rDzogs rim rdo rje bzhi'i rnal 'byor gyi nyams len rgyun khyer du bsdus pa / dpe 'di nyams khrid gzhung ma thob pa la bstan na dam las nyams pa (pp. 63–77) | | Vol. 4 (pp. 257–79) *authorship confirmed in colophon (but edited) |
| 6) Zla gsang las sku gzugs dbang po skyon sbyang rab tu gnas pa'i cho ga (pp. 79–147)+ | Vol. 11 (pp. 377–456) | Vol. 4 (pp. 121–221) |
| 8) Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i dbang chog bdud dpung zil gnon gyi nyer mkho lhan thabs kyi rim pa (pp. 155–185) | Vol. 11 (129–58) | Vol. 3 (pp. 299–343) |
| 9) Phyi dbang (=nang) gi chas dbang zab mo (pp. 187–94) | | Vol. 3 (pp. 287–98) *authorship not listed in colophon |
| 10) Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las / kha skong tshogs kyi 'khor lo (pp. 195–202)+ | Vol. 11 (pp. 253–67) | |
| 14) Zla gsang gzhi bsnyen las don grub bsnyen pa'i sdebs dang ma grub na ar la gtad pa dang ru khugs kyi las shintu gsang ba (pp. 223–9)+ | Vol. 11 (pp. 865–70) | Vol. 2 (pp. 217–24) |
| 15) Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las gshin rje'i gshed kyi rgyud rnams nas bshad pa'i dam tshig gi rim pa rnams (pp. 231–41)+ | Vol. 11 (pp. 175–86) | |

¹⁰¹ As indicated above, Arguillère has catalogued the 'Jam dpal tshé bdag texts found within the Byang gter compilation, noting authorship if expressed in the colophon.

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| 16) <i>Phyag rgya zil gnon zhi bar bsgrub pa'i thabs</i> (pp. 243–55)+ | Vol. 11 (pp. 159–74) | Vol. 2 (pp. 21–39) |
| 22) <i>'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed phyag rgya zil gnon gyi thun mong ma yin pa'i rdzogs rim rdo rje bzhi'i rnal 'byor zhes bya ba ches zab cing gsang ba snying khrag lta bu</i> (pp. 299–375)+ | Vol. 11 (pp. 661–758) | Vol. 2 (pp. 473–603) |
| 25) <i>Zla gsang las bsad pa mthar thug gdug pa me'i las sbyor</i> (pp. 385–406) | | Vol. 4 (pp. 321–57) *authorship not listed in colophon |
| 28) <i>gDug pa me'i las sbyor gyi kha bsgyur las phran rnam</i> s (pp. 417–25)+ | Vol. 11 (pp. 601–12) | Vol. 4 (pp. 359–72) |
| Volume 26 | | |
| 6) <i>Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i lag len dngos gzhi</i> (pp. 41–63) *lineage list ends with <i>sPrul sku Gar gyi dbang phyug rtsal</i> | | Vol. 4 (pp. 379–401) *lineage list ends with Chos kyi grags pa |
| 13) <i>Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i nye bar mkho ba'i bzlog byang asti</i> (pp. 149–58)+ | Vol. 11 (pp. 345–58) | Vol. 1 (pp. 281–95) |
| 15) <i>Yang zlog me'i spu gri'i ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len lhan thab [=thabs] med du mi rung ba</i> (pp. 173–80) | | Vol. 1 (pp. 57–71) *authorship not listed in colophon |
| 16) <i>Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las phur gdab kyi man ngag gud du bkol ba</i> (pp. 181–95) | Vol. 11 (pp. 359–76) | |
| 20) <i>Yang zlog me'i spu gri'i lo rgyus rgyas pa</i> (pp. 215–44)+ | Vol. 11 (pp. 1–35) | |
| 24) <i>Yang bzlog me'i spu gri dang zla gsang gi rgyud bka' gter rnam s thun mong gi brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs bsdu</i> s pa (pp. 277–80)+ | Vol. 11 (pp. 187–90) *varies slightly (follows <i>gter</i>) | Vol. 1 (pp. 33–42) *varies slightly (follows <i>gter</i>) |
| Volume 27 | | |
| 35) <i>gShin rje tshe bdag yang bzlog gi ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len bkol zhing bsrigris pa</i> (pp. 385–406) * <i>gTer ma</i> with no colophon (thus not specifically attributed to Chos kyi grags pa) | Vol. 11 (191–236) *this is an annotated version | Vol. 3 (pp. 59–106) *this is an annotated version |
| 49) <i>Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i bsnyen sgrub kyi zhal gdams gud du sbas pa</i> (pp. 557–65) * <i>gTer ma</i> of rGya Zhang khrom | Vol. 11 (pp. 831–52) *varies slightly and contains commentary | Vol. 2 (pp. 163–92) *varies slightly and contains commentary |

Table 2 — Yang bzlog lineage lists from the Rin chen gter mdzod (5th Dalai Lama), Byang gter compilation, and Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum

| | <u>5th Dalai Lama</u> <u>brgyud 'debs</u> | <u>Byang gter</u> <u>gsol 'debs</u> | <u>gSung 'bum</u> <u>gsol 'debs</u> |
|-----|---|--|--|
| | | | |
| | Key: * indicates the point of the <i>bka' ma</i> / <i>gter ma</i> divide + indicates unclear name divisions | | |
| | | | |
| 1. | gShin rje gshed | gShin rje'i gshed | 'Jam dpal dbyangs bcom ldan gshin rje |
| 2. | rDo rje rnon po | rDo rje rnon po and Lag na rdo rje 'dzin | gSang bdag rdo rje 'dzin |
| 3. | dGa' rab rdo rje | dGa' rab rdo rje | dGa' rab rdo rje |
| 4. | 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen | 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen | 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen |
| 5. | Santim garbha | Santim garbha | Santim garbha |
| 6. | Ye shes snying po | Ye shes snying po | Ye shes snying po |
| 7. | Nam mkha' snying po | Kha garbha | Nam mkha'i snying po |
| 8. | Khrag 'thung nag | Khrag 'thung nag po | Khrag 'thung nag po |
| 9. | gTsug lag dpal dge | gTsug lag dpal dge | gTsug lag dpal dge |
| 10. | Rig 'dzin Padma 'byung | Slob dpon Padma 'byung | Slob dpon Padma 'byung |
| 11. | Ba su dha ra | Basu dhara | Ba su dhara |
| 12. | gNubs chen Sangs rgyas* | Sangs rgyas ye shes* | Sangs rgyas ye shes* |
| 13. | Yon tan rgya mtsho (cont. <i>bka'</i>) | | |
| 14. | Ye shes rgya mtsho | ↓ (gter) | ↓ (gter) |
| 15. | rDo ston lCags spe ba | | |
| 16. | Me ston Dran chung | ↓ | ↓ |

| | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|
| 17. | Dran <i>ston</i> mTha' bral <i>rje</i> | | |
| 18. | dKon mchog rin chen | | |
| 19. | bKra shis rgyal mtshan dpal | | |
| 20. | mThar phyin lha sgom ¹⁰² | | |
| 21. | Gangs pa Śāk (=Śākya) 'bum | | |
| 22. | Gra phyi g.yung <i>ston pa</i> | | |
| 23. | rGyal ba rdo rje | | |
| 24. | Rig 'dzin Dar ma 'bum | | |
| 25. | rNal 'byor dbang phyug | | |
| 26. | <i>Ston pa</i> Sangs rgyas mgon | ↓ | ↓ |
| 27. | <i>Bla chen</i> Khams <i>ston</i> * | <i>gTer ston</i> Zhang khrom (<i>gter</i>) | <i>gTer ston</i> Zhang khrom (<i>gter</i>) |
| 28. | <i>lHa rje</i> gNubs chung | <i>lHa rje</i> gNubs chung | <i>lHa rje</i> gNubs chung |
| 29. | mTshur <i>ston</i> | mTshur <i>ston</i> Rin rdor | mTshur <i>ston</i> Rin rdor |
| 30. | sKu Zhang | sKu zhang dpal | sKu zhang dpal |
| 31. | Tshul khrim rin chen | Tshul khrim rin chen | Tshul khrim rin chen |
| 32. | Byang mgon Nam mkha' mtshan+ | Byang chub mgon po+ | Byang chub mgon po+ |
| | | Nam mkha'+ | Nam mkha'i mtshan can+ |
| 33. | Tshul khrim rgya mtsho | Tshul khrim mtshan can | Tshul khrim mtshan can |
| 34. | rGya <i>ston</i> Nam mkha' dpal ¹⁰³ | Rig 'dzin gSang ba | Rig 'dzin gSang ba |

¹⁰² Aguilère 2024b notes that this name is most likely a duplicate. Specifically, see p. 378, note 170.

¹⁰³ At this juncture the *bka' ma* and *gter ma* lineages are said to be unified (*tshul khrim rgya mtsho rnam la / bka' gter zung 'jug rgya ston nam mkha' dpal*). *Rin chen gter mdzod, Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'*, vol. 26, p. 435; *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs, Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'*, vol. 25, p. 4.

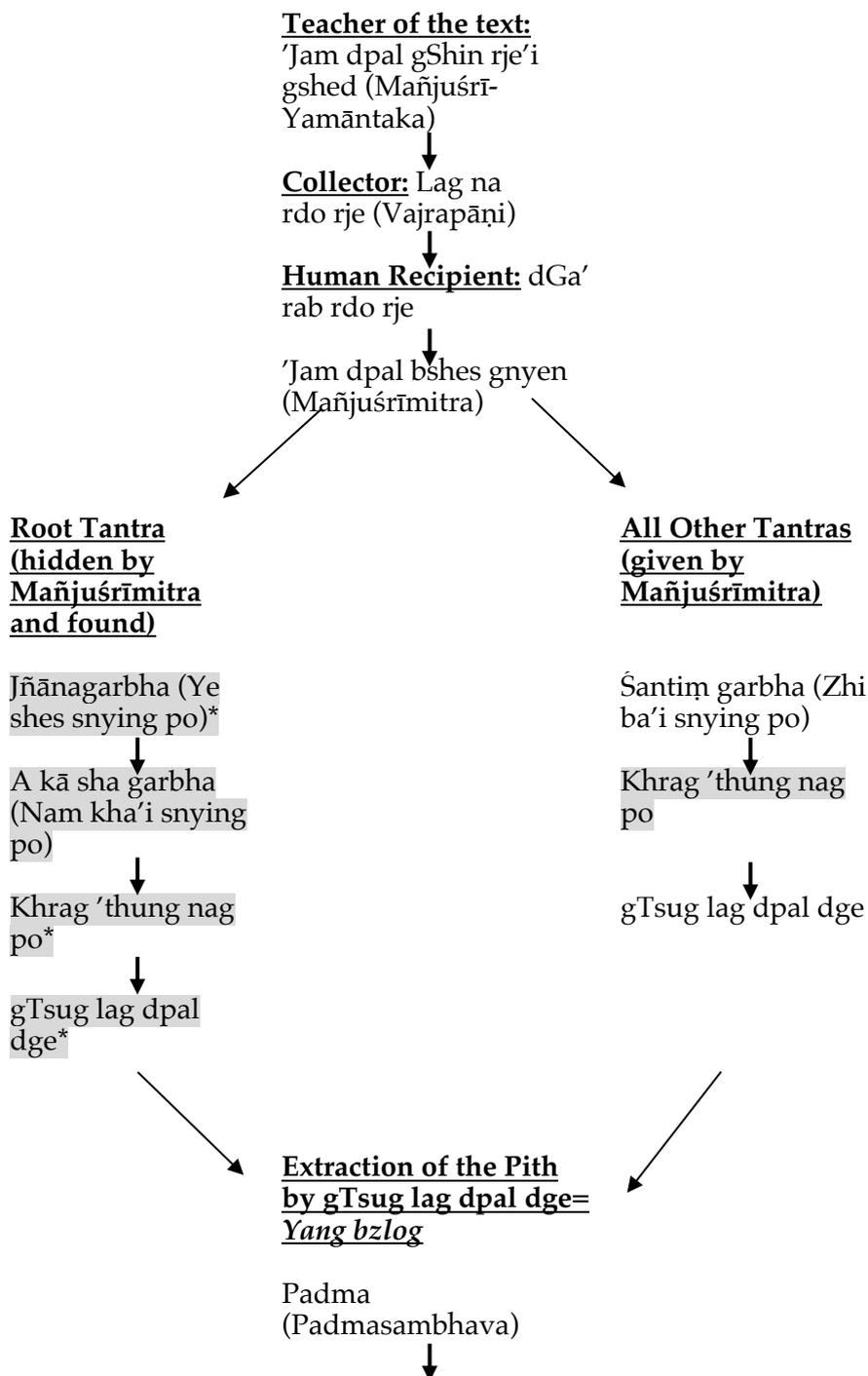
| | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 35. | gNam lcags me 'bar (rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs) | rJe btsun ratna (rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs) | rJe btsun ratna (rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs) |
| 36. | <i>Chos rgyal</i> Phun tshogs <i>rje</i> | mChog grub rgyal po manga'i mtshan can ⁺ | mChog grub rgyal po ⁺ |
| 37. | bTsan yag <i>sprul</i> <i>sku</i> bKra shis phun tshogs (Nā ro bKra shis phun tshogs?) | | Manga'i mtshan can ⁺ |
| 38. | Drag po'i mtshan can ¹⁰⁴ | | |
| 39. | <i>IHa sras</i> dBur smyon (Chos kyi grags pa); note this lineage continues in the text | | |

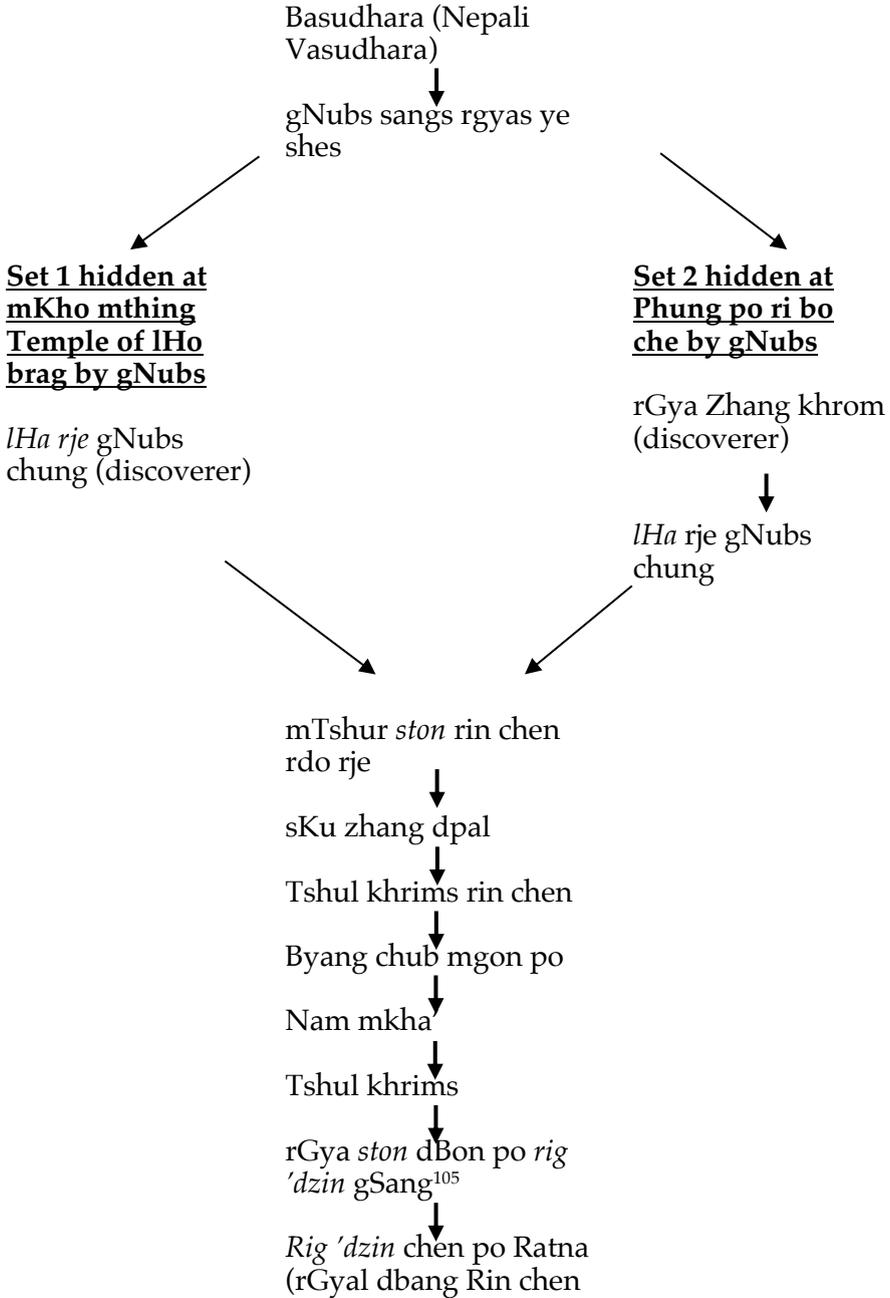
Table 3 — Visual Representation of the Yang bzlog history
extracted from the truncated histories (in Tibetan and English)
and the extended history

Key:

-* indicates English
versions not found in
the Tibetan truncated
history
-(grey) indicates
origination from the
transmission history of
the extended version

¹⁰⁴ Since this name is missing from other lineages it may be a duplicate or an epithetical phrase. However, in his *gSan yig*, the 5th makes reference to this moniker in regard to transmission lineages, seemingly as a distinct individual—e.g., *rlung 'khor mkho mthing ma ka'i rtags can gyi brgyud pa ni / spo bo'i sngags 'chang nas chos kyi grags pa la brgyud de rdzogs rim rnam ni yi dam gyi lhas rje dbur smyon la dngos su gnang ba stsal bas 'jam dpal phyag rgya zil gnon (gSung 'bum / Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, vol. 3, p. 43).*





¹⁰⁵ In the Byang gter version of this history, his name reads: rGya *ston* dBon po rig 'dzin gSang ba nam mkha' dpal.

phun tshogs, Chos kyi
grags pa's grandfather)



rJe btsun Dharma (Chos
rgyal Rin chen phun
tshogs, Chos kyi grags
pa's father)



mTshungs med manga
(Nā ro bKra shis phun
tshogs, Chos kyi grags
pa's brother)



Chos kyi grags pa
(author of the history)

